ON JUST SUCH A MORNING

There were no walls to experience, the farm inside me being always larger and freer than the one that lay waiting outside my kitchen window. I was my own window that morning, and I came to my prayers like Janus looking both ways—outward to where Nimrod the mighty cat stalked the patio in pursuit of a guinea chick he didn’t really want, and inward to where a thousand equally casual deaths and near deaths had blended into acceptance and peace in the balance.

Dublin the rooster stood tall on the gatepost of the chicken yard. During the winter that had preceded us, he’d lost his comb to the bitter cold, having preferred the pain of frostbite to confinement in the henhouse. Now, crownless except for his scar of black and withered skin, he swayed from his perch more vigorously than he had when he was whole. This too I brought in to me, this regard for scars and purchase.

The early spring crowded around us—around Dublin and Nimrod and me. It waddled with the ducks crossing the greening yard toward the fowl lot and scurried with the guineas in their frantic discovery of the missing chick. It grew deeply and insistently up the kitchen window toward me, vining and budding as it came, but I would have none of it. I’d not be so easy a convert to merriment that morning. Too many beginning springs had seduced me before that one.

Beyond the fence line, Flash, the gelding, moved away from the mares to look across the yard, an immense air of tragedy pervading the whole of him. He stopped briefly to neigh toward the
kitchen door, lowered his head to scratch his neck along the cedar railing, and moved on. He had no prayers standing between him and his ordinary habits—no interior pasture in which to feed—and I was glad for the simpleness of his purpose, the directness of his life. Mine was not so—certainly not that morning, when I walked two lands, the one that I housed, having been built of daily pieces from the one in which I was myself housed.

It must have been on just such a morning as this that the young Mary first was told, first knew that she stood between two worlds, and “was troubled at this saying” (Luke 1:29)—and across the intervening centuries I reached out to her fear and reverenced her confusion.

Below me on the patio Nimrod tried again for the chick, but this time the cock was there. It was over in less time than it took me to laugh—the cock on the cat, talons burying deep in fur, beak pecking hair and drawing blood, fur and feathers intertwined and racing across the patio and into the low-lying holly bushes, Nimrod scraped free of his burden by the low-lying prickles, and the guineas on patrol around the bed. Even Flash had turned back to watch, and Dublin, ever a gossip, crowed his delight from atop the henhouse roof.

It was all too much for me, and I was at last seduced. I went out into the farmyard, adding, as I went, its frolic to my prayers. Of these things, too, is worship made.

—Wisdom in the Waiting, chapter 6

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Although a theologian herself, Tickle has never claimed the label