

## Cleopatra Mathis

---

### *Survival: A Guide*

It's not easy living here, waiting to be charmed  
by the first little scribble of green. Even in May  
the crows want to own the place, and the heron, old bent thing,  
spends hours looking like graying bark,  
part of a dead trunk lying over opaque water.  
She strikes the pose so long I begin to worry  
she's determined to be something ordinary.  
The small lakes continue their slide into bog and muck—  
remember when they ran clear, an invisible spring  
renewing the water? But the ducks stay longer, amusing  
ruffle and chatter. I can be distracted.

If I do catch her move, the heron appears  
to have no particular fear or hunger, her gaunt body  
hinged haphazardly, a few gears unlocking  
one wing, then another. More than a generation here  
and every year more drab.  
Once I called her blue heron, as in Great Blue,  
true to a book—part myth, part childhood's color.  
Older now, I see her plain: a mere surviving  
against a weedy bank with fox dens  
and the ruthless, overhead patrol.  
Some blind clockwork keeps her going.