

## PRIZE FOR NEW TALENT IN TRANSLATION

### **L'Enlacement** by Frances Hedges

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I remembered the long dress she was wearing on the evening of the Montreuil dinner, the silver necklace which made her skin gleam like mother-of-pearl, and I was entranced by her long hands which I imagined to be connoisseurs of fabrics, sensitive to their softness, their stiffness, their creases, the way they fell, their substance. Like the threads, I said to myself, those invisible threads which she wove together when she talked, creating an intricate web of loveliness, a halo around her at the heart of which we couldn't quite understand what she meant to say, nor who she was deep down, nor what it was she had come looking for in Paul's dazzling, slightly artificial social world. Nevertheless, she performed to perfection her rôle as the lady of the house, in keeping with her social status, blending well with her surroundings. Paul, who was usually very talkative, lapsed into long, reverential silences, and when, at the café Landthmann a few months later, she'd leant towards me to observe innocently that "they do like to talk about women", I perceived an element of irony which she hadn't revealed before now.

And yet, since her arrival that morning at the Belvedere, I'd found her rather withdrawn, preoccupied, occasionally lingering at random over a painting but without really fixing her gaze upon it, later planting herself in the middle of the hall and waiting for me to join her there, with a slightly dazed look in her eyes. Then, we'd climbed the huge marble staircase and seen ahead of us the brightly-lit doorway of the Schiele room which she'd been the first to enter, standing stock-still in front of the big, tempestuous painting which covered the whole of the opposite wall, then taking a few steps towards the window and collapsing in silence. Everything else in my memory seems overshadowed by her exaggerated smile saying, "Oh, it's you!", while her hand, tensely grasping my own, seemed to drag me down into her abyss, and I already felt a presage of her shame, the shame she would later feel for this devastation, this disaster (as she lay with her raincoat riding right up to her knees, her hair all over her face), the shame of having let herself go with someone whom, I believed at the time, she hadn't herself chosen.

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