

Undress

By Ruby Robinson

There is an ash tree behind this house. You
can see it from our bedroom window.
If you stare at it for long enough, you'll see
it drop a leaf. Stare at it now, you said,
and notice the moment a leaf strips away
from its branch, giving a twirl. Consider this.

The ash tree unclothes itself Octoberly.
From beside our bed, fingering the curtain,
observe the dark candles at the top of
that tree, naked and alert, tending to the breeze.
A sheet of ice between the rooftops
and this noiseless sky has turned the air

inside out. Black veins of branches
shake against the blue screen on which they
hang. Small mammals are hibernating
in pellets of warm air under ground. But,
in spite of the cold, this ash tree does not shy
from shrugging off its coat, sloping its nude

shoulders to the night. So, you said, undo,
unbutton, unclasp, slowly remove. Let down your
hair, breathe out. Stand stark in this room until
we remember how not to feel the chill.
Stand at the window, lift your arms right up
like a tree. Yes — like that. Watch leaves drop.

Source: *Poetry* (October 2014)