When We Collected Fireflies

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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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