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Green Ash

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Ramspeck: Green Ash

GREEN ASH

Doug Ramspeck

A green ash beside the Comal River
offers its shadow to the road, offers
its shadow to the passing hoods of cars.

And Donna, when she is naked,
sits with a small acoustic guitar in her lap
and strums her painted fingernails like picks.

And the shadow of the ash closes its eyes
as she drives through it, the dark stain
of the shadow's body opening in the heat of day.

Or notice how the Comal River moves
with the slow music of the earth,
as sleepy as the wind that barely stirs
the oval leaflets of the ash.

The first time we ever spent the night together,
Donna had a nosebleed come morning while buttering
her blueberry waffles, which she took as a sign
we would have children together,

and the last time she visited New Braunfels
she told her father he'd be a grandfather
several times over, the way a green ash
is a grandfather to the river,

the way the river is a grandfather
to the months and years.
Donna, this morning, is driving to New Braunfels

to visit her father who has died, but all the tree knows
is how to spill itself out of its body,

and all the car knows is how to drive through
a shadow then be gone.

Sometimes the river beside the ash looks gray or green
or black, and always the tree keeps opening its shadow,

its reflected oval leaflets that sway as faintly
as the real ones, the way a reflection of the moon
sways in the Comal River after dark.

Her father used to burn ash wood in the fireplace
in dead winter—

and the smoke rose out of the chimney
the way Donna's voice rises
out of her chest and throat

whenever she strums with the picks
of her painted fingernails, whenever she sings
naked to that strumming—

the way the shadow of the green ash
keeps opening and opening its body,

and then a little dust lifts in the air and floats away
across the river.