

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)