

## Schmetterlingsküse Lalini Shanela Ranaraja

*Inspired by Jan Verberkmoes's piece "Lophobasileus Elegans Meissneri/Crested Tit Warbler/Schopfhänchen", as published in The Paris Review, Issue 227, Winter 2018.*

Hear them sing for miles and miles. The airwaves race away. Trees are crackling, russet sprays arc against white, shadows meld into ice. Temptation. Touching snow for the first time is like trying to hold magic. A few seconds, then your skin sears, the flakes on your fingers flare supernova, *sterrenstof*, stardust, and yet the longer you linger the warmer you are. Every branch and bark and twig and trunk is suddenly present; they arch overhead like wedding lace, christening gown, cathedral canopy; their arms are full of silent bells, silver ringing, triumphant. Look into them and everything disappears except the sky, *bleu de triomphe*, the spirits of souls. Raise your head; the benedictions fall into you.

*Schmetterlingsküsse*. You haven't seen butterflies in aeons but here they are now in their jeweled millions, Jezebel and the Leopard and the Ceylon Tiger, *parantica taprobana*, not to be confused with the Tamil Tiger, winging across the island to Samanalakanda, where the Buddha's footprint appears at sunrise. Now the light flickers and roars through the treetops; your corneas burn and *aarde* sings back in kaleidoscopic sparks, scattered and heaped where the ice should be. A new world; on the other side of the planet the monks chant through woodsmoke forests, *buddham saranam gacchami*, and north of here and over the ocean there is a priest in the blue shadows of the Basiliek van de Heilige Nicolaas praying *de rosenkranz*, but here is the silence absolute. There is a bird in the trees, up there, high, *oiseau de proie* to my *paradijsvogel*, and I call to her, him, *hen*, where have you come from, what have you seen, *nehmen uns mit sie*. Out there where the souls dance burn shimmer glow supernova, where you open your eyes and the cold spills out of them and rosary beads bloom on the cathedral forest floor and they spell it out, *ik mis je*, beloved I am coming home to you.

*Schmetterlingsküsse - butterfly kisses (German)*

*sterrenstof - stardust (Dutch)*

*bleu de triomphe - triumphant blue (French)*

*parantica taprobana - Ceylon Tiger (Latin)*

*Samanalakanda - butterfly mountain (Sinhala); mountain in Sri Lanka*

*aarde - Earth (Dutch)*

*buddham saranam gacchami - Buddhist recitation (Pali)*

*de rosenkranz - the rosary (Dutch)*

*oiseau de proie - bird of prey (French)*

*paradijsvogel - bird of paradise (Dutch)*

*nehmen uns mit sie - take us with you (German)*

*hen - them - (Dutch)*

*ik mis je - I miss you (Dutch)*