Susan E. Gunter

Desert Sestina

We need not hurry. There is time to stop our truck to look for tracks, ancient footprints that water and wind have nearly erased, covered by sand. Allosaurus? Stegosaurus? The red cliffs shimmered in the distance, silent.

On our trips we are often silent. This geologist lives in Precambrian time, millions of years ago. Sometimes I read indifference in his eyes that find tracks and only then widen. Like the sand, our words drift away in the hot wind.

I keep a ball of wool to wind as we travel, knowing that silence is the desert's rule, its vast sands stretching to the end of human time. We press for life but our tracks will not leave impressions in red rocks. When we fight, I see red and he vanishes, invisible like the wind. For decades we left random tracks across each other’s mind, yet we are silent and cannot speak of death, of the time we’ve spent to erect our house of sand.

We try, still try, to plane and sand our lives to fit them together, use red ink to correct our words but time works against us. We grow winded from the things we don’t say, silent to see that rider and pale horse track us, while we photograph the tracks and look for more of what the sand has covered. The dinosaurs are silent. They have nothing to tell us. The red sun sets early, and our path rewinds back to now, counting the brief time left us, hurrying to trace the red petroglyphs, the dinosaur bones sand and wind have polished, their silent messages timeless.