

Hoof Prints

Your hoof prints are still in the sand.

I trace your tracks in the dust, each step round with a perfect pyramid at the base,

Like the wax seal of a signet ring confirming you were here.

Around the silver stock tank, topsy-turvy and every-which-way,

Hoof prints where you turn slow circles rummaging for the best bites of alfalfa - flowers first!

I follow your trail further into the dry, dusty pasture where, after I slip off your halter,

You bound away, kicking your heels high into the air, leaving a flurry of hoof prints in the dirt,

Each tiny triangle of your tracks a bold exclamation point proclaiming "FREEDOM!"

Your hoof prints guide me in a circle under the giant mesquite tree

Where you stretch out your neck to nibble the lacy, green leaves,

Gently maneuvering your soft, velvety lips around each needle-like thorn

Until you have stripped EVERY. SINGLE. SWEET BEAN POD from its branches;

Where you stand under its limbs, rocking to and fro, scratching your back, smiling with pleasure.

Your hooves have carved deeply worn paths toward the fence line where,

Catching the eye of the neighboring horse, you issue the challenge to race.

At some unspoken signal - off you go! - straining muscle and sinew to reach the finish line.

Then you suddenly slow, seeming to float, head held high, nostrils flared,

Flagging your tail like a paintbrush of blackest India ink spelling out VICTORY!!

And when all the races have been won,

You follow the familiar path to your favorite corner of the pasture,

Let out a long SIGHHHHH, and close your eyes for a well-deserved nap.

A swish of the tail, a flick of the ear are the only interruptions to your contented slumber.

I follow your prints in meandering, lackadaisical circles

Where you blow puffs of air into the powdery earth

Trying to uncover some tasty tidbit long hidden in the dust,

Or nip at tender blades of grass peeking through the soil after a rare summer rain.

Your hoof prints finally congregate in the well-loved spot

Where early each morning you eagerly wait for me.

You nicker a greeting and follow me as we walk to fetch your hay,

You and I together, our tracks weaving a patchwork pattern in the sand.

Only one trail remains.

I follow your tracks out the pasture gate, my heart heavy knowing that this path has no return.

Each hoof print signals the finality of your departure.

The sun shone hot that day as you stood silhouetted against the late afternoon haze,

Dappled golden coat in a halo of pale yellow light,

Soft ebony mane, deep brown eyes looking into the distance as we said goodbye.

Your tracks are fading now.

Time will pass, the desert winds will blow, and the monsoon rains will come.

But you are stamped upon my heart, and your hoof prints will forever be in this sand.