

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.