

**“The Elephant in the Room” by [Kay Ryan](#)**

The room is  
almost all  
elephant.  
Almost none  
of it isn't.  
Pretty much  
solid elephant.  
So there's no  
room to talk  
about it.

*excerpt from ["Bigger Than Life"](#) by [Nipsey Hussle](#)*

No I don't want your love, it's not why I make music  
I owe myself, I told myself back then that I would do this  
And I always look so out of reach, and just seem so confusing  
That I felt my place in life, a young black man it seems so useless  
But I don't want no help, just let me suffer through this  
The world would not know Jesus Christ if there was never Judas  
This knife that's in my back will be the truth that introduced us  
And the distance in between us is the proof of my conclusion  
Life is what you make it, I hope you make a movement  
Hope your opportunity survives the opportunist  
Hopin' as you walk across the sand, you see my shoe print

And you follow 'til it change your life, it's all an evolution  
And I hope you find your passion 'cause I found mine in this music

**blessing the boats** by Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide  
that is entering even now  
the lip of our understanding  
carry you out  
beyond the face of fear  
may you kiss  
the wind then turn from it

certain that it will  
love your back may you  
open your eyes to water  
water waving forever  
and may you in your innocence  
sail through this to that

**“Miss you. Would like to take a walk with you.” by [Gabrielle Calvocoressi](#)**

Do not care if you just arrive in your skeleton.  
Would love to take a walk with you. Miss you.  
Would love to make you shrimp saganaki.  
Like you used to make me when you were alive.  
Love to feed you. Sit over steaming  
bowls of pilaf. Little roasted tomatoes  
covered in pepper and nutmeg. Miss you.  
Would love to walk to the post office with you.  
Bring the ghost dog. We'll walk past the waterfall  
and you can tell me about the after.  
Wish you. Wish you would come back for a while.  
Don't even need to bring your skin sack. I'll know  
you. I know you will know me even though. I'm  
bigger now. Grayer. I'll show you my garden.  
I'd like to hop in the leaf pile you raked but if you  
want to jump in? I'll rake it for you. Miss you  
standing looking out at the river with your rake  
in your hand. Miss you in your puffy blue jacket.  
They're hip now. I can bring you a new one  
if you'll only come by. Know I told you  
it was okay to go. Know I told you  
it was okay to leave me. Why'd you believe me?  
You always believed me. Wish you would  
come back so we could talk about truth.  
Miss you. Wish you would walk through my  
door. Stare out from the mirror. Come through  
the pipes.

**"Do not trust the eraser" by [Rosamond S. King](#)**

*for Gabrielle Civil & Madhu H. Kaza*

Do not trust the eraser. Prefer  
crossed out, scribbled over monuments  
to something once thought correct  
. Instead: colors, transparencies  
track changes, versions, iterations  
. How else might you return  
after discards, attempts  
and mis takes, to your  
original genius  
?

**"Tonight No Poetry Will Serve" by Adrienne Rich**

Saw you walking barefoot  
taking a long look  
at the new moon's eyelid

later spread  
sleep-fallen, naked in your dark hair  
asleep but not oblivious  
of the unslept unsleeping  
elsewhere

Tonight I think  
no poetry  
will serve

Syntax of rendition:

verb pilots the plane  
adverb modifies action

verb force-feeds noun  
submerges the subject  
noun is choking  
verb disgraced goes on doing

now diagram the sentence

**“There Is Absolutely Nothing Lonelier” by [Matthew Rohrer](#)**

There is absolutely nothing lonelier  
than the little Mars rover  
never shutting down, digging up  
rocks, so far away from Bond street  
in a light rain. I wonder  
if he makes little beeps? If so  
he is lonelier still. He fires a laser  
into the dust. He coughs. A shiny  
thing in the sand turns out to be his.

**“Bioluminescence” by [Paul Tran](#)**

There’s a dark so deep beneath the sea the creatures beget their own light. This feat, this fact of adaptation, I could say, is beautiful

though the creatures are hideous. Lanternfish. Hatchetfish. Viperfish. I, not unlike them, forfeited beauty to glimpse the world hidden

by eternal darkness. I subsisted on falling matter, unaware from where or why matter fell, and on weaker creatures beguiled

by my luminosity. My hideous face opening, suddenly, to take them into a darkness darker and more eternal than this underworld

underwater. I swam and swam toward nowhere and nothing. I, after so much isolation, so much indifference, kept going

even if going meant only waiting, hovering in place. So far below, so far away from the rest of life, the terrestrial made possible by and thereby

dependent upon light, I did what I had to do. I stalked. I killed. I wanted to feel in my body my body at work, working to stay

alive. I swam. I kept going. I waited. I found myself without meaning to, without contriving meaning at the time, in time, in the company

of creatures who, hideous like me, had to be their own illumination. Their own god. Their own genesis. Often we feuded. Often we fused

like anglerfish. Blood to blood. Desire to desire. We were wild. Bewildered. Beautiful in our wilderness and wildness. In the most extreme conditions



we proved that life can exist. *I exist. I am my life*, I thought, approaching at last the bottom of the sea. It wasn't the bottom. It wasn't the sea.

**"Emily Dickinson at the Poetry Slam" by Dan Vera**

I will tell you why she rarely ventured from her house.  
It happened like this:

One day she took the train to Boston,  
made her way to the darkened room,  
put her name down in cursive script  
and waited her turn.

When they read her name aloud  
she made her way to the stage  
straightened the papers in her hands –  
pages and envelopes, the backs of grocery bills,  
she closed her eyes for a minute,  
took a breath,  
and began.

From her mouth perfect words exploded,  
intact formulas of light and darkness.  
She dared to rhyme with words like cochineal  
and described the skies like diadem.  
Obscurely worded incantations filled the room  
with an alchemy that made the very molecules quake.

The solitary words she handled  
in her upstairs room with keen precision  
came rumbling out to make the electric lights flicker.

40 members of the audience  
were treated for hypertension.  
20 year old dark haired beauties found their heads  
had turned a Moses White.

Her second poem erased the memory of every cellphone  
in the nightclub,  
and by the fourth line of the sixth verse  
the grandmother in the upstairs apartment  
had been cured of her rheumatism.

The papers reported the power outages.  
The area hospitals taxed their emergency generators  
and sirens were heard to wail through the night.

Quietly she made her way to the exit,

walked to the terminal and rode back to Amherst.

She never left her room again  
and never read such syllables aloud.

### **“Paul Robeson” by Gwendolyn Brooks**

That time  
we all heard it,  
cool and clear,  
cutting across the hot grit of the day.  
The major Voice.  
The adult Voice  
forgoing Rolling River,  
forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge  
and other symptoms of an old despond.  
Warning, in music-words  
devout and large,  
that we are each other’s  
harvest:  
we are each other’s  
business:  
we are each other’s  
magnitude and bond.

[Untitled] by bell hooks

in love  
there are no closed doors  
each threshold  
an invitation  
to cross  
take hold  
take heart  
and enter here  
at this point  
where truth  
was once denied

**"no more grandma poems" by [Yolanda Wisher](#)**

they said  
forget your grandma  
these american letters  
don't need no more  
grandma poems  
but i said  
the grandmas are  
our first poetic forms  
the first haiku  
was a grandma  
& so too  
the first sonnet  
the first blues  
the first praise song  
therefore  
every poem  
is a grandmother  
a womb that has ended  
& is still expanding  
a daughter that is  
rhetorically aging  
& retroactively living  
every poem  
is your grandma  
& you miss her  
wouldn't mind  
seeing her again  
even just  
for a moment  
in the realm of spirit  
in the realm  
of possibilities  
where poems  
share blood  
& spit & exist  
on chromosomal  
planes of particularity  
where poems  
are strangers

turned sistren  
not easily shook  
or forgotten

**"The Robots are Coming" by Kyle Dargan**

with clear-cased woofers for heads,  
no eyes. They see us as a bat sees  
a mosquito—a fleshy echo,  
a morsel of sound. You've heard  
their intergalactic tour busses  
purring at our stratosphere's curb.  
They await counterintelligence  
transmissions from our laptops  
and our blue teeth, await word  
of humanity's critical mass,  
our ripening. How many times  
have we dreamed it this way:  
the Age of the Machines,  
postindustrial terrors whose  
tempered paws—five welded fingers  
—wrench back our roofs,  
siderophilic tongues seeking blood,  
licking the crumbs of us from our beds.  
O, great nation, it won't be pretty.  
What land will we now barter  
for our lives ? A treaty inked  
in advance of the metal ones' footfall.  
Give them Gary. Give them Detroit,  
Pittsburgh, Braddock—those forgotten  
nurseries of girders and axels.  
Tell the machines we honor their dead,  
distant cousins. Tell them  
we tendered those cities to repose  
out of respect for welded steel's  
bygone era. Tell them Ford  
and Carnegie were giant men, that war  
glazed their palms with gold.  
Tell them we soft beings mourn  
manufacture's death as our own.

**"To Live in the Borderlands" by Gloria Anzaldúa**

To live in the borderlands means you  
are neither hispana india negra espanola  
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed  
caught in the crossfire between camps  
while carrying all five races on your back  
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;  
To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years,  
is no longer speaking to you,  
the mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the Anglo inside you  
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;  
Cuando vives en la frontera  
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,  
you're a burra, buey, scapegoat,  
forerunner of a new race,  
half and half-both woman and man, neither-a new gender;  
To live in the Borderlands means to  
put chile in the borscht,  
eat whole wheat tortillas,  
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;  
be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints;  
Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to  
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,  
the pull of the gun barrel,  
the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;  
In the Borderlands  
you are the battleground  
where enemies are kin to each other;  
you are at home, a stranger,  
the border disputes have been settled  
the volley of shots have scattered the truce  
you are wounded, lost in action  
dead, fighting back;  
To live in the Borderlands means  
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off  
your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart  
pound you pinch you roll you out  
smelling like white bread but dead;  
To survive the Borderlands  
you must live sin fronteras

be a crossroads.

[“The Thing Is” by Ellen Bass](#)

to love life, to love it even  
when you have no stomach for it  
and everything you've held dear  
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,  
your throat filled with the silt of it.  
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat  
thickening the air, heavy as water  
more fit for gills than lungs;  
when grief weights you down like your own flesh  
only more of it, an obesity of grief,  
you think, *How can a body withstand this?*  
Then you hold life like a face  
between your palms, a plain face,  
no charming smile, no violet eyes,  
and you say, yes, I will take you  
I will love you, again.

**"border fever 105.7 degree" by Juan Felipe Herrea**

*—for Jakelin Amei Rosemery, 7 yrs old, from Guatemala, with a fever of 105.7, who died in custody and for 8 yr old, Felipe Gómez Alonzo, also from Guatemala, who died under custody of Customs and Border Protection on 12-24-18. For all migrant and immigrant children, and their families separated on the road north.*

why do you cry  
those are not screams you hear across this cage  
it is a symphony – the border guards says

*there is a girl up ahead  
made of sparkles is she me or  
is she  
dead*

on the custody floor  
105.7 degrees

where do I go where did they go  
where do I go to breathe no more

a lost flame a firefly  
dressing for freedom

where did she go