

### CNA CLINICALS DAY #3

It was mud.

All mud. His language lost in pain  
and loose teeth, and it may have been  
important, may have been a plea

for a priest, a cigar, or forgiveness for  
stealing his sister's lunchbox, his brother's  
wife, and do you think we fill in  
other people's cracks to heal our own?

Some days, I drag soap over broken bodies  
to convince myself that I am clean.

My instructor never turns their groans into stories.

She pokes a straw through his chapped lips  
to shut him up, and has me hold his wrist  
to feel how blood leaves the extremities  
when the heart begins to scream, feel how

his pulse shakes like a wet, caged bird.

He jolts.

*He'll squirm less when he's dead*  
my instructor jokes, and laughs  
when my hands jump to cover his ears  
betraying my need to protect this patient

from her sharp truth, her rough decree  
that to the world, he is already unhearing  
unseeing, unformed, already dispersed

beyond our reach, beyond revision  
the way fire burns wood into ash  
the way that ash and water  
will forever be mud.