This Haunting

Fingers fumbling for the ghost of a cigarette. My mother smoked Players Light, slim piano hands shaking each time the police were called, fidgeting with cigarettes the way she did her gods. Grandma smoked two packs a day, died slowly in a hospital bed, gaunt eyes dreaming the French and Michif that had been misplaced. Mama said how Grandpa took his family out of Saskatchewan back then, he said he didn’t want to be treated like an Indian anymore. How many times have I watched Mama lift a cigarette in the air, the dark smear of lipstick here, the grey ash glowing there. What ancestral memory has been unearthed now? In this time of sleepless grief, I crave the ritual I rejected, the nervous fidget between the fingers, the aching throat, the sacred twist of smoke. My hands know how to move. This storm has carried away all consolation, but the one I never had. Trembling and hollow-eyed, I roll the ghost of tobacco between my fingers and lift it to my mouth, but there is nothing to inhale. It is only when all else has fallen away that I face this haunting; the wraith of Mama’s wanting, fertile cigarette in hands that never held one.