

# *The How of the Great Blue Heron*

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A tattered man upon a stick hung flapping his arms in the wind. People had tired of his stalking around, stealing eggs, snatching food, eyeing the children. The butcher caught him in Branson's hennerly. They chased him down, him running fast for such a skinny old sod. When they caught him they were afraid of his crazy eyes. They hooked him by the coat collar to a stake. He hung for days before they let him go to the marshes. There he stayed, a crooked man on crooked legs hunting fish and frogs with his pointed spear. For hours he stepped through the reeds and along the ponds, his coat jagged and rough, his long nose thrust forward, his eye round and staring.

He stayed until winter, then was gone. No one knew where he went. The dog-boy said he'd seen him heading southward, his long arms rising and falling and his gray-blue coat streaming in the wind. Everyone thought the dog-boy mad. Until spring. Then the tattered man returned to the marshes. Some swear they saw him flying. Others swear they saw a bird, gray-blue, long-legged, great and staring.

By the following year the tattered man was seen no more. In his stead, definitely, a great heron, stick-legged, spear-beaked and crazy-eyed stalked the marshes. He kept to himself and never let anyone near him. The villagers never ate him either, and that's the way it stayed.