

MICHELLE PORTER

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.