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Blue Heron

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Blue Heron

It stands shin-deep in a shallow run,
blue-gray from back to front,
from side to side, crest-plumes
and black streaks starting at the eye,
compact and composed. Or it assumes
another pose, neck held high
and motionless above the glass-
smooth, metal-bright surface
of the water, waiting to blend in
like trees and stones. The beak, when

it spears a small fish, often
tossing it in the air first,
then opening wide to swallow, can
be frightening. Is this all rehearsed—
the speed, the nonchalance and easy
gulp of the meal, its immobility
only a ruse, a studied act,
or a highly refined survival tactic?
Who knows? Steal quietly or stumble
down the bank though, and it will

turn toward you, heavily, as it
senses your presence, then with effort,
bend at the knees and push off,
leaping, neck stretched aloft
to assist. It will lift itself airward,
awkward wings extended, rapid
down beats smoothing, each absurd,
bamboo-knobby leg under
it tucked in now like a belly feather
and land flowing below the bird.