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While They Choose a New Pope, I Eat a Bagel

These are old occupations; in Vatican City there is no internet, not until they all nod and send their white smoke rising. Black smoke means they're still at it. Here it would mean the bagel's burning. There's no white kind. They used to carry them around on sticks, which is why the hole in the middle, and we keep it even though sometimes the butter ends up pooling right in the middle of the plate. We keep things the way they are.

The Cardinals—do they sit around a table, a dark table older than America? They may have bagels of their own, though it's hard to imagine them licking cream cheese off their thumbs. But things do change. They used to lock the bishops in the chapel until they got it done, and now there are hotels and buses. They wake up to a coffee maker, maybe a continental breakfast. And I've got a toaster, and a food processor to make the hummus, everything I need. There may be windows high up in the wall, shuttered. Nobody's allowed to see things in process.

The Cardinals crowd around, one of them almost a Pope. Me, I'm already eating the bagel.

The Peacocks of East Ridge Retirement Village

They carry their heavy tails on their backs
like planks, like all these old folks here,
bent under the weight of what they once
supported. As though the steadily failing frames
resigned to this at last become these
gleaming bodies. I don't see why not;
they're already forgetting what they've been. And
there are feathers with something like eyes
scattered across the hard Florida grass.
One peacock limps badly, but there's enough food
to always get by. My mother stands up out of the chair
one time out of five without help. Others
are in trees, and that's how I find out
they can fly. It seems impossible, until
I see it, and then it seems impossible. One
peacock is trying to find a mate out of season,
his feathers spread the width of my arms
reached out. My mother wants to know
what good that tail is. I tell her what I learned
somewhere: it's supposed to be a problem.
They show their strength by hauling
what they can't, what they
really can't, but do.

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