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The Shape of the Winnow

suppose that we are afraid
—Plato, Phaedo

I was surprised to learn that where love is concerned, the laurel means labor, though whether the crown is bestowed for pity or succor I have no way of knowing. It takes no suspect talent to embrace our dearest vehicle of fear; how strange and brutal, to be conscious of destiny! When we rewrote history, when we arrayed the sentences in a manner more pleasing, we meant it as a friendly gesture, only wanting to lend the better beauty of a murmur we could not banish from memory, as Gabriel's greeting stirs cloves and ashes among the flowering dogwoods before he vanishes the way a damp footprint dries on a stone. Suppose we are afraid, say we wonder still what song the siren sang; precisely here the prince of mockery falls silent.