

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.