

# Sisyphus' Unnamed Wife Vacuums Deserts for Minimum Wage

by Alison Hurwitz

In the story no one knows, she gets up before it's light, makes instant oatmeal, fills her flask of water, unplugs and lugs her vacuum, charged and ready to inhale. The car won't start (it has been stalled a thousand years) and so she rides the bus to her department

of the desert, walks to where she works, Dustbuster bumping every hardened rut. Begins. Drenched in sweat within five minutes, she thinks of Sisyphus, his gritted teeth and silicated tongue, straining slowly up the rise. He's held his rock so long, she thinks he has forgotten

her own name. For centuries, she's been too tired to remind him, too busy sucking and disgorging dunes to shape the words. Heat rises, breaking waded mirages on her skin, the vacuum handle slipping, sweaty in her palm.

She squints through shimmer almost glass, almost mirror. If she let herself reflect, maybe she'd be another woman, one who could unbind her hair and snake it free. What if she could excavate until she found a buried voice, one loud enough to call herself by name?

Sand spreads out to meet the heat-bleached sky. Her filter's clogged again. Sand in every swallow. Far off, her husband's figure goes on heaving up a hill. He won't look up, see she's also trudging, also sinking, flayed by desert light. She lets the hours drift, their

dessicated bones. She could refuse to work, of course. But rent and food, and one day, fix the fricking car. The grit of crystals stings her skin. Tonight, the rock will sit there silent at the table, will roll with them to bed. Undressed, the wife of Sisyphus looks in the mirror,

sees a sand-filled hourglass. Particles cascade and shine around her feet, each one etched a perfect shape, a tremor in the breath, a constellated wish. Later, she will feel her husband shift to stroke her thigh, the burl of callus in his touch. In the dark, he'll whisper how he almost

lost his rock and panicked, how it slipped away, went rolling, how he had to run to grasp it back, scraped his hands until bright bits of pyrite infiltrated blood like stars. She wishes. More than she could ever count, or name.