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Joan Digby

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Marks on the Surface

by Joan Digby

Sometimes players fail to sweep the court
and we arrive to find a palimpsest
of scrapes and dusty footprints
that tell the story of games lost and won.

This furious calligraphy is nothing like
the narrow line of deer tracks
leading from the forest to the water's edge.

In tennis tracks we read a war of conquest
fought in skirmishes along the baseline and the net.

Strategic battle plans litter the court now:
sole marks—deep grooves of angry tread—
that double back in circles for the kill.

Along the alleys are the telltale spots
where shots hit cruelly to the outer edge
drew opponents off their balanced stance
and foiled their hopes of victory.

Seen in late summer's dappled light,
the court's a universe of comet tails and stars,
where balls, like spent suns exploded,
leave shadows of their departed ghosts.

Putting this ruined world to rest,
we take the brooms and sweep concentric circles
softly parallel like some Japanese sand garden
but empty of all landscape rocks,
a *tabula rasa* without imagery or thought
perfect for meditation on the game to come.

