

Poetry by **Mike Perkins**

*Real Heroes*

real heroes  
may ride off  
but they come home  
by sunset  
have rough hands  
but tender hearts  
can drive a hammer  
or hold a child

give up a deer rifle  
or a fishing trip  
for braces  
or a new bicycle  
stay at jobs  
for paychecks and benefits  
that physically  
and financially  
break them  
but pay the bills  
somehow

heroes fix old cars  
in the cold  
with used parts  
building  
what they can  
on weekends  
and fix what they have to  
at night

real heroes  
keep promises  
and commitments  
raise children  
rather than hell  
say little  
and do much  
and do it  
over and over

real heroes are  
underappreciated  
and seldom understood  
until it is too late  
helping you  
fulfill your dreams  
at the cost of their own  
they are  
the plain men  
of quiet character

when everybody else  
leaves you  
forgets you  
real heroes  
stand by you  
believe in you  
see something  
others ignore  
as long as they  
draw a breath  
and then maybe  
a little longer

Poetry by **Jeffrey McDonald**

*Squirrel*

Sitting in the driveway,  
presuming the morning true.  
THUD from behind me,  
a small squirrel missed what it had leapt for.  
I caught its aberrant carom off the cement.  
Aerial artist, fearless daredevil, crafty nuisance  
no longer.  
Stunned and grounded, it veered off like a drunk to the nearest bush for cover.  
Too familiar.

I went inside,  
the day no longer  
worth believing in.

Poetry by **Natalia Treviño**

*Musica Caprichosa: For My Grandmother Who Wanted to Play*

Summer 1931, you stood by the door 'Uelita,  
eleven-years-old, black curls in tight, shiny, spirals, dripping sweat.

You hid behind the door  
before your first lesson, in piano, your heels

pressed to the threshold. The aunt, esa tia  
the mean one, a step, not blood, was your teacher

and you could hear her sister from the other side of the door:  
To that one? Le vas a dar classes a esa largona?

To that dummy?  
What for?

You turned and ran home, crushing dirt clumps  
beneath your shoes, the black paten dulled in the sun.

You never touched  
a piano, or a music lesson after that.

They never asked you or your mother  
where you went. Why you missed.

Ramiro could sing. Your older, handsome brother.  
Operas, they thought. And the aunts and the teachers

came. Free lessons for his voice,  
His rounded notes. Took photos for his trip,

para irse a Hollywood –ese Ramiro! tan guapo!  
And then free doctors came, free surgeries,

For the tissue that should not grow  
behind his brain.

And there was no money.  
You tell me your mother climbed the steps del palacio.

To see the governor, her gold-gray hair pulled back tight,  
for respect. Dressed in long black skirt, like Buena gente.

Had never begged she made it clear, but  
He can sing, por favor;

She trembled  
es mi hijo.

And the governor sent his own doctor,  
paid for the boy who could sing.

You say Ramiro knew what day he would die--  
had read there would be blue fingers

in the books his doctor gave him. And he called out  
from his bed, Ya estan negras, Mama! Black!

Days before, he'd chased you down on a bus  
in the cold rain.

You had been sneaking bus rides  
to see your secret boyfriend who became my grandfather.

\*

Now, 'Uelita, in your translucent sleep,  
you pee sometimes, sing, or dream.

Your sister, Licha comes to to wake you  
from your hardened muscles. And you whisper

the songs you both love to sing. You keep  
Ramiro's photo for Hollywood hanging on your melon-painted wall:

a head shot.

Poetry by **Natalia Treviño**

*The Function of Swelling in Pregnancy*

1.

Fortunately, the swelling that comes with pregnancy  
does go down. Watery ponds in wrists,  
moveable lakes in ankles, all the waters damned  
behind the stretch of translucent skin.

Water, the doctors say, you're retaining so much.  
Drink more, they say.  
You're lookin puffy.

And pregnant women eye the mirror  
for signs of skin not puffed. Left  
eyelid maybe, top of this knuckle.  
But there are bigger problems: standing,

not being able to stand,  
the ache for sitting.  
Unwashed dishes that pile  
in the deepening sink.

2.

When the babies are born, new mothers  
check the floating uterus  
under skin. Wet chamois.  
Dough to knead. Doctors say, the uterus is tilted.

You may not pee on your own;  
squeeze your nipples like this. The sitz,  
yes that. He's not latching on. He'll dehydrate  
if you don't wake him and make him eat  
every two hours. Make him angry. Piss him off.  
Cleft chin! That's a birth defect.  
Yes, the mother-law says--I will smoke in front of the baby.

During the birth, levied thick wrists have burst,  
rivers, legs, bottoms, and eyes blast, flood the room.  
Mother and child, all moist air now, all quiet fog  
behind a steady rush of the waterfall they formed,  
of flesh and blood, and milk.

Poetry by **Amit Parmessur**

*Let Me Worship You*

Blow me.  
Paint me.  
Slap me.

Make me your pea whistle  
and blow me.  
Whistle me to the content of your mind,  
drown me in the sweet tornado of  
your luscious lips.  
Shape me into scarlet clouds  
and when your tyrannous will  
is done toss me into the  
basin of your lap.

Paint me.  
Slap me.  
Blow me.

Make me your sketch pad  
and paint me.  
Let me smile in the sky of your eyes,  
stroke me in the plush mole of  
your pupils,  
let your anger and whims cut me.  
I am the immovable wave.

Slap me.  
Blow me.  
Paint me.

Make me your drum  
and slap me  
and turn me into a ricochet  
of eternal bliss.  
Slap me with the terror  
of your soft nails  
and deflate my cheeks of falsehood.

Blow me  
for  
what is the blow without the blowing,  
what is the blowing without the blow.

Paint me  
for  
what is the painting without the paint,  
what is the paint without the painting.

Slap me  
for  
what is the slap without the slapping  
what is the slapping without the slap.

Blow me  
Paint me  
Slap me

but let me worship, and worship, you.

Poetry by Joanna C. Valente

*If They Were Men*

They go out together every Friday night to buy red wine for dinner as though they have people to be and places to discover. Maggie will heat the oven using their grandmother's recipes and her own hands, and they will eat until

they are full with grief digesting in their bellies. Place hands politely on table, smile in little sour apples, laugh in the succession of swarming flies, they desire one thing but know it is too late now. They would make good men,

and treat their women right, fill the house with flowers, change the oil in their Buick (their old girl.) What is it about boys' blood that leaves a taste in a slow'd mouth? They were left behind for all the things their body could give them,

but what was it they could take? They drive home to boxes in the garage, a kitchen full of utensils; they never knew anything so honest and good as the feel of a fork and knife pressed against their backside.

Poetry by **Akhil Katyal**

*The biopic lecture*

I was taking notes on my laptop  
when the professor stated: 'So he  
loves her like a madman in 1903,'  
a little jaded, I mistyped 'loved.'  
I could not help, you know,  
this *s* and *d* are right next  
to each other on the keyboard.  
Who knew love ends like a typo,  
a letter wrong and you detonate softly.  
Or perhaps I must have sensed  
that their love would not last  
when I faulted its tense from  
present continuous to past.

Poetry by **Akhil Katyal**

*We go at it like insane*

We go at it like insane, we  
break up, we make up and  
break up again, and when  
we think we could do this  
for a while, the game is  
called off due to rain (we  
thank the gods for their  
timeliness, for their pain).  
We call each other to our  
cities, we cross the Atlantic  
twice in a night, get knackered  
and have a spat, Jackie K says  
'Life is like that,' we only love,  
we only fight, get to know better  
in hindsight, and 1 pm voices tell  
us to stop flying for once, and  
remain, forget East Coast, they  
say, come rest with us in Spain.

Poetry by **Pravat Kumar Padhy**

*My Temple Visit*

Seldom I visit the temple  
To offer my prayer to God  
Because I find Him  
Distinctly outside  
In flesh and blood.

*Be Happy*

No use decorating  
With phrases of praises  
The little flower  
Is worthy of its fragrance.

*Hygienic Ostentation*

When the poor soils his body  
The rich washes his hands  
To show the  
Value of cleanliness.

*Metro Life*

At the square of liberty crossing  
Some one enquires  
We feign busy  
Squeezing ahead of time.

*Beyond*

We are born in lust  
And won't hesitate  
If some one gifts  
Two more eyes at our back.

Plywood of billboards

Sheds tears of grief

And screams aloud

To save the trees.

*Image of Life*

All depends on how you snap

Your inner bright

The edge of perfection

Lies in the angle

Of your sight.

Poetry by **Claudia Lamar**

*How to defraud things like love and luck*

I'm tired of hanging out in gardens  
waiting for ladybugs to pay us attention,  
and counting leaves on clovers like:  
*1, 2, 3, dammit,*

I don't want to kill chickens just to make wishes,  
or rub up against your rabbit's foot  
and mistake it for your foot,

our roof is leaking  
and we are using kitchenware to save our lives,  
I try to make you laugh and open up an umbrella,  
but you say,

*that's bad luck, don't do it,*

but we're holding poorness in fistfuls,  
and can't afford to have fears,

Abe Lincoln's head was shot  
and yet you find it fortunate and put in your pocket,  
but I'm not allowed to accidentally spill salt  
without you calling an exorcist,

and the neighbor's black cat that crosses your path,  
please stop running from him,  
he does not want to ruin your day,

there is no such thing as luck in the wild,  
only humans can be unlucky in love,

I pretend I am an animal and my heart never hurts

Poetry by **Tasha Graff**

*A Bank Manager at 7 a.m.*

*For my grandfather*

I can plot your routine for each morning from when you put on black wool socks and then your slippers to the tune you whistle (Al Jolson, Swanee) as you flick the switch of the electric

kettle. Before it boils you've placed four Yorkshire Gold bags in your Brown Betty and walked to the door to grab your copy of the Daily Mail and the milk, still delivered in glass bottles,

you pour it into the bottom of two teacups, brew the tea, and add a teaspoon of sugar to one and two to the other. You put the paper under your elbow and walk upstairs in your dressing

gown and sit back in bed so your blood pressure can rise as you read about how immigrants are ruining the country—was it only last year that curry was voted the national dish?—your

bookie is on speed dial and you bet a few pounds on horses. You are not quirky. You are predictable, at least that's how I think of you, that's how I remember you from when we

spent our summers together and you would play my piano and sing like Frankie Vaughan and buy me too many sweets. You did stop smoking, eventually, but that wasn't surprising,

because by that time you knew you were paying for cancer, but you had your impetuous moments: you dumped a gallon of milk on Gabriel's head just because he said you wouldn't

and you named my mother after Ingrid Bergman, though I'm sure you spent time considering this, and I'm glad you did, but mostly you were predictable and I loved you for it. If you lived

here you'd be a Republican, and I would still love you, and maybe it would be easier if you were closer. You would let me visit and I could watch you die instead of picturing it, replacing

my memories with imaginings of what your mornings are like now you can't get out of bed, now every day is unexpected, because when I think about you I want you to be whistling that song

I hated, I want you to be making yourself another cup of tea.

Poetry by **Steven Gulvezan**

*Endless Novena*

Nine times nine, ninety, nine hundred,  
Nine thousand – I don't care – nine times  
The movement of my hand as I trembling  
Outstretch my hand to the Cross...  
What songs do you wish me to sing?  
What stations to travel?  
What words to whisper?  
My head bowed,  
My eyes closed, my knees  
Welcoming the scrape  
Of the stones of the floor

Poetry by **Joshua Berida**

*This is Probably About Nothing*

---I tell her. This is not about the  
blue of the ocean and how it signifies the unknown.  
*May I kiss you? I ask her.* No it doesn't mean anything I tell her.  
Just a kiss. Not the time I made love to her nor the time  
I bought her flowers after a fight.  
I tell her to look at the moon  
the way its light beams on us with its smile.  
I tell her it's not romantic. It's just the night.  
It's just us sitting here in the dark.  
Just us.  
I tell her to read the letter I gave her.  
She opens it and tells me with her voice of silence  
*there's nothing written on it.*  
*Yes there is* I tell her. But don't think much of it.  
It's not the past. It's not the present. It's not the unwritten future.  
It's nothing.  
Just us.  
I tell her *I love you.*  
It's nothing not the way your eyes  
can fold and un-  
fold me. How your lips  
flutter like a rainbow inside me.  
It's no-  
thing. Just  
love.

Poetry by **A.J. Huffman**

*Separated by a Row of Headstones*

It's Hallow's Eve again.  
Time for all the ghosts and ghouls  
to take off their masks  
and walk among us.  
Naked.  
And unafraid.  
They are mocking us.  
As we hope to mock them.  
Laughing  
and dancing.  
And more like ourselves  
than even we can comprehend.

Poetry by **A.J. Huffman**

*Recipe for Perfection*

Sitting  
on the dining room table,  
I wear his shirt.  
Pure white silk  
and open to the waist.

Slowly,  
I lift a spoon  
from the dish  
of caviar and diamonds.  
And lick a thick cream  
from my other finger.

And I watch his eyes  
flash  
dutiful indecision.  
In wonderment  
at what to eat  
first.