

Poets

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A Peruvian Knife

Tooled in the leather of the hilt
the outline of a condor in flight.
Old tribes tell how ancestors
sacrificed virgins to a bird —
the women's spirits would join
the invisible army of the sun god.

A love gift. Light and slender
like the one who gave it to me,
and numerous-layered, the steel
alloy and softer, darker metals
melted and folded onto each other
to form a pure and single whole —

like her and how she is folded in
upon a love burning beyond
the passing fire of any parting,
where all that can ever happen
has happened, even death. Her centre
is that seething bird's twin,

the pulse through muscle and bone
the hammer and tongs, its own
bladesmith lifting from it living
unseen weaponry, annealing
then tempering the curved
edge to the tip in the blood —

the talon of light that lets it
pierce into the world, the world
made of lovers who are killed
while they dream, lawless, wanting
to be forged into a blade of law,
to die in order to escape it.

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