Blue Heron

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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.