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Ring-necked Pheasant

Howard Schaap
Dordt College, howard.schaap@dordt.edu

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Ring-necked Pheasant

For Robert Siegel

Howard Schaap

Improbable,
he's evolution's joke,
wearing the designer's gaudiest gown
grabbed from the creator's mixed-bag of blessings.
He's the millionaire overdressed for his own masquerade ball
where everyone stands to gain from his murder,
and even his plain wife, jealous of nature's bejeweling in him,
has got the poor sap to put on a red felt mask of oversized eye patches
so that he looks out at his enemies from behind two bull's-eyes,
oblivious or defiant, his cold lizard's irises narrowing in on
the number of himself he can sacrifice for the species as a whole.
The rest of his costume is equally ridiculous:
his smooth head crests into a backwards beret;
a hijab in purple-green-blue hologram wraps his neck,
terminates suicidally where Muslim meets Christian
in his sharply isolated clerical collar,
his signature moment of solemnity undone
a moment later by the billowing ascot of shimmering rust
that glows in the light of those chest-out moments—
every dawn and dusk with naked sunlight
when he lets it shine out from ditches like a beacon.
The inventor of paisley, his Joseph-coat
sports poshly layered ocher and black tear drops
that resolve into rust and gray pears down his back,
but it hangs unimpressively from his round shoulders
where it gives way to pinstripes on his comically short arms.
Below, impulsively, as if he were a closet belly dancer
prepared for a midnight performance, he's strung
a minty green fringe shawl to highlight his rump,
but, most scandalously, from this scanty cover
his erect and protuberant tail erupts electrically:
tawny light punctuated by regular black lines
like the moving lights of a Vegas strip arrow,
advertising, in selfless selfishness,
"Shoot at me! Shoot at me!"
as he draws the gunfire that sows
his cornfield hangout with deadly lead
seeds and he or his species skirts off safely
to another millennia of showy existence.

