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## Mud

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## Mud

Frank R. Motley III

My parents always told me to stay away  
from the mud and the snow.

“The mud will slow you down,”  
father said, and “stick to your clothes.”  
“Snow is fleeting,” my mother  
told me sternly, “you’ll spend your life  
chasing it.”

“The sun is all you need  
to be happy,” my brother once said,  
but I was not. There  
was a need to fill my curiosity.  
I wanted to see what hid  
in the mud and the snow.

I went to the snow first. The large  
blankets were so much easier to find.  
Standing in the snow, I took a breath,  
closed my eyes, and thought,  
*This is what it means to be happy.*  
When I opened my eyes,  
the snow was gone, so I had to search again.

The snow, which was once new  
and invigorating, got old. The chase to find  
new mounds and piles left me feeling hollow,  
never as happy as the first time.  
Everytime the snow would leave, I would cry.  
So I turned my search for the mud, as it  
was more stagnant and longer lasting than the snow.

I found a forest that had mud hidden  
in the ground. I took a shoe off and dipped  
my toe in the mud.

It was soft and cooling, and all my  
thoughts drifted away.  
“This is what it means to be happy,”  
I said, but I was not aware of the snake  
in the mud as it approached and bit me.

My mother did not tell me of the snakes  
that hide in the mud, but that did not deter me.  
The mud was soft and cooling against my skin.  
It slowed my thoughts, and numbed my limbs.  
In exchange, I let the snakes bite me  
over and over and over.  
I would spend hours in the mud  
and let my limbs be wrecked by the snakes,  
just so I could spend more time  
in the mud.

I didn't need food in the mud;  
I didn't need friends in the mud—  
I just needed the mud. Until,  
one day my father pulled me from the mud  
and told me, “I told you not to play in the mud,”  
I was furious when he took me away and sent  
me to a room.

The longer I was in the room, the more mud dried off my  
clothes.

When there were just stains on my clothes and body,  
I could see the marks—  
I could see the damage of the snakes,  
and I cried. “Father!” I yelled from my room,  
“If only you told me what lied in wait of the mud  
I would not have gone!”

When I only had a few stains on my clothes,  
I tried the door to the room and found it was un-  
locked.

And so, I ventured outside, with a plan to stay away  
from the hollow happiness of the snow  
and the painful bites of the mud.

As I walked away from the room  
On a path that led me far from  
the snow and the mud,  
I thought  
*This is what it means to be happy.*