The Comedian

The comedian slips the mic from its stand, gathers the excess cord in a loop, and placidly stares at the audience as he begins to pace.

A few people titter expectantly. He stops pacing, looks up, shifts his weight to one foot, and the murmur dies away. The comedian’s eyes roam the crowd. He raises an eyebrow. A woman guffaws abruptly, an outburst soon followed by a ripple of laughter. Time passes.

The audience shift in their chairs, making soft papery sounds. A man clears his throat. “Come on,” someone shouts. Two minutes pass. A few people shake their heads, chuckling uneasily. Others sit stoic, not chuckling at all.

Whispers simmer lightly through the crowd, and people begin gesturing to one another, “Is this the joke? Us?” Near the back someone says a name, “Andy Kaufman,” as explanation.

After seven minutes, the comedian whispers, “You have been a great audience. Ever since you were born—”

His voice breaks and the breathy whisper fades into overwhelming awkwardness. He begins to take off his clothes. There are more clothes underneath. And then more clothes underneath. Eventually his body itself begins to peel away in gauzy layers,

and it becomes clear he’s not a man but a slender woman. And then no longer a woman but a heron. And not a heron but a blade. And soon it is clear he is not even that—