Footprints in Cement

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Abstract

The early morning sun hurled bright golden spears of light through the branches of the heavy oak, beneath which Joel knelt on the brown grass still wet and cold with dew. He studied the map sketched on a scrap of brown paper he held in his hand, glanced at the tree trunk, and nodded at the eggshaped stone half sunken in the earth before him...
The early morning sun hurled bright golden spears of light through the branches of the heavy oak, beneath which Joel knelt on the brown grass still wet and cold with dew. He studied the map sketched on a scrap of brown paper he held in his hand, glanced at the tree trunk, and nodded at the egg-shaped stone half sunken in the earth before him. Then he set down the empty Campbell's Soup can he held in his other hand, rose, grabbed his spade from the damp grass, and pounded at the ground. Stamping on the spade and then pulling up on it with all his eight-year-old might, he broke the dry sod and pushed it to the side. Then he leaned onto the spade again. The ground was softer, the digging easier, as he progressed.

He was nearly a foot into the earth before he sighted the first crawler. He pulled a snow mitten from his hip pocket, slipped it on, and, making a face, picked up the brown glistening worm and dropped it into the damp dirt of the soup can. His next spadeful was alive with worms. He sifted through it, pulling the moist worms out one after the other, at least a dozen, grabbing them now in eagerness. When he leaned onto the spade again, he heard something crack beneath it. He threw the dirt aside and knelt over the hole. Gleaming in the sunlight, the ends of a small smashed rib cage stuck up like the broken spars of a sunken ship.

An acorn dropped behind him. He leaped to his feet. He grabbed the soup can, ran four or five steps, stopped, ran back and grabbed the spade, and then dashed across the Collier's back lawn, raced under the willows of his own back lawn, around the side of his house, up the stoop without seeming to touch a single step, and into the kitchen.

He leaned back against the screen door, panting. His mother looked at him from the kitchen table, where she sat in a pale blue terrycloth bathrobe, her head tilted to the side,
running both hands through her long limp red hair to comb out the tangles. A cup of black coffee smoked at her elbow.

“You look like you seen a ghost,” she said, still combing her hair with her fingers. She frowned. “What you want to bring that spade in here for?”

Joel tried to control his panting. “I hate him,” he said.

She lifted the coffee cup to her lips. “What he do now?”

“It was a dirty trick,” Joel said. He remembered last night when, about ten minutes after the phone call, his brother Billy stamped into their room and kicked off both shoes. “He said I had to dig the worms,” Joel told his mother. He could still see Billy glaring at him, snatching a pen from the dresser, and viciously ripping a paper bag in two. Then his brother sprawled on the bare floor and started sketching the map, his pen clawing against the boards. Finished, Billy jumped up and threw the map at Joel and said, “You’re going with me tomorrow. Make sure you do the digging before I get up. If you got to come along, you can do some of the work. X marks the spot.”

His mother blew into her coffee. “So what’s the problem? Did you dig ’em? You got ’em in that can?”

Joel nodded. “He’ll have to let me go with him now.”

“Don’t you worry none about that,” she said. Blowing into her coffee, she got up and padded to Joel. She took a sip of coffee and patted him on the shoulder. “You take that spade and them worms outside and then get Billy up. I’ll get dressed and start breakfast.”

Joel waited on the stoop until she disappeared; then he ducked back inside with the worms and tapped up the stairs to his room. Beneath the old scarred headboard on which was rudely carved “Rest in Peace,” his thirteen-year-old brother Billy lay facing the wall, mumbling and murmuring. Even asleep, he seemed not to be resting but plotting, scheming. When Joel slammed the door, Billy only wrapped a pillow around his head and tugged at the sheet, moaning muffled obscenities. Joel opened and slammed the door again.

Billy slowly peeled the pillow from his head. Blinking in the bright sunlight, he propped his head on a hand and glared at Joel. “What the hell you making all that racket for? A corpse couldn’t sleep in the same room with you.”
“It’s time,” Joel said. “We’re going, aren’t we? It was a deal.” He held out the soup can. “See? I kept my part of it. Now you got to keep yours.”

Billy fluffed his pillow, then dropped his head down onto it. Looking at the dusty ceiling, he said firmly, “I do as I please.”

Joel looked once more at Billy, who was lying open-eyed; then he set the can on the dresser and stepped to the window that overlooked the back lawn. The sun hung gold in the cloudless, heavy autumn sky. Not a leaf stirred in the drooping willow trees. A scolding squirrel raced across the nearly brown grass and scurried up one of the trunks in dizzying spirals. From the tops of the willows, birds sang low solemn tunes.

Joel craned his neck and pushed his nose to the screen, looking into the robin’s nest built in the rain gutter. The robin, for which he had not yet found a name that pleased him, was not there. But looking down again, Joel saw the bird, or one very like it, hopping across the dry grass. The robin stopped, cocked its head, hopped a bit farther, cocked its head again, and then stabbed at the hard ground. As soon as the robin raised its head, a worm dangling from its beak, a black blur sailed out from behind a willow, covering the robin. Joel glanced again at the empty nest in the rain gutter, and quickly turned away from the window.

Billy was now sitting on the side of the bed, muttering. He gave Joel a threatening look. “You found them worms like I told you?”

Nodding, Joel pointed to the can on the dresser. “Want to see ’em?”

A grin grew on Billy’s face. “Find anything else?”

Joel looked away to the window.

“That’s funny,” Billy said. “I kind of thought you might. Me and Willie Kendall buried a cat there last summer. Buried it alive.” He scratched with both hands at his wiry auburn hair. “What we done, we dug a hole four, five feet deep. Then we threw a fish down it and hid behind a tree and waited. Pretty soon this straggly stray comes along and dives after that fish. Me and Willie grabbed our shovels and started throwing the dirt back in. After we had the hole all filled in, we could still hear that cat scratching away. We thought sure he’d dig
his way back out. We could hear him scratching and clawing probably not a foot under the ground. Then all of a sudden he stopped." Billy got to his feet and grabbed his jeans that lay in a heap on the floor. He nodded at the can. "I bet them are good fat worms."

Joel grabbed the can and swung open the door. "It was a dirty trick," he said, and slammed the door behind him.

While his mother hummed over the eggs she was frying, Joel sat at the table, staring at the pattern of faded daisies on his plate. "Can we get a dog?" he asked.

She turned from the stove and pushed a strand of oily red hair out of her eyes. "What you want a dog for? I thought you was scared of 'em."

"A dog'd keep that cat away," the boy said.

She turned back to the stove and flipped over a sizzling egg. "Don't know why you want to bother that cat. Poor thing's damn near crippled already from Billy's slingshot."

Billy came pounding into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes with clenched fists. "What's the big rush?" he asked.

His mother told him to just sit down.

When he finished eating, Billy dropped his fork to his plate and sneered at Joel. "I ain't going with that poke-along," he told his mother. "It takes him 'bout an hour to walk a block. He's always stopping to pick dandelions and step on acorns."

"You got to let me go," Joel said. "I dug the worms. And I borrowed a fishing rod. And I got yours out of the garage."

"I do as I please," Billy said.

Their mother folded her hands on the table and eyed Billy. "You think you're a pretty big man, don't you? Oh, you're tough, all right. Mrs. Casper told me just how tough you are, last night. A real big man," she said, and she gave a long whistle.

Billy frowned, scratching at his forehead.

She turned to Joel, who was picking at his food. "You know how tough your brother is? He's so tough, he can force a kid with asthma to smoke a foot-long cigar. A kid that hardly has enough breath to walk across the street without passing out. Ain't he a tough one?"

"It wasn't no foot-long stogy," said Billy. "Wasn't no bigger than a thumb."
"That ain't the point. The point is, you're gonna stay out of trouble today. That's why you're taking Joel. I got your sack lunches ready, so you got no excuse to show your face back here before supper. And if I hear of you getting in any trouble today—well, you'll just find out how tough you are."

"It ain't no use fishing in that river," Billy said. "Nobody's seen a fish there in years."

"Pooh," she said. "Mrs. Casper told me Wayne caught one there just day before yesterday. That's where I got the idea." She frowned at Billy from head to toe. "'Course, if you ain't the fisherman Casper is . . ."

"All right," said Billy, throwing back his chair and leaping to his feet. "Let's go, Poke-Along."

Joel slipped off his chair and took the sack lunch his mother held out to him. When she handed Billy his lunch, she grabbed him by the forearm. "Billy, I don't ever want to hear of you picking on that Wayne Casper again. It's bad enough he can hardly breathe. But then his mom with cancer, too. They say she ain't got more'n a couple months to live." She brushed the hair out of her eyes, smiled, and slapped Billy on the seat of the pants. "Now, you go catch me a fish. That Casper kid only caught a little four-pounder. I'm expecting an eight-pounder out of you."

Joel followed Billy out the flimsy screen door. Blinding sunlight bounced off the cement stoop. Billy picked up the soup can and gave the order, "Forward march." They slung their fishing rods over their shoulders and started across the dying grass to the street. When they reached the curb, Joel stopped under the shade of an acorn-shedding oak, looking down into the gutter. There, in the cement of the newly laid gutter, were two footprints, the right one much larger than the left. Joel wanted to take off his left shoe and sock to see if his foot still fit the print, but he saw that Billy was already far up ahead of him and hurried to catch up.

The boys followed the cracked sidewalk, shaded by a row of old thick oaks, leading to the main street. The river skirted the other side of town, and in order to reach the old bridge from which, every other month, a fish was rumored to have been caught, they would have to go four blocks up to the main street, follow the main street to the edge of town, and then tramp along a gravel road for about a hundred yards. As Joel
skipped along behind Billy, trying to keep up with his brother's long strides, he remembered how those footprints first got there.

On his way to the swimming pool a few months before, he had accidentally stepped down into the wet cement. When he came home and secretly inspected the damage, he was surprised to find not one, but two footprints in the cement, the right one, as he could tell by the long narrow toes, belonging to Billy. The next day rumors (started by Billy) swept among Joel's companions that a hideous deformed monster which lurked about Joel's house had jumped into the cement. Billy had laughed for days.

"Hurry up, Poke-Along," said Billy. "I never seen anybody walk as slow as you."

Joel ran to catch up and pattered along at Billy's side, taking two steps to each one of his brother's. After a time he asked Billy, "Is Mrs. Casper really gonna die?"

"Who?" said Billy.

"Mrs. Casper. Mom says she's got cancer. Will she really die?"

"I s'pose," said Billy, and he wiped some sweat from his brow with the back of his hand.

"I'm not gonna die," Joel said.

Billy stared at him. "Not even when you're a hundred?"

Joel promptly shook his head.

"How 'bout two hundred?" asked Billy. "Be wrinkled up like a prune and not able to move enough to pick your nose. You gonna die then?"

Again Joel shook his head.

Billy shrugged. "Maybe not," he said, the corners of his mouth upturned. He mopped his brow with his shirtsleeve. "I don't see why we got to go fishing on a hotter'n hell day like this. Prob'ly both die of the heat." He chuckled. "I forgot, you ain't gonna die, are you?"

Joel shivered, remembering the black Angora sailing through the air, pouncing full onto his robin. "Not unless somebody kills me," he said. "The Collier's cat killed a robin this morning."

Billy said cats kill birds all the time.
The stores were just opening when they reached the main street. Lowering his fishing rod, Billy walked under the canopies. Joel at his heels, for protection from the glaring sun. Joel looked into each store window they passed. Mr. Burns, the grocer, was putting up a sign—vinegar on sale. The barber, Mr. Gouge, snapped on a switch, and his red-and-white pole began to revolve. The climbing red-and-white spirals reminded Joel of a squirrel scurrying up a tree.

Turning away at last and looking up ahead where Billy should have been, Joel froze. There was not a trace of his brother. He looked up and down the empty sidewalk. His head spun and his feet were preparing to make a mad dash, when suddenly Billy's head peeped around the corner, two stores down. Joel's heart was still hammering when Billy came back and, setting down his lunch, patted him on the shoulder. “Take it easy,” Billy said. “Geeze. You're white as a snowdrift.” He patted Joel on the shoulder again. “I was just teaching you a lesson. Nothing but a trick. Come on, now. But make sure you stay right at my side.”

Joel tried his best to keep up with Billy, as they passed by the rest of the stores and, at length, again reached the shade of a row of oaks. In front of Mrs. Winkle's Haven for the Golden Agers, near the edge of town, a heap of acorns lay treacherously scattered across the sidewalk. Billy tramped over them, but Joel stopped to stamp on them one by one, lost his footing and fell buttward to the sidewalk, one of his loosely tied tennis shoes flying off his foot. Billy turned around and laughed.

“That's what you get,” he said, retracing his steps and then standing beside Joel, his hands on his hips. “You're just lucky you didn't bust that rod,” he said, nudging it with his toe.

Joel brushed off an acorn that stuck to his elbow and got up and retrieved his shoe. When he was forming the first big loop with his shoestring, a voice called out, “Going fishing?”

They both looked up. An old man with at least three chins and a weathered face the color of crisp leaves sat on the waist-high ledge of the long porch of Mrs. Winkle's Haven for the Golden Agers, dangling his stubby legs.
“We sure as hell ain’t going ice-skating, gramps,” Billy called back.

The old man pushed back his oversized engineer’s cap and turned his eyes to Joel. “Gonna catch a whopper, little fellow?”

Joel was still having trouble with his bow.

“He’ll be lucky if the fish don’t catch him,” said Billy, leaning his rod against a tree. He gathered up a handful of acorns, scanned the branches overhead, and fired one at a peeking squirrel. “Hurry up, Poke-Along.”

Joel got up and they moved on, the old man calling “Good luck,” after them, Joel waving back. They turned onto the dusty gravel road and as they tramped onward Billy, juggling his gear, fired his acorns at anything that moved, narrowly missing two sparrows and a mangy cat. At the Wallace’s farm, he stopped, eyeing the chickens cackling and ruffling on the lawn. Before Joel knew what he was up to, Billy set down his lunch and the soup can and shot off in full attack across the lawn, swinging his fishing rod in front of him, swishing it over the tall grass. Feathers rose and fell in clouds like snow, leaving drifts on each side of Billy’s path, as the chickens fled squawking and screeching and fluttering like flags in a storm. Billy hounded them, whooping, all the way around the house, until Mrs. Wallace stuck her bandannaed head out of an upstairs window and her screaming rose above the din of the chickens and Billy both. Billy stood with folded arms until she disappeared, then he hurled an acorn through the open window and started back toward Joel, who was still waiting on the road.

Breathing hard, Billy mopped his brow with his shirtsleeve. “One more time around the house and I think I would’ve got one,” he said. “They were starting to tire a little.” He puffed three or four times. “Lot better chance of catching a chicken than snagging a fish in that river.” He looked up at the window. “If it wasn’t for old Prune-Face.” He picked up his lunch and the soup can. “Come on. Almost there now.”

From the crown of the hill on which they stood, Joel could see the bridge below them, the river slithering out of a wall of willows, under the bridge, and back into a wall of willows. Though still puffing, Billy yelled “Charge,” and dashed down
the hill. Joel galloped behind in his dust, slowly gaining ground while Billy reached into his pocket for another acorn and fired it at a frog that hopped across the road just before the bridge, sending it fleeing to the cool water.

The short old bridge had a wooden bed that creaked under their feet. Each rusty steel side resembled a section of fence, with three slats dented and sagging from boys' climbing up to the flat top rail, which was about four feet high. Joel dropped against the side of the bridge, winded, his legs weary, his arm stiff from carrying the fishing rod. Billy leaned his fishing rod against the other side and set down his lunch. Then he picked open the lid of the soup can and stirred the dirt inside with his finger. "Sure got some nice fat ones," he said. "They ought to be. Prob'ly ate that whole cat between 'em.

"Here's a frisky one," Billy said, dangling a lively crawler that seemed to be trying to tie itself into a knot. He set the can down at Joel's side and held his fishing rod before Joel's eyes. "Watch, now." Billy threaded the big worm on his hook expertly, leaving a loop and tip to wriggle. A bubble of muddy ooze, where the barb peeked from the body of the worm, did not escape Joel's attention. With a mocking grin, Billy nodded at the can. "Now, let's see you bait yours."

Joel did not look at the can. "I don't think I can," he said. "You do it for me."

"Not me," Billy said. "You wanted to come, you bait it." With his foot, he nudged the can closer to Joel. "Dig in," he said.

Joel reached into his back pocket and pulled out his snow mitten. Before he could slip it on, Billy snatched it from his hand. "What the hell's this?" Billy said, holding it between two fingers and scowling at it. "I never seen such a sissy." He flipped the mitten over Joel's head, off the side of the bridge.

Joel turned and watched the mitten float, sinking, under the bridge. "What you do that for?"

"If you fish with me, you're gonna bait your hook right," Billy said. "Not that it'd make much difference whether you use any bait or not. Never catch a fish in this river anyway," He spit over the railing. "Know why there ain't no fish in this river?"

Joel shook his head.
Billy crouched beside Joel, looking down at the murmuring water. "Willie Kendall's grandpa told me about it. He says this river was full of fish when he was a little kid." A trickle of sweat ran down Billy's nose and splatted onto the bridge. "Then one time in the winter a little girl got lost out here. Her parents went out looking for her with a lantern. The snow was still falling hard, but they could make out her footprints by holding that lantern just a few inches from the ground."

Billy squinted his eyes, as if tracking those faint footmarks through the black, icy, snow-heavy night. "The footprints circled around, led down the bank, and right out to the middle of the river. Then they stopped. No more footprints. Funny thing was, the ice hadn't broke. So she couldn't've fell in. Just vanished." Billy ran a hand through his wiry hair. "The little girl's mom says she must've jumped right up to Heaven. But Willie Kendall's grandpa says it ain't so. He says that little girl must've been a witch or a demon or something. He says the day after she vanished, the ice turned black." Billy spit into the river again. "Ever since then, there ain't been more'n two or three fish in this river at a time."

Billy sprang up and crossed to the other side and looked down over the rail. Joel listened to the river murmuring stealthily below. Then Billy turned and said, "Ain't you baited that hook yet? I ain't fishing till you bait that hook."

Joel glanced warily at the soup can. "I will," he said. "Just let me rest first."

"And if you pull out another mitten, it'll join the other one," Billy said. "If you can't do it right, you got no business tagging along." After glaring at Joel, Billy turned, examined the side of the bridge, and looked down at the river. Then he climbed up the dented slats and sat straddling the rusty top rail, and he reached down and grabbed his fishing rod. Slowly he stood up on the rail, which was about four inches wide, and he edged forward, using the rod as a balancing pole. When he reached the end, he turned and shuffled back. Then he started hopping on one foot across the rail. "Hey, Joel, look," he said. "I bet you can't do this." He turned his head toward Joel while in the air, landed with only his toes on the rail, said, "Whoa whoa whoa whoa," and fell sideways off the bridge.
The next thing Joel heard was a weak splash from below. He rose, laughing at the trick; Billy was, he knew, a pretty fair swimmer. He crossed to the other side of the bridge and peered down between the slats at the water, waiting for Billy to surface. With the slight breeze here, the water purled cool and clear in the shade of the willows, lazily splitting around the scattered stones and combing out the circular undulations directly below. But there was not a sign of Billy, not even of his fishing rod.

Puzzled, Joel went around the side of the bridge, stumbled down the steep bank, and looked up and down for Billy. He was nowhere in sight. Joel crawled back up the bank and stood under a willow a moment, waiting for Billy to peep his head around a bush or a tree, or to pop up from under the bridge, or from wherever he was hiding. Joel laughed again, remembering Billy's wide eyes and startled face when he fell off the side. It was the best trick Billy had ever pulled.

Joel checked the trunk of the tree for bugs, then he sat down and leaned his head back against the rough bark and closed his eyes. The birds' soft repetitious songs, the leaves crackling above him, the crickets chirruping in chorus like the swinging of a rusty gate in the wind, the rummaging squirrels scratching up and down their tree trunks, the moaning of the frogs and their occasional plopping into the water formed a drowsy harmony that soothed at the same time that it reminded him of his fatigue. The pungent green smell of the shaded undergrowth covered him like a cool blanket. He kept his eyes shut tightly, feeling that he was floating in sounds and smells.

When a bird-dropping splattered onto his nose, he opened his eyes with a start and wiped his nose on his shirtsleeve. Looking up through the branches, he saw that the sun was almost directly overhead. He looked out at the river, and it murmured along as clearly and steadily as before.

Joel brushed off the seat of his jeans and stumbled up to the road, onto the bridge. Billy's sack lunch still sat beside the edge where he had left it. Joel turned his eyes away from it at once. He kicked the soup can off the edge of the bridge and watched as it bobbed and weaved, flipped onto its side, and slowly sank. Then he squatted beside his own sack lunch and
opened it and took out a peanut butter sandwich wrapped in wax paper. Shucking the paper and peeling back a corner of the bread, he saw that his mother had put butter on the sandwich. He shook his head, tore up the sandwich, and scattered the crumbs over the wooden bed of the bridge for birds. Then he shouldered his fishing rod and started back down the dusty road.

As he walked, he enacted Billy's fall, holding his fishing rod like a balancing pole, tottering, jumping up into the air and clapping his hands when he landed. At the Wallace's farm, he stopped, kicking at the dusty road, and watched the chickens cackling and ruffling on the lawn. One fluttered away at the sight of him. A red bandanna frowned down at him from the upstairs window. He turned his head away. Stepping down into the road ditch, he plucked a withered dandelion, blew the seeds, and watched them fall, scattering, like motes of weary dust to the ground. Then he threw an imaginary acorn at the red bandanna and tramped on in silence.

When he reached Mrs. Winkle's Haven for the Golden Agers, the triple-chinned old man was still sitting on the porch ledge, his legs dangling, staring up into the trees.

He pushed back his big engineer's cap and spit a jet of tobacco between his gapped front teeth. "Any luck?" he asked.

Joel looked down at the scattered acorns and shook his head.

"Where's the other one?"

Joel picked up an acorn, searched the branches overhead for some time, and at last fired it into the leaves. Then he faced the old man. "He drownded."

The old man lifted the cap from his head, revealing a knitted brow, and smoothed his bald crown with the other hand. Then a glint came into his eyes and he settled the cap back onto his head and smiled. "Drownded, did he? How'd he manage that?"

Joel picked up another acorn. "Fell off the bridge." He threw blindly into the trees again. "Fell off the bridge and drownded."

The old man laughed in snorts and wheezes, and then, apparently swallowing tobacco, he hacked repeatedly,
pounding on his flabby chest. "You better hightail it home and tell your ma," he said, when able.

Joel dropped an acorn from his hand and stared up at the old man, who was looking into the trees again.

"One time I went fishing with my brother," the old man said. "He got such a whopper on his line, he fought and fought and kept losing ground. I seen it was a losing battle and I run to help him, but it was too late. That fish dragged him right into the river, and we never seen a trace of neither him nor the fish again."

With wide eyes, Joel waited for the old man to go on, but he merely stared up into the trees. "Never?" Joel asked at last.

"I run home and told my ma," said the old man. "Nearly done her in. He was always the favorite." The old man looked back at Joel and stroked all three of his chins. "Guess that's what you better do, little fellow."

Joel turned and, without so much as a nod to the old man, he started jogging home. As he ran, his feet began moving faster and faster, as if under their own power. They led him by the shortest route homeward—through lawns, over flowers—slapping on and on, faster and faster, as if taking him down a steep hill.

Cutting through Mrs. Casper's back lawn, Joel tripped over the edge of her flower bed and went sailing through the air, falling flat on his belly. He got up on his knees and tried to breathe, but he had no wind. He felt his lungs grinding to get him air. He did not move, he just stared at the uprooted daisies in front of him until his breath came freely. Then he climbed to his feet and walked slowly the rest of the way home.

When he reached the gutter at the edge of his lawn, he stopped and looked down at Billy's footprint. The sun, piercing at his back, threw his small shadow over both footprints. The Collier's black Angora hesitated toward him from the shade of his house and rubbed against his leg, but he stood firm as marble. From the tops of the willows off in front of him, birds sang low solemn tunes. He looked down at Billy's footprint, and it seemed as empty and lonely to him as a birdless nest.

He heard an acorn drop beside him, bounce twice, and roll to a stop on the cement. He felt sure that when he looked
up he would see Billy's fishing rod leaning against the stoop and, beside it, a pair of blue jeans soaking up sun on the steps. A shower of acorns would skitter past his feet and Billy's derisive laughter would ring from behind a willow trunk. Still he did not move, but only turned his eyes to the other footprint, his own.

As Billy's laughter rose, echoed off the house, and roared through his mind, he still stared unwavering and breathless at his footprint. And he stared still, mourning his own loss, even when an acorn stung his temple and sent a lone tear coursing down his cheek.

Give Me a Sign

by

Betty Lartius

Science & Humanities 4

I who never ask for signs
beg for a sign
I will accept mud tracks across
my kitchen floor
as omen
that I am not frozen forever in February.

And I who never sing hymns
will sing grateful hymns on my knees
as I scrub mud omens of grasslife
under deep snows.

Artwork

by

Ann Bishop