

PILGRIMAGE

It's harder to find now—all I looked for
in a decade of daily one-mile loops around
a man-made pond I've loved, its *ensō* path
the shape of infinity, place of the finite.

The great blue heron, still then stealth, patches
of lotus snuffed out by herbicide, a cormorant
that flies in solo, dives for fish, pops up yards
away to dry his outspread wings, then move on.

This small world in a small woodland
is both nucleus and nebula
motes of matter, things that matter
in cycles of wither and flourish

among scatters of stardust and DNA,
and I feel a tension between what's inborn
and ingrained, elemental and imagined,
all bequeathed to us in genes and dreams



The heron returns after months away
carried by instinct, and I answer with habit—
with legs still as the bird's, I lift my phone,
expand the zoom, obey a knee-jerk wish

to capture a likeness and take it with me
as if heeding a need to prove what's there.
Focus the frame, snap the shot,
and in one blip of divided attention

an absence I didn't expect,
another failure in the folly
of holding on—nothing left
but reeds and ripple,

flocks of legacy behind me, before me,
and the pilgrimage advances in
walks long enough, when alone enough,
and light as a bag of spent currency.



Bees rise from dead leaves,
gather around my two feet,
and I move ahead—trying
to resist a persistence of want

for this spirit animal, for any guide
like this blue-gray bird who evolves,
yet remains what he's always been.
How long do I walk to find such balance?

For now, I carry the question in my open
hand. Beyond the spot of the heron's exit,
and farther beyond the woman I was—
the one who was always ready to seize

a distance, erase the self—and like the ghost
of the heron, leave the human world
with little more than your last appearance,
and nothing more than myths of you.

—Cheryl Martone



Takahashi Bihō, *White Heron at Water's Edge*, 1917–1923