

# THE MANTLE

## POETRY

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#11

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Each poem belongs to its respective author

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## I've Been to Bigger Forests With Even Bigger Secrets

it's true what they say: the forest keeps the secrets of the universe  
of course, i can't say where or how, that would be breaking the contract

darling, i signed my name away long ago. we all did.  
you didn't get the paperwork yet. it's full of dark howls and gray shadows.  
it's full of jewels and songs. it's full of night in its endless pearls.

i hope, when you get to the end, you don't miss the last clause.  
darling, it's important. read harder. the real joke is: we are the ghosts.  
stop hiding. you're only hiding from yourself.

**Stephanie Athena Valente** lives in Brooklyn, NY. Her published works include *Hotel Ghost*, *waiting for the end of the world*, and *Little Fang* (Bottlecap Press, 2015-2019). She has work included in *Reality Hands*, *TL;DR*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*. She is the associate editor at *Yes, Poetry*. Sometimes, she feels human.  
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Jude Nguyen

## acromantis grandis

in my parent's home country  
is the red river  
running its natural course through years of  
deprivation and oppression, there was always half of a home, half  
of a river, half belonging to my ancestors,  
the other half belonging to plastic, to a barrel

somewhere in this  
is light

my mother told me how the children would capture the acromantis grandis in paper  
cups similar to how  
my cousins and i, during our bluest age would capture fireflies in plastic  
cups, i told her how strange is it that as humans we capture fireflies so we  
can look  
at their light

In the background of this,

is a humming, from a lamp, or a landline

some light spilling itself, over a river  
we drink the light, as an ode, as a way to survive,  
as the acromantis grandis sleep,  
we pardon our restlessness, we pardon the river, we pardon  
the light, the barrel, the plastic

and when we wake, we let the fireflies free  
as an ode to survival, as an ode to light

**Jude Nguyen** (Instagram: [@jdy.ngu](https://www.instagram.com/jdy.ngu)) is a first-generation college student. They reside in Central Massachusetts. Their work can be found in *Glass: a Journal of Poetry*. They are an Aries/Taurus cusp that is passionate about activism and is an advocate. They can be found painting, free-writing, or procrastinating on homework.

Jude Nguyen

## ode to section 8 housing

i would watch my father water  
the bird eye chili  
of our section 8 housing  
in between his manic episodes,

sat on our concrete steps  
in between the cây chổi and  
a make-shift ashtray, in the backyard  
tomatoes grew from the pollution

there are days i think being a first-generation American  
is synonymous with trauma

some wire walking or was it a balance beam

when i was thirteen,  
i could not find the words to translate into my father's language:

stage four cancer,  
chemotherapy,

I could only count to thirty in Vietnamese  
without stuttering

but did not know how to translate percent or survival rate  
something about a thirty percent survival rate

durian fruit is known for its pungent smell  
how it goes bad after the fifth day

when the Mars Rover went cold NASA pinged it a thousand times in 8 months  
kind of like how letting go feels like a perpetual gnawing

i am all skin and spilled milk  
fist full of power adapters and feathers  
i could not translate my father's sickness into our native language  
Sorry,  
Sorry -  
often translates itself into asking for forgiveness  
like a cardinal sin, my pocket change  
is in a jar  
we

used to wash the plastic spoons, in order to reuse them  
an  
ancient hymnal,  
that only plays the b chord - like an echo chamber  
I am twenty-one,  
and my father weighs less than i do,  
standing almost a foot taller than i do  
my entire life  
my father  
has been teaching me  
how  
to disappear

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## ode

one day absence called me up & bought me a five course meal  
& i let him hold my hand because that's the polite  
thing to do when absence calls you up & wines  
& dines you & asks you to fuck his brains out  
does absence even have brains does absence  
put on deodorant every morning do you  
think if i handcuffed him to the headboard  
would he like it did you like it  
tell me why you left him in your place  
without even sending a complimentary fruit basket  
at least absence has a bigger dick than you  
& uses it so well that he is the only thing i feel inside me

**Madeleine Grossman** is originally from New Jersey and currently lives in Brooklyn. She has been published in *SOFTBLOW* and *The Kentucky Review*. She studied English, French, and Creative Writing at New York University and now works in the music industry.

Madeleine Grossman

## potty training

i found you in a bush itching, you have my  
permission to fold -- lay down all your  
cards except the Queens, Long Island  
City leave those in my sheets &  
be done with it. steep  
yourself in parsley tea, here is an out  
house, stop wasting your time  
pretending i'll blow you  
away, go. write all your secrets & stick  
them in a bottle, call me a puddle, call me  
tomorrow, call the proctologist & tell him  
you're full of shit. if i wait any longer  
my body clock will spring forward &  
you'll fall back, feet spilling over themselves.

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## Gain Powers and Learn Desperation

Just like that it was gone -  
the casually engendered peace  
-

it had been as subtle  
as insulation.

But the video game blinks  
a blaring directive.

*Gain powers and learn desperation.*

So I cut through the Won Kok parking lot.  
I have made pink clouds my background

and to the up-left, a strand of  
pigeons, still on their wire  
in the rain

.

I hunker down, blurry with prednisone.  
Lupus lamentably does not mean  
I'm a werewolf -  
merely that I have been bitten by a wolf -  
(on the face, ill-favored)

.

I am coursing along the wide street.

Mrs. Lin the psychic resides in a hut  
of raspberry pavlova, and  
she is **In**.

I listen to a song, hoping for  
provocation

but find it both  
very weird  
and just ok.

.

I call him my sweet  
log of marzipan. I call him  
my pavlova. Chewy.

To be loved and  
also sick - this  
is a new vibe -

a rosemary tree  
a moth in a beer stein  
two socks, jack frost  
apartment in the morning

.

I keep getting hit by the desire to  
make a tent of my jacket  
and just hope I'm forgiven

**Allison Hummel** is based in Southern California. Her work has recently appeared in *Oxidant Engine*, the *Operating System*, *SLANT* and *Sorority Mansion*. Work is forthcoming from *Francis House*, *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Flag + Void*. Assimilating to Twitter: [@allisonhummel4](https://twitter.com/allisonhummel4)

## I suppose I will never stop thinking

1,  
I suppose I will never stop thinking  
about it, and why would I want to

when the grain of your love,  
rubbing against my gums, is

the only thing that reminds me  
of the esoteric world

dying, but extant

like a phenomenon in Minoa  
or a willingness to  
entertain belief.

And there were a number of  
Minoas,

each singular, like a  
scattering of baby octopuses.

2,  
It would be nice if belief  
could be obtained, like a  
moody draught,

or caught like a cold.

I would stake out and  
then approach my  
neighborhood witch.

*I don't need the thing,  
I'd say, just give me  
an inch of clearance*

an inch of space, an airfield -  
I'll tend it in anticipation  
of the thing's arrival

if it never comes that's fine  
at least I made room for it  
I didn't say no

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## Exorcist, Please

You sent glitter in the post,  
a sweet thought, but

now there's glitter in the sofa  
glitter on the cat  
glitter in the fridge  
glitter in my eyelids

when I breathe out I spew  
glitter, my shoes don't fit anymore

don't worry, I managed to get the glitter  
out of them, but my feet  
absorbed the stuff, behemoth paws  
that leave a rainbow trail

wherever I go, glitter  
in my dreams

glitter on the other cat  
glitter in the glitter,  
some other glitter dimension  
where atoms are replaced with glitter,

my TV just plays glitter;  
a snow crash in colour,

and I don't know which button is red  
or blue or yellow or green,  
they're all glitter,  
you sent the letter years ago,

but still I'm haunted.



## "Would You Stay Calm or Would You Panic?"

[question asked by Nathan D. Horowitz]

I've grinned at fists that bludgeoned me,  
while inside I absorbed inches  
of distance dwindling. I stood paralyzed  
as in webs of many spiders.

See me there strumming a chord on stage,  
leaning on the house guitar?  
I tremble so much a bead of sweat  
jogs zigzags down my cheek.

Panic never leaves. I wear calm  
like a summer shirt—loose, lazy.  
One kicks the other in the shin  
under a table where no one can see.

Not an either/or; an either/&:  
panic an overheating motor,  
calm the FM station, stereo  
turned up loud to mask the grind.

**Ace Boggess** is author of five books of poetry—*Misadventure*, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, *Ultra Deep Field*, *The Prisoners*, and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled*—and the novels *States of Mercy* and *A Song Without a Melody*. His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and many other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His sixth collection, *Escape Envy*, is forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press in 2021.

## These flowers know which birds sip

These flowers know which birds sip  
and the ones that guzzle --it's how each sky  
plans its journey for the water it needs

to breed, take in the tears already lush  
as yes then yes again till your ears  
overflow with sweet talk, can tell

from the echo if it's a footstep  
or someone in love is answering back  
with scented dirt as a place to stay

--you dead are always on the listen  
let in the shadows these gravestones make  
till one by one they become this dam

and the ones that didn't you let dry  
become what you hear leaving someone's hand  
for yours, now empty and in the open.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Rosenblum Poems* published by *Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library*, 2020. For more information including free e-books and his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com).

## Submission Guidelines

*The Mantle Poetry* welcomes poetry submissions from you, no matter who you are or where you live.

Send your odd, poignant, beautiful poems. Send poems you're proud of, whether raw, refined, or jagged.

Submissions are read year-round. Issue cut-off dates are as follows:

January 15 for the Winter issue.

April 15 for the Spring issue.

July 15 for the Summer issue.

October 15 for the Autumn issue.

Send up to 5 previously unpublished poems of any style or length in one .doc/.docx/.pdf/.rtf/.odt file to **themantle.poetry@gmail.com** with "submission" somewhere in the subject line.

Include your name and an optional cover letter in the email. A 50-75 word third-person bio will be requested in the event we accept your work.

You may submit again after receiving a response. If your work is selected for publication, wait for the following issue to pass before submitting again.

Simultaneous submissions are encouraged. If any of your poems get accepted elsewhere before you get a response from us, send a reply to the original submission email noting which poem(s) you need to withdraw (no worries, and congrats!).

Feel free to query if you haven't received a response after 60 days.

We ask for First Serial Rights. After a poem is published here, the contributor retains all rights. If the poem is published anywhere else after, we kindly ask that you credit *The Mantle* as first publisher.

We are a non-paying market.

Thank you so much for reading! *The Mantle Poetry* is grateful for your support.