

Compass

Mark Bennion

In the simmer and slow furnace
of morning, the ball sits on the ground
rotund as pomegranate, a misshapen

amphora ripe with early light. Spherical,
hardy, ready for heft and masked
with a faint glaze of brass. It is a friend

without lament, without need for inflating
or pretense. It circles your trudge
through sand; it ignites leading questions,

taking you to the taste of untamed roots
and the immersion of honey, then pares
down days to prayer shawl. Your group

snubs then pleads with its spindles,
their tips evanescent in the serpentine dark.
Beside crevices, field and angle

weld beneath the sterile north,
nudging you toward a longer day.
At noon the compass is unseen,

sometimes remembered, snug
in the necessary bundle of rods,
deep in dreams like the brewing

of an unnoticed boil. It will begin
to hurt you or me or the ear
entrenched against hint or granting.

Its magnetism awakens as famine
starts to thrum—the straight-line
boredom, weariness, gruel. And

before long, you see it in every stone-
face, in each yellow evening, it cools
on the horizon: *Remember smallness,*

the pebble stuck in the cistern's core.
Its rounding bulk festers
in detour, the arrows deaden

in a persisting storm. Test the sphere
and it will mimic or heal the asp's bite.
It is bronze plate and lodestone.

It's apocalyptic, each season,
regardless of the coming moon. It is
ghost needling substance. It's right outside

your tent, the quick shift between a hike
and wandering where the hills may cleave
together or drop you in the divide.