1984

The Peacock Flounder

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They say flounders are camouflaged to blend in with the bottom of the ocean, but that can't be true for this one unless the bottom where he comes from is covered with Persian rugs. The aquarium is not: maybe that's why he doesn't deign to swim down there. He ripples slowly like a flying carpet, opening and closing his sideways mouth.

Now and then he swims up to the top and breaks the mirror surface with bulging, limpet-like eyes, as if he had to take in the view above the tank as a whale or dolphin takes in air. He almost has the whole tank to himself: the four or five other fish are not colorful, and they're so thin that when they turn toward us they disappear.

With what effort did his eyes push around to one side, concentrating a million years of evolution into a few weeks? And how are we to understand him if not by a like effort of the eyes, feeling our gaze pulled askance by his, our mouths twist until we realize that we, like him, are secretly disturbed about our lives.