

*A Bug Collection*  
Short Stories by  
Melody Mansfield  
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Melody Mansfield

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# *A Bug Collection*

SHORT STORIES BY  
Melody Mansfield

A humorous and heartbreaking look at the complexities of human life through the compound eyes of bugs.

*A Bug Collection* is not for the squeamish. These stories about love, death, and the webby, tenuous intersections between the two take a humorous and heartbreaking look at the complexities of human life through the compound eyes of bugs. When a lone mayfly has a painful revelation about the ephemerality of her own existence, it sets in motion a chain of revelations by more bugs—beetles, katydids, earthworms, ants—who force us to consider what it means to be fully alive in a world of dung.

### Praise for *A Bug Collection*

“Not quite fable, but the feel of fable, the bugs in Melody Mansfield’s *A Bug Collection* are real (and smart!)—filled with yearning, pain, excitement, loss, joy. These stories are authentically human without one single human character. Mansfield’s sentences are sharp and prophetic. In ‘To Kill a Katydid,’ the narrator instructs us on how to save ourselves: ‘You slide down the glass and try to hide your deformity.’ We take these bugs seriously—with a dose of laughter—because at every turn, every sentence, every move, they reveal the paradox of our own humanity. Nothing feels off or out of place in this bug world. We might learn from these bugs how to live on this dirt.”

—Terry Ann Thaxton, author of *Getaway Girl* and *The Terrible Wife*

“Mansfield employs the unlikely and fresh metaphors of bugs—mayflies, fireflies, dung beetles, and the rest—to provide a whimsical and sometimes heart-wrenching reminder that the human condition is fraught with battling hopes, fears, and vanities in our ongoing search for love. The writer considers how grand and hopeful we can remain in spite of the unavoidable truth of our mortality. Gregor Samsa, you are not alone. *A Bug Collection* is an enlightening, beautiful, and delightful read.”

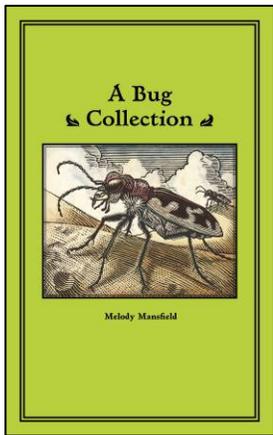
—Jane Bradley, author of *You Believers*, *Are We Lucky Yet?*, *Living Doll*, and *Power Lines*

“In the bizarre enchantment of this collection, all the glories and dilemmas of Western civilization are second nature to the dung beetles, katydids, and fireflies, while Melody Mansfield’s reverence for all life makes her intimately acquainted with every pedipalp and scutellum. Immerse yourself in these strange pages: erudite, ecstatic, and suffused with gentle humor.”

—Diane Lefer, author of *California Transit: Stories* and *Nobody Wakes Up Pretty*

### Biographical Note

**Melody Mansfield’s** first novel, *The Life Stone of Singing Bird*, was published by Faber and Faber, Inc. to favorable reviews from *The New York Times Book Review*, *Booklist*, and others. Her short fiction, essays, and poetry have appeared in a variety of literary, academic, and commercial publications including *Thought Magazine*, *Inside English*, and *Parents Magazine*. She is currently at work on a number of longer projects, including a semi-autobiographical account of her years as a ballet dancer in NYC. She lives in Los Angeles with her writer/professor husband, Jerry Mansfield, and is the Director of Creative Writing at Milken Community High School.



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**More Praise for *A Bug Collection***

“Melody Mansfield’s *A Bug Collection* offers a richly imaginative, stylistically diverse reading experience full of wit and philosophical insight into love, death, the very nature of human/bug existence. Contemporary stories, buggy retellings of classical and biblical tales, inventive blends. Mansfield makes you love and hate her bug stand-ins for flawed humankind, and offers a rare treat: an incredibly fun story collection (with a play and poems as added bonuses) so full of existential wisdom that when you finish, you find yourself wondering how she pulled it off . . . and longing for more.”

—Daniel M. Jaffe, editor of *With Signs & Wonders: An International Anthology of Jewish Fabulist Fiction*; author of *The Limits of Pleasure* and *Jewish Gentle and Other Stories of Gay-Jewish Living*

“According to Mansfield’s delightfully creative vision, it turns out bugs are like us—just more poetic and better read. Cleverly toying with masters of literature and the forms they used, Mansfield introduces us to a cast of bugs that includes a Tennyson-loving katydid—abhorrer of Shelley, a ‘depresssed’ honey bee who observes another bee plunging into gossip as if it were pollen, and a judgmental firefly who surprisingly discovers love. Even with their compound eyes and different limb counts, these insects reflect our humanity, with our fear of mortality, longing for love, and painful misunderstandings. Their powerful, insect-sized stories are told as Greek tragedies, in poetry (sonnets, villanelle, *Canterbury Tales*), and in one notable achievement, as a *Dragnet* episode. In their anguish, they shake their tarsi at God, but like Mansfield’s fluid prose, many of them fly. Join them in their flight; this is a bug collection you must experience.”

—Mary Clyde, author of *Survival Rates*, winner of the Flannery O’Connor Fiction Award

**From *A Bug Collection***

**Fireflies of the Vanities**

“Blue” was not his real name, but it was what the others called him. Something had always been a little off in his bioluminescence—instead of glowing the brilliant yellow of his compadres, his abdominal segments lit up in a murky blue that looked awfully like the night sky itself. But his parents had been supportive. The entire Lampyridae family, as a matter of fact, had been careful and kind about his congenital disorder. And for a long time that was enough. For a long time, his friends sought him out because he told funny jokes, like the one about how many Hercules beetles it took to screw in an artifact of artificial luminescence, or the one about what you call a dwarf spider without legs. Or they sought him out because he knew stuff that they didn’t, like about how there were some fireflies in faraway lands that could flash in synchronized patterns, or about how some humans did nothing all day but tap buttons on boxes to make black marks appear on white surfaces.