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All

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All

1.

I've come from her apartment, my divorced friend—
twenty-four, a medical student,
and beautiful. She's tired of loss,

their arguments about the marble-topped table,
the sectional couch.

I know everything about the confederate flag

her grandmother had given them, Ann and Marc
embroidered in gold thread
on that bottom edge, how even that was a fight.

She turned to Good Housekeeping for guidance,
the year-long subscription producing
a recipe for guacamole, served at every party.

2.

The stinging nettles are back, a dozen
just off the graying dock,
floating in that red clay water like baggies.

We pulled up the crab pot and freed a female,
her underbelly a sunset,
fierce orange and yellow. None of this makes

much difference. Even as the nettles washed to shore,
we'd nudge them back into the water's
dull cloud and watch them float away.

It was a small miracle, their soft masses sucking
and pushing out the water,
our eyes on their swift motions.

3.

I was dragged through a corn field once to hear
the sound, those stalks
against our arms, the dry brushing.

It seemed like something more, but we didn't kiss
and I left him there,
the sky dimmed with night. All these details,

and what should I learn? Ann talks about love,
meaning company, but I know
the feeling of wanting to hold onto a memory.

4.

The nettles would get us every time,
our young arms turned a quick,
blotchy pink. We still saved them

from the receding shore, motivated by the power
of it all, this first feeling of life.
What we remember can help us live;

he tried to tell me this in the dark field,
the past season's crops
hovering over us. I remember releasing

his shirt and that was all, the thin moon
tipped behind the trees,
its faint light, and that was all.

—Kellam Ayres '97