

Mud

When I muttered the word I'd learned at school, my mom said, "Your name's mud, mister" & washed my mouth out with soap. On my tongue the cuss did taste like mud:

Shit. Shit. Shit. Sunday, the boy who taught me was hauled to church by his mother. The old ladies whispered how his dad had dragged the family name through the mud.

My mom says a name means something, says the Christian meaning of my name is *Strong in Victory*, but the baby names book says *bill covered in broomweed*. Only mud

seeped up no matter how deep I dug in our backyard—never the unnamed bones of another time, never those rumored diamonds. Deep under my fingernails: mud.

Pastor once said if we conquer our bodies God will give us a new name carved into a clean white stone. The boy wrestled me in my Sunday clothes into the mud

but never thought to lay a hand in the hollow of my hip. I'd have thrown the fight, climbed the ladder to heaven or hell, taken my true name. Come summer, dried mud

caked my legs after my baptism in the lake. "You know," my mom said, "we almost called you..." She held the name like an unborn child, picking absently at the mud.