

To the Heron Behind the Fisherman

I think you divine, not supernatural.
I see now how Leda could mate with a swan
—lay eggs, kiss feathers.
At one angle you are laughable,
hideous, malformed, muppet creature;
unstable legs, joke of a face—
two-dimensional beak pointed at me.
But then, another angle,
you are unadulterated grace
dinosaur descendent, adjacent,
and patient,
reticent and stalking.
Your flexible feet grip stone
fearless of gravity—
Someday you will die and rot,
your bones will crisp in the sun—
still, I think you are a god,
more than the tally of your DNA
more than any formula could define
or capture.
You are magic; unique in all reality.
You exist for a moment, then vanish
(as we all do)
stage secret of nature's black art.
At the rock ledge shaped like an altar, I pray to you
while you stalk the fisherman
in striped shirt and loose jeans
who casts his line carelessly.
You hope for a votive offering of fish:
scales, guts, delicious eyes,
but he will only gift you companionship.
I have seen the shit & scraps left from your brethren
on other docks and buoys,
but this is the closest I have ever been
to holding your kind, caressing
the elongated stretch of your spine,
pointed beak, breakable toes, wings like
clumsy curtains gathered against your body.
Physics tells me that our atoms are mingling
even now, even now, and now
touchless, chaste, godly.

Like a poem without stanzas,
swampy clarity of ongoing process:

I kiss you Heron of my mind
all along your riverbend neck,
and in some darkened cave with my oldest ancestors
I snap that neck and feast,
glory in the gift of your flesh
—one way or another.