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HECTOR THE TURKEY

EMMIE BRISTOW

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.

Pinkyringmiddleindexthumb

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?