

Finch (For Brigit in Illinois)

*—And for Renée, because I, too, think that no one really leaves.\**

Dear Brigit,

The flatlands: linear, predictable, innumerable placid rows  
penned by translucent barbed wire; the burn  
separates sawtoothed winter from county roads. Your eyes  
mark horizon: *Is it forever?* No valleys, no steep mountainsides.  
In Illinois, you'll wander a long way to find what you're  
looking for. And even if you find it, you'll still be thinking about leaving.

Is level land so unbearable? What about the sumac leaves  
turning to flame? Clusters of sour, furry fruit and the dusky hips of prairie roses?  
Shallow substitutes, I guess—things one never intends to seek or love. You  
didn't want to reckon with the unobvious: the ashes of an autumn-burn  
or unexpected smoke-blur-blue air of a prairie remnant. You sighed  
watching the grackles stealing grain, their eyes

reflecting the angles and planes of your face; the angels and plains. But I  
see red-rusted corn cribs and yellowed leaves  
of farmhouse Bibles; a brindled cow on the front lawn; endless variations of sky. Besides,  
soon there will be a turning: furrowed  
corn will tunnel-vision the crossroads and we'll forget the accomplish of the burn:  
the solace of promised resurrection, that nothing abandons you

unless it will return stronger. (*Stay. Not forever.*) Put a bluestem anchor in your  
braid and strange, green Osage oranges in your hands—I'll  
stand with you against spark-shimmer air, the heaven-vivid tallgrass burning.  
The landscape *is* big around us. Bur oaks rise like giants but their leaves,  
wind-caught, won't reach horizon. Still, the house finch isn't humbled. She rises  
on hollow bones; the dark undersides

of her wings swallowing distance between thistle and hedge. Can you reside—  
here—where a rich man can see all his fences? Is there nothing the flatlands can give you?  
Above us, dreams of the Baptist choir rise—

*I'll fly away, oh Glory! I'll fly away. Like a bird from these prison walls I'll fly.*

*I'll fly away!*—you've left

the window song-cracked. And suddenly, I can see the angel within you, the blush-burnt

cheeks, the green-gold height caught in vast, explosive light and I burn,

too: you carry wings: sober-furled and tight: hidden inside

so they'll not startle awake if you're suddenly reminded of leaving.

(*Enough.*) Throw the window wide, untie the braid, scatter the sumac berries. You

are the hungry finch, the quiet moon burning—I

will miss you—wild as milkweed, the lush and dusky rose.

Your silhouette has burnt into the field but I can't hold you,  
wings pinioned, bound to your sides. And there, in the dark beads of your eyes—  
a red-lit finch restless to leave. Longing for flight: a fire-song: rising.

\* "Finch" is a response poem to Renée Ashley's "For Brigit in Illinois."