

Wild Turkeys
(Richardson Nature Center)

1

The wild turkey working its way up
the path, at times with her beak
to the mulch; at others, snake-like neck
wavering ears and eyes into crisp air,
her folded-back wings blackened
like a Burr oak struck by lightning,
felled and left to burn out, its stump
hollowed out, a bowl for wild flowers.
This hen gives me no more mind
than an old lady, locked-in-hand wrist
crossed behind, like an apron tied,
waddling herself meditatively uphill.

2

My earliest memory of turkey wings
is not of these folded back feathers,
but of great bodies--like Victorian
lampshades--lifting up
into tree limbs to stare down
at me in my great uncle's worn
hard farmyard, where grownups worked
at getting an oily piece of machinery
up and running on a Sunday afternoon.

Today we call those turkeys *free range*,
but Great-Uncle Harry's were *yard wild*!
Somewhere there were turkey sheds,
but I never saw them, so to watch this hen--
waddling up the path, her tail to me,
without alarm--transmutes retained fear
from that day, a city boy unaware of what
that bird, carved and ate Thanksgiving Day,
looked like, with ashen feathers spread,
beating air, to rise above us into tree limbs.
Buzzards, I'd thought. I'd known buzzards
from comic books and Saturday matinees.

3

Now at my age I've hiked enough trails,

heard that one note wild turkey's *yelp*,
seen enough domesticated turkeys pent up
in low sheds of southwestern Minnesota,
to say we've taken the wildness out of even
these few turkeys in this nature preserve
by our too much supposed familiarity.
The wild ones--the wild ones are the ones
without roof overhead, heard far off at night,
lifting bodies into tree limbs to roost.

By Chet Corey

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