Hector the Turkey

Emmie Bristow
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I plucked a turkey yesterday.
It was dead, of course—
frozen:
its pink, wrinkly head curled
toward its neck and clawed
foot stretched in an uncomfortable
angle. Its eyes were shut, at least,
but in a way saying,

This is going to hurt.

I named the bird Hector.
All birds are Hector.

Its feathers were coffee
brown, long, and soft
with a pattern like marbled
paper sprawled across
them. When I stretched
out the wing it crunched
with stiffness, yet the sight of fuzzy down feathers ruffled in every direction caught my breath—like a newborn’s hair after it’s been curled up all night next to your warm body.

I grabbed the first feather and pulled slowly, feeling the crack and dislocation of the white stem in its fleshy pink skin. I finally had to jerk it, ripping out the feather and sending a jolt into the bird and myself.

One feather down.

I recall learning birds were once larger and more ferocious in prehistoric days. It wasn’t until mother nature helped wipe them out for us smaller, cockier creatures that we ruled over what was left—turkeys and chickens and whatnot.

As I worked on Hector
one feather at a time,
my co-worker watched,
eyes shining. Her hands
tapped on the table,
impatience bouncing
off each fingertip
into the same wood
holding the corpse.

Pinky ring middle index thumb
Two down
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Three down
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Four down.
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Five down.
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Six down.
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Seven down.
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Eight down.
Pinky ring middle index thumb
Nine down.

Her fingers seized Hector.
His body oozed the slowly
de-thawing blood in a streak
across the table where he’d been
drug. Grasping his pink
skin, she ripped it from his body
in one violent tear, exposing
vulnerable, red insides.

I froze like the bird.
I wished I knew better,
like Hector. Wish
I’d closed my eyes
knowing

*This is going to hurt.*

I looked at my co-worker.
Her eyes shined at me.

Her fingers didn’t tap anymore.

If we humans are Achilles,
who will the Priam
for the birds be?