

Lines

# *The Life of a Laysan Albatross*

*Gail Sher*

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lord of the air

>>

“the goonies are here!”

“the goonies have come back!”

squawking, squabbling

their drowsy hum

from the bush

on lime-green flats

little water-spout

tracks

the pelagic bird stops

through roaring troughs

her hulking shadow

dusting clouds

slender waves

tacking through the spindrift

>>

two nests

too close

their killing stare

settling on the egg

talking to the egg

shhhh . . . listen . . .

pssstt . . .

the babe turns

slowly . . . slowly . . . crack!

matted fuzz, spiky fluff

kicking away

the blunt shell end

>>

*a newborn sleeps, a father stirs*

*on the atoll's floor*

*gossamer prints*

open bill

on open bill

crosswise

*coaxing its face forward*

*pointing, peeping*

*scooping its tail toward his chick-pouch*

*folding wings*

*straightening feathers*

*his long gaze at the sky*

>>

on flight-stiff legs

her beeline

toward the fledgling

gulping, guzzling

wiping its beak

in the sand

*chick pauses to swallow*

*dangling from its mouth*

*mucousy strings of goo*

the still-small bird

away from its nest –

its expression seeing father

*monarch of the ocean skies*

>>

*silent tide, silent sea*

*crest to crest*

*her graceful arc*

rocketing higher

gliding right up the wind

shrinking to a pinpoint

her flight line dips

now vast, now toward

starlit moonless water

surfing the air

its rushing edge –

the long bones of her wings

>>

tropical Kuroshio, frigid Oyashio

hush!

do you hear the fishing grounds?

birds scatter, birds drown

catching squid

in a vicious typhoon

one breaker's spray

the spume of the next

cold northwest blast

after dark

down

as the ocean swells

& forward

up & away

like a storm-driven snowflake

>>

head tucked, feathers flat

on the sea's slick skin

a watertight bird

look!

loligos!

small!

alive!

fresh!

one dying saury

one dead squid

in the dusk's sloe light

impaling them

on her bill

following a breeze

its wafting scent

of pup-filled sharks

ruler of the sun

>>

heels rooted, toes raised

in the undulating air

a youngster pants

'hugging the trees'

broad strips of shade

hundreds face away from the glare

one thin reed

one still fowl

in its sun-spotted shadow

neither stirring

nor breathing

hauled to the incinerator

>>

circling

oops!

the lagoon's greenish water

breast to ground

reeling forward . . .

a little too fast

churling birds, whirling sand

the grizzled sea

a white-capped chop

*over aerofoil wings – its gentle lift*

*savoring the glow*

*in the bow waves*

*rider on the wind*

>>

“hey!”

but the youth

quickly *departs*

*dive-bombing, blanketing him with droppings*

*“you can’t come here!”*

*“you can’t come here!”*

*a truck driver honks*

*climbs down from his cab*

*the juvenile's gawky stare*

shady lawn

skidding rear

the smashed-bird's face

>>

he, still

she notices

will she stay?

*drawing himself up*

*he remains rooted –*

*she tosses a twig aside*

“moo” clacks the bird

croaking, whistling

shaking his feathers into place

*regaining her balance*

*settling her wings as they*

*shriek, fight, stumble over one another*

>>

erect, a skyward victory scream

after a nap

in the rare spring sun

throwing grass

he bows to the ground

“eh...eh eh...eh” he murmurs

she sits

he sits nearby

gently nibbling her neck feathers

*caressing his bill*

*she raises one wing –*

*the male's rapt look*

>>

two birds touch, lower to the ground

through nubile limbs

their dappled bodies

she watches quietly

the tip of her beak

on his expanded breast

water ebbs

surges on the sand

the rising moon's flickering shadows

morning sun

in its chiseled lace

turtle's mottled shell

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