

Mary Oliver

A Poem for the Blue Heron

1

Now the blue heron
wades the cold ponds
of November.

In the gray light his hunched shoulders
are also gray.

He finds scant food — a few
numbed breathers under
a rind of mud.

When the water he walks in begins
turning to fire, clutching itself to itself
like dark flames, hardening,
he remembers.

Winter.

2

I do not remember who first said to me, if anyone
did:

*Not everything is possible;
some things are impossible,*

and took my hand, kindly,
and led me back
from wherever I was.

3

Toward evening
the heron lifts his long wings
leisurely and rows forward

into flight. He
has made his decision: the south
is swirling with clouds, but somewhere,
fibrous with leaves and swamplands,
is a cave he can hide in
and live.

4

Now the woods are empty,
the ponds shine like blind eyes,
the wind is shouldering against
the black, wet
bones of the trees.

In a house down the road,
as though I had never seen these things—
leaves, the loose tons of water,
a bird with an eye like a full moon
deciding not to die, after all—
I sit out the long afternoons
drinking and talking;
I gather wood, kindling, paper; I make fire
after fire after fire.