

# Albatross

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*for ch. baudelaire*

Baudelaire taught me how to whittle the bones into  
Maori tattoo blades; I learned which caterpillar  
to infect and when to kill it to get the right  
pigment and that the cheeks should be carved in grooves  
so that men would see me and know courage, know that  
I killed the albatross which sculpted my face. So,

not knowing I was infected, I hunted him  
by sea, arms pounding into oars. Each swing pushed my  
flesh into the handles, blood pooling in the grains  
marrow sucked into blade until my arms became  
flaccid, hollow—fell to the keel like crushed shafts of  
feathers. I prayed that my shoulders would sprout wings but  
I felt the murdered bird around my neck, and when  
I closed my eyes I saw him, and wept; clumsy and  
ashamed on wet deck, white wings beside him like oars.