

2012

When We Collected Fireflies

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Recommended Citation

Merritt Mahaffey, Alana (2012) "When We Collected Fireflies," *Studio One*: Vol. 37, 18-19.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/studio_one/vol37/iss1/14

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When we collected fireflies

The trick was always
 to open the jar just slightly
 and barely divide the lid
from the vessel and
to coax
the bug
inside.

 A quick dot of light—
a dim and solitary signal to the others
 --mysterious transmissions

Our employment:
 to trap so much life
 into one round and empty space;
hold it delicately, turning,
 turning, lighted beneath a desk lamp.

The universe was a mustard jar
 small and remote
 stationed on the nightstand.

To keep
simple lives
squirming—
 tap water and crabgrass
scattered in divine piles
 at the jar's bottom.

The real trick was keeping them alive.
 invariably, the first died overnight, his
 darkened body, hard atop crabgrass, and
 a dozen sleeping brothers never knew.

But in days, each one followed—
 each one descending toward the former,
 each signal unanswered, until
the last body blinked hopefully
that single searchlight for the rest who,
like tiny broken bulbs,
cushioned his fall.

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