

**SAMPLE POEMS FROM**

**Tabako on**

**the**

**Windowsill**

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**Brick Books**

**Winter 2025**

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verified with the corrected, finished book.**

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We acknowledge the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund, and the Government of Ontario, and the Ontario Arts Council for their support of our publishing program.



Canada



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## The Cigarette Is Pretext: Smoke Rises from Within

Unless you're as practiced as a lola's wrinkles do not flip the lit side of the yosi in your mouth. They developed this skill in war and carried it into supervised work with no breaks to speak of. My smoking is less like revolution, but it helps on the job. There's an extra few minutes of break-time for you, depending how slammed your co-workers are. Be generous: ash trays and pavements, what they have to take it won't come back half nice. The kisses taste exquisite as ash. Nods in the rain, friendships you find and forget. The trick to becoming a proper smoker is some small grief there is no relief from and you know it, so you might as well light something on fire on a regular basis, take it in and breathe it out like it's part of your everyday being. It's okay if the grief is large. It's more important to find less violent ways of spitting. The worst way to spit is like a man who has sized up another human being and is claiming to measure their worth when he's really measuring his own self-disdain. The worst way to smoke is like you don't want to. I've felt it so many times from people like me: we ask for a yosi, claiming we've quit, or—more honest but not less painful—lamenting we can't. Don't get me wrong, pulling singles when you can't manage the pack is fully acceptable, I'm only warning against wistfulness. The smoke knows, holds on for fear of being abandoned tight as you wish you were free. I would say I'm sorry but I already told you smoke works like grief. Don't need yellow-stained fingers to know this, you could just burn the oil in the soup pot by walking away while heating it up and have to run it outside. Fingers scalding as you inhale

what's promised. You could just be sad without the smoke for company. You could call your lola's smoke-voice the first island you're from. Keep the light, I have another right here.

## **Zoom Call with Lunar Moth on the Wall, and Tilting**

I focus on the hallow around your face. Instead of all this missing, the planet your head makes, the giraffe of you because you hold your laptop camera down by your chest. I like when I mishear what you, or anyone says. It's the mishearing that makes me awed by that small adjustment of meaning sound turns in my body—from translucent to ecstatic, irreversible as awe. When you show me how you did the magic trick, my awe still lingers. When I hurt at you reminding me how callous I have been to you, that undertow is only mine, cross-tiding my awe that you noticed anything I did. You notice things, maybe, like the earth notices them—not just the glint in a friend's eye when they're sexting; not like a camera panning and pulling and pushing closer—as something always already there. Like how I only learnt about the Goddess of Lost Things through that hazy, lazy, nasty, holy portal of the Google search and filled with awe that I could have found her after so long searching for any god to love me as I am. You remind me of siya: the genders you struggle in and declaim, whoever you miss wrapping arms around your name, you remind me of Anagolay because you know what losing is. Because you know what losing is, I diagnose you god: an entity who might love another as they are: a being who's lost, someone who, from the meanest deep, even if only because they're standing in the kitchen with the light behind them, has a hallow around their head. Fallow with want. Filling me with awe though I know the magic trick: you're in the kitchen somewhere else. I can't remember how you smell. It must be something like loss. It might be the thing that makes any of us holy.

## Poem to Burn: From spiral and storm

the world this morning  
reminds me too much  
of my insides

that night I almost  
abandoned the balcony.  
Three pages deep of furious

language. Scratching  
worry into my journal  
before I can say, *please*,

*let me—*

on the outside table  
this jagged bouquet:

tobacco seeds, dried,  
still attached to the cut  
few inches of their last-year stalks,

wrinkled fire in a mini vase. It doesn't  
look much like promise, but it is.

## Windowsill Offering for Crossroads That Keep Forming

*"We look; we're still looking" —David Maduli*

I'm carrying the fact of it, another ending. I tell this to you  
on our way here, paré, so it doesn't weigh down the work  
we came to do. This spot, shaded by an evergreen so large  
if it were hollow, we could have parked inside its trunk.  
Older, you say, than the rounds of colonization

our families brought with us, and found  
on this continent when we arrived.

In the morning we'll make breakfast, begin again with  
nourishment, with fire. Tonight, from a floating dock,  
we watch as the sun falls through the ocean above ocean  
that makes its way inland over mountains. A crossroads,  
you say. Before we go to sleep, we'll step close-close to  
that tree, as tribute touch its bark, its roots.

Tomorrow a whale will show us what it is to be  
the depth itself—where the waves from across  
meet the shallows. But first, we stand, prepare.  
Where three stairs used to lead to something in  
the past, at the threshold where the ingrowth has  
already taken back the place they led to.

We pour libations and, beside them, place  
the smoke. As you make orayson, what we  
first mistake for a feather is a seed that floats  
across, and we won't know whether it reaches  
ground, finding what it needs to grow, or if

it catches another current, simply keeps on rising.