

Radius

My grandmother ties a rope around my mother's waist like an umbilical cord.
The other end of the tether is not connected to my grandmother.
It is attached to a metal post.
Metal posts do not make good mothers.
The midday sky, cloudless, hangs like an empty canvas.
Until a hawk circles overhead and wild dogs bark in the distance.
My mother cries until she falls asleep.
When she wakes and no one is there, she explores the area around her.
Pokey blades of crabgrass, small pebbles, dirt smooth as dust.
Finally, a pill bug catches her eye.
Its seven pairs of legs crawl toward her and at last, she cups the bug in her tiny hand.
When it rolls into its armored sphere, she gasps with delight.
Sometimes it is better to be an armored sphere.
The creature slowly uncurls like the fist of a sleeping baby and crawls away.
She follows it until the rope pulls taut like a leash.
Rope can be beautiful depending on the length.
My mother lies back down on the ground and curves her body into a ball.
You can see the hand of God in a pill bug.
This is her first memory.
When she grows up, she believes her real mother must have been a concubine who
died in childbirth.
Not my grandmother who raised her.
We can write whatever we want on an empty canvas.
One morning my mother leaves for America.
Takes with her my father, brother, and sister.
Leaves me alone with my grandmother.
My grandmother never ties me to a metal post.
People can be metal posts.
I look out the window everyday and wait for my mother to come home.
She never walks through the door.
This is my first memory.