

## 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