

*otipemisiwak*

was taken from your grandmother's mother and her mother and her mother. replaced with half-breed and dirty blood. the words stung, burned her lips like hot mustard. she spat *otipemisiwak* out, vowed to embank her children and her children's children with only clean white words. but in the quiet nights i heard *otipemisiwak*, found it in the pages of Marilyn, Maria, and Katherena. i held the word in my palm, runny in my fingers, it tried to slip through, so i cupped my hands tight and drank. i imagined it would feel heavy, that my tongue might balter under its sonorous weight. that i might need to wrest it from my ancestors' hands. but it came willing, sweet. each consonant and syllable flitted and whizzed along my taste buds, teasing, light and sheer, it swirled like a ribbon skirt inside my mouth. i let the tip of my tongue linger, nubivagant, on every vowel. i swallowed slowly, savouring in the flavours as it filled the lacuna in my mixed-blood identity. *otipemisiwak*—i am free.