

***Milk Teeth***



Rae White is a non-binary poet and writer living in Brisbane. Their poetry has been published in *Meanjin Quarterly*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Andromeda Spaceways*, *Woolf Pack* and others. Their short stories have been published in *Seizure*, *Capricious* and *Slink Chunk Press*. Rae's poem 'what even r u?' placed second in the 2017 Overland Judith Wright Poetry Prize.

Rae is the editor of #EnbyLife, a collaborative zine about non-binary experiences. They hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Creative Writing Production) from Queensland University of Technology, and previously worked at 4ZZZ community radio as an on-air announcer. *Milk Teeth* is Rae's first poetry collection.

## I

*Lost in the forest one night, we find the body  
of a wolf, its throat torn open,  
the wound a cupful of rippling*

*black milk, where maggots curl star-white  
in their glistening darkness.*

– Sara Eliza Johnson, ‘Märchen’

## Mother's milk

Each of your milk teeth, toddler shoe-  
boxed under your mother's bed.  
You giggle, call out  
her sentimentality but I'm dizzy  
at dinner, preoccupied  
with thoughts of tinkling  
dentin slipping on my palm.  
I excuse myself, lurch  
into the bedroom.  
My arm zigzags in the dark  
touching fusty carpet before finding  
the muted box compact with dust.  
Pinpoint fingers remove  
one creamy molar.

You drive me home & with haste  
I kiss you goodbye. I'm excited  
close to ravenous  
as I close my door & pick  
the gem from my jeans  
pocket & place it in my  
mouth. I roll it leisurely  
with tongue, let it clink  
like ice cubes in empty  
glass. I swallow  
feel it scrape & chafe  
lodge in my throat.

That night, its crystal  
teratoma grows eggy bulge  
forming restless  
dreams of mountain peaks  
lost in a vortex  
of sinew & snow.

In the bright mirror morning, I scratch  
at flaked skin & peel lengths  
of stringy flesh to expose  
crackle quartz jutting from my neck.  
It glimmers & hums, my beautiful  
crystalline baby  
the only jewellery  
I'll ever wear.

## **ambulance symptoms**

july was flushed with winter  
promise: white water breezes  
& steeples of rain.  
trees shed  
as we layered holiday  
sweaters. my scarf  
was a suspect in your  
strangling.

your neck crimson-blotched  
marzipan / the hospital hammocked  
in caution tape / gift baskets  
unconscious on the floor

## spell for epiphanies

I decoupage my  
bottlebrush and dust  
use fossils of threadbare snakes  
ouija board, cast a circle and call  
wand: the knotted dried  
cauldron with the blood red of  
from decomposing moth wings,  
& ladders games for my substitute  
the quarters with my found-object  
leg of an ibis.

at first it's stillness, then abruptly  
in drifting wattle tufts  
petrichor scent and curlews  
it's nausea in watercolour, hypnosis  
and seaside blue. there's a sparse  
are chanting.

for the rest of the week  
swimming pool water. I pluck  
legs from my hair.  
my mouth tastes like sugar and  
out stamens and moth

## ☠ hotel

check in            with a 6-digit code.  
reception is abandoned & cloaked

in chicken wire ☠ the lift wheezes  
up to your floor: bleach white            freshly painted.

the bed is softly askew ☠ the television whirrs  
& flickers ☠ lift the receiver            to hear clacks

& crackles ☠ the drawers all empty: complimentary  
bible jacking up one leg            of the bed.

lift the doona & shadowed carpet  
is flushed            with rust.

☠            you sleep  
in bursts            ☠

traffic headlights            crawl the walls.  
slipper feet shuffle

in the hallway ☠ always stopping  
just outside    your door.

## Go and gone

For months, the world was different. Or at least, our Lake was: parkland filled at night for communion, crowds of us in coats and runners. Everyone had time for a chat about the ibis clustered and blooming on the Island, or what on earth we were doing: this witchy ritual of open spaces and outdoor worship, of roaming with glowing phones like so many candles.

For months, the world was new and gleaming. In the daylight, I would sit by the Lake and chat about the day's catch with strangers. Kinship made me say things I hadn't in years: like how the algae troubled me, kept me up at night with blue-green figments. Like how my cardio was improving and how maybe, if I could run up both flights of stairs at work, just maybe I could outrun anything.

Last night, the lakeside was barren. Alone on the bench, I noticed the gutted cormorant, beak and belly up on the shoreline. I tickled it with the toe of my trainer, watched it topple into water and submerge in the shallows.



## tweets i never published

there's a vision of the person  
i want to be & it's not  
the type of person who goes jogging

nor the type of person  
who dates @\_\_\_\_\_  
for all of their life #SorryNotSorry

coz sometimes i hate your cheekbones  
so immensely  
i want to squeeze them till they pop

like a pimple but with spurt  
& ooze of pus,  
of blood, of your hefty opinions

& there are days i hate  
polyamory – it makes me  
more tired than i thought possible

speaking of: can i hope to slumber  
in a modest space  
bristling with fairy lights until 2020?

or at the very least: to sleep till you cease  
narrating my life  
like i'm rules of an obscure board game

## Dear Excited to Meet Me

I'm surprised to hear  
we're already dating  
and that you also enjoy picnics      beaches      walks in the park      and  
dislike loneliness. (I'll admit to being sore  
from those emptying gut clenches  
that hit when it's midnight and the bedroom walls  
swell      with echoes.)

Have we met before? Your words  
are familiar and I wonder if you're Anon:  
who hand-delivered      chain letters      when I was 16.

Do you remember the house? The rumpled fervour  
of the garden, overgrowing past the footpath? Unruly plumbago  
brushing your hand  
as you opened      the mailbox      slipped in      the envelope?

Or perhaps those days aren't patterned (intricately)  
in your memory  
like they are in mine.

I feel acutely  
for your financial situation.  
I wish I could transfer the requested amount.  
If I sell this poem, I promise you the profit and in return  
perhaps a date? We could go on a picnic: watch the autumn breeze  
ripple the lake while ibis boldly pluck lunches from hands.

I beg as you did for an eager sincere reply.

## II

*Most days I can bend and stretch inside the bit of space I have made for myself in this world, and breathe a little deeper in the spaces trans people are fighting to make bigger. Most days I can see the changes happening. Most days. Then there are the other days when I cry in the truck on my own because it happened again and I'm tired of talking about it, tired of talking to anyone.*

– Ivan Coyote, *Tomboy Survival Guide*

## **while swallows nest**

she's on the phone low voice spittle breaths I know she'll  
look for me soon grief making her forget run onto the  
patio calling my dead name but for now I'm in the garden  
squashed between hedge and house brick the sun is warm  
on my toes the brick cool on my forehead when I twist and  
look up I see brittle remains of a swallow's nest under the  
eaves I ran out here from the kitchen so I couldn't hear her  
the gurgle in her throat the sadness dribbling from her  
lungs I ran out here in the hopes of stalling something  
something waning and raw

## blueprint for a body

fingerprints slide      into dewy dirt  
immersive rapture

pluck nubs      swollen green  
settle on soil  
circular sorcery

watch for growth      hairs and roots  
fine-spun wisps

leaves stretch      we thrive  
shape scarfskin  
elated rebirth

## <title>gender options</title>

<!DOCTYPE cis-centric>

```
<option value="biological">      MALE</option>
<option="TRUE">                  female</option>
<option="other">                  404  404</not-an-option>
```

>>Gender not found<<

```
if (value == "trans")
return false;
```

```
if (value == "they/them")
then devalue; {disrespect};      <!--tolerance
                                   is sufficient-->
```

```
((deconstruct; {in pieces}
  like mould-rotted floorboards))
))debate; {interrogate! silence!};
  like echo-cold court rooms((
  our trans <bodies> are crimes -- are prisons --
    <!--are defined =by us=
    not you>
```

## Regarding your suspension

Dear Rae

Your gender has been flagged and suspended by our team, due to being one or more of the following:

- biologically invalid or medically unsound
- undesirable and unwanted
- extreme or absurd (see our FAQs on 'political correctness' for more information)
- attention-seeking and 'snowflakish'
- too new/modern (you may wish to try validating your gender again in a decade's time or posthumously)



If you wish to dispute this suspension, you have 24 hours until your gender is completely erased from our system. Please fill out the 20-page dispute form on our website and bring two or more of the following supporting documents:

- a collaborative poem written by your doctor, psychologist and a third unbiased medical professional
- a detailed inventory of your wardrobe, categorised into 'male' and 'female' clothing items, and including 'alternative lifestyle' accessories, such as binders, packers and pronoun badges
- 10 naked photos of you from varying flattering angles taken by a professional photographer (selfies not valid)
- a heartfelt 10-page essay on why your gender should be considered

'authentic' (please note, your essay will require  
15 scholarly and academic sources)

You may also validate your gender by sending us  
a lump sum payment of [\$\$ redacted]  
via cheque or bank transfer.

## what even r u?

non-normative flags  
whip pink f\*g umbrellas  
out of our trans-  
-gressive / expressive hands

we're marching / crawling / squirming  
on our tattoo-tanned bellies  
out from under the  
wind-whipped rainbow

a man on the footpath leers at / up my  
swelling skirt ... but in a romantic way / normative  
way / innocent way ... (aside : i lost  
my innocence to this bloke branded  
the Gendered Healthcare System  
& his love of inflexible  
formal binaries)

in truth, i'm flexible about discrimination : see also :

new msg : ur a genderfree male, yeah?

new msg : i get it – ur \*just\* a non-gendered female?!  
ur a general lack of person / per-  
centage / reference point / pride?  
a flimsy foundation of cluttered pronouns  
& threadbare symbols?

new msg : wait, r u \*just\* an emoji?

let me try again :

r u l of those tr\*nnys?

hey, i heard (on the news / on Facebook / on this scrawl of foot-  
-path propaganda) ... that ur identity lacks  
identity / definition / something

i can cling to because :

i'm shook / a sook / a sock  
monster wagging my tail / working myself into a state  
called 'unable to show you  
the slightest respect'

in truth, i'm \*just\* fucking tired  
of the marching, the crawling (see also : indulging) : see also :  
exhausted / pooped / snoozed out  
of the cis-tem & sick-to-choking  
on ur systemic lasagna-layered revulsion

let me try again :

## Reaction(ary)

I came out to fanfare and  
distaste. As they gripped

my hands and said I was  
brave, I watched you roll

the word inside your mouth:  
testing it with your tongue

like the pit of a sour plum  
you didn't want to swallow.

## I don't even own a cat

take a selfie:  
your best striped shirt,  
weighted necklace (eBay bargain)  
to detract from  
your face #TransisBeautiful  
    maybe today  
    you'll feel it.

take a selfie:  
hair out of place.  
take 20 more (at different angles)  
Storage Almost Full!  
delete every picture of  
    yourself  
    ever taken.

take snaps of the  
cat: curled angles &  
sprinkled sunlight (perfect)  
#CatsofInstagram  
#LoveMyCat 80 likes  
    self-love  
    can wait.

## Dirty talk

I've slept with            'trans like you'  
before & I need to know for my sake  
as a doctor as a detective as a gentleman:

What surgeries?            What was the exact  
weight & feel & cost of each addition &  
subtraction? What was your motive?

How long                    have you known? Did it hurt  
your parents? I need to know, for whimsy's sake,  
of curiosity of masculinity of plot points

on my corkboard            where you're an index card  
& this moment              is thumbtacks & string.