The Book of Dirt

by

Nicole Santalucia
## Contents

You Have Now Begun Reading *The Book of Dirt* 11  
Notes from the Commonwealth 13  
Keystone Ode with Jane Doe in It 14  
Keystone Ode with Moving Violation in It 16  
*from* The Book of Dirt 17  
Keystone Ode with Lesbian Car in It 18  
Red State 19  
Notes from the Commonwealth 20  
Keystone Ode with Overgrown Garden and Invasive Species in It 21  
Keystone Ode with Homophobia and Ground Beef in It 22  
Bitchtown, Pennsylvania 23  
Notes from the Commonwealth 24  
Red State 25  
*from* The Book of Dirt 26  
*from* The Book of Dirt 27  
*from* The Book of Dirt 28  
Keystone Ode with Assault Rifle and Grocery List in It 29  
Notes from the Commonwealth 30  
Keystone Ode with Hot Sauce and Motor Oil in It 31  
Bitchtown, Pennsylvania 32  
Keystone Ode with Marianne Moore in It 33  
*from* The Book of Dirt 34  
Keystone Ode with *The House of Mirth* in It 35  
Notes from the Commonwealth 36  
Red State 37  
Keystone Ode with Founding Father in It 39
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Ode with Local Journalism and the Associated Press in It</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red State</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Ode with Visiting Hours in It</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red State</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Ode without Jaywalking in It</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Ode to My Wife after Reading Anne Bradstreet at a One-Hundred-and-Three-Year-Old Farmhouse</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Ode with Litter and Exhaust in It</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red State</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Commonwealth</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from The Book of Dirt</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from The Book of Dirt 64
Keystone Ode with Prison Dinner in It 66
Notes from the Commonwealth 67
Keystone Ode with Despair and an Unmentioned Avocado in It 68
from The Book of Dirt 69
Keystone Ode with Environmental Contaminants 70
Red State 72
Keystone Ode with #MeToo in It 73
Notes from the Commonwealth 74
Keystone Ode with Queer Skin 75
Keystone Ode with Businessmen in It 76
Notes from the Commonwealth 77
On First Having Read The Book of Dirt 78
If I’m a wife and my wife is a wife
who vacuums the house and cleans the dishes
which wife dusts and which one does laundry
who cleans the dirt off of the dirt
which one of us sucks dirt and which one spits out dirt
which one of us doesn’t fit into the word wife

if wife is carved into the dirt whose left breast
falls off and whose right eye is dug out
if the wind is prayer if dirt is 50% lesbian

and 50% void if it never rains how do mosquitoes
suck the gay out if we live below ground
in our dirt house do we get squatters’ rights

can we sue the land if the land is our witness if
we inhale the earth if our bodies are silent
tell us what we own if the law of the dirt

is dirt if wives travel west of the dirt
what customary law influences property rights
if individual grains of sediment never move

if the force of gravity pulls us deeper into the dirt
if there’s no gust of wind or water or ice
our marriage will never sculpt itself into a mountain

if the valley of dead-women-in-the-dirt has been
our destination this whole time all we had to do
was walk barefoot in our backyard
Bitchtown, Pennsylvania

Some bitch like me sets the fire, cranks the heat, burns the toast, swallows the flare.

The flowerpots and front lawns blaze one little fire at a time. Flames sprout from the gardens on Hanover Street. Yellow fires and red fires and motherfuckers drive trucks that are on fire. The chicken hut, gas station, post office, and the neighbors: all on fire.

When the train passes through this neighborhood of flames a gust of wind knocks over the bitch who lit the first match. Her fire burns on fear. Pretty soon the black sky swirls in flames and the clouds shrivel up, dry out, and drop like dog shit to the sides of the streets and highways where heroin addicts are left for dead, where farmers grow lettuce and trade sheep for shoelaces and guns, where starving cows are auctioned and eaten alive, and the people confuse women for beef and love for needles.
You watch the news to find out that lesbians don’t wash away after drinking dirt, that the dirt didn’t absorb all the rain last week, that there’s everything to name and no voice to repair the rainbow, that the history of queer was murdered in the Michaux State Forest. I heard about the woman who ran from the echo of hate—one shot at a time. I mean, I went to the grocery store, bought mushrooms covered in dirt, rinsed their white heads, poured olive oil on them, the news in the background. There’s a storm coming, a flood warning, maybe a murderer on the loose. I cooked and swallowed dirt. Eleven miles away a tree named Rebecca sank into the land.

I am on the other side of the rainbow in the dirt that doesn’t make the news: lesbians sprout like wild strawberries; their root systems tangle with murder. In Pennsylvania, crushed bones cut into the land, and daughters collapse before they are auctioned off every Sunday morning. This ritual is for sale in the church parking lot where blessings smell like gunfire, and fingers break the sound barrier as they dig for life.

The dirt under the dead woman’s fingernails: sacred. The yeast in her throat: scooped out, melted down, and served as communion.
Keystone Ode with Local Journalism and the Associated Press in It

After reading The Patriot Newspaper on July 14, 2015

The news headlines are stuffed in exhaust pipes and King Street is about to explode in Shippensburg. Tailpipes are clogged with the “Military’s Transgender Ban” and the “Number of Uninsured” has hit the bottom of the Susquehanna. I am driving on the river bottom looking for lead musket balls with teeth marks, something to bite down on while my muffler burns out and my catalytic converter suffocates. There are soldiers brushing their hair with bones down here. My windows are rolled up while saw blades, British copper half pennies, and clay marbles float to the surface. The obituary page is on the shoreline in a pile of flint and pink arrowheads. Margaret Mosier Balaban is survived by thirteen children. She loved to savor nut roll, raspberry torte, and chocolate layer cake—her degree in chemistry was burnt in the oven back in December 1945. She would have been 91 this year, but now Mrs. Balaban is a sheet of paper on the riverbank where heroin addicts topple over. This trash pit will never get dug up and archived because all the historians are starving to death in toothpick forts.
Keystone Ode with #MeToo in It

So #MeToo cuts her ponytail off, walks into a bar and takes a seat next to #MeToo and the bartender serves #MeToo whiskey from an eyedropper she pulls straight out of her purse, but it turns out #MeToo was already in every purse because #MeToo comes as a picture inside every wallet. #MeToo carries tweezers everywhere she goes, plucks chin hairs before her picture is taken. #MeToo slides into a bra strap, tucks into a sock, falls out of a pocket, folds into a shirtsleeve, gets lost in a discount rack. #MeToo shuts up. Drinks. #MeToo never loses the memory.

#MeToo, like when my high school soccer coach hijacked my shin pads and cleats he drained the water cooler sucked the orange slice out of my mouth the warehouse out of my mind the metal cage out of my lungs the ferris wheel seat that flips inside my gut yes he resigned I was a goalie I wanted to tell his wife wanted to cut his tongue out rip his face off my torso hardened into tree bark when my shirt came off her torso hardened into tree bark when her shirt came off she wanted his wife to yell but it was sunday then tuesday and 16 is hard pavement her head is my head against the curb my hair wrapped around her throat I was 16 I swear I never kissed back

So #MeToo wants to tell his wife, wants his daughter’s name not to be Nicole. #MeToo was kicked off the soccer team. He ran for mayor as a democrat, just like #MeToo. So you lost the sour taste of being a teenager, #MeToo? Me too. Now she stands in front of a classroom twenty years later with hair down to her knees and when a student says #MeToo, she imagines her soccer cleats dangling from his rearview mirror as he gags on a wad of her hair.