

Mark Belair

one thanksgiving in the mid-1950s / my grandfather won a turkey raffle
 at the mill in maine where he pulled shifts as an electrician
 he bragged of his luck to his wife and two grown daughters then /
 on the appointed day / strode up to the mill's loading dock where
 he was handed a good-sized turkey that was / to his surprise / alive
 he tucked it tight under his arm / walked home with a frown /
 then stuck it in the basement / until he'd kill it for thanksgiving dinner
 as that day approached / my grandmother / having dutifully cared
 for the bird / told my grandfather it was time to behead the thing /
 so she could pluck and clean and stuff it
 my grandfather descended the basement stairs / with his newly
 sharpened ax / but minutes later he trudged back up / and said to my
 grandmother / *i can't do it / not today anyway / he looked me in the eyes*
 the same thing happened the next day / and the day after that /
 my grandfather climbing back upstairs / his long ax clean
 to report that / once again / the bird had looked him in the eyes
 his daughters / of course / found this development / deliciously humorous
 but after a week of it / my grandmother / old farm girl that she was /
 before a fire destroyed her family's homestead / displacing them
 from quebec / stomped down and wrung the turkey's neck /
 without giving it a thought
 but my grandfather wouldn't eat that turkey / thanksgiving or not /
 nor would he taste the sandwiches that followed / or the turkey
 vegetable soup
 nor would my frowning grandfather meet / night after night at the
 dinner table / long after the turkey was gone / my grandmother's eyes

one thanksgiving