

Rattler

I saw him there beside the road,
Coiled as if waiting to strike, but still,
And with head unaccountably low.
As I approached,
I heard no buzz of rattles
And saw the blood that smeared
That diamond tapestry of gray and brown
On a body thick as my arm—
Torn where the wheel had passed.
There were thirteen rattles and a button.

Surrounding in the dust,
The marks he'd made—
Ridges of loops and whorls—
A massive thumbprint—
A graceful calligraphy
Of accidental beauty
Written in thwarted escape
Or reptile agony.

With fading strength
He'd pulled himself
Into the formal coil
To await the final enemy.

—John Sterling Harris