The First Footprints

Every summer, Gabriel went down early to mark his family's spot with the beach umbrella. That morning he was the first one down the boardwalk. From the top he saw the strip of smooth sand and quickened his pace.

Near the water he found dog prints without anyone's footprints beside them. He followed them around a bend. They looped back on themselves, crossed some birds' tracks, and vanished where the foam began.

When he reached his usual spot, he planted the umbrella. He sat down for a few minutes and looked back. His own footprints made a straight line from the boardwalk.

His daughter arrived with their mate and asked if he'd walked to the jetty. Gabriel left the umbrella where it was and stood up. She set the thermos down on the sand and followed him along the strip the first wave had just washed over.