

## Of Dirt and Wildflowers: A Memoir of Growing the Courage to Bloom

**Kylee J. Marshall**

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*In the memoir-in-essays Of Dirt and Wildflowers, natural, tactile items are used to reflect on the idea that all people, plants, and cherished possessions have stories to tell.*

Kylee J. Marshall's reflective memoir *Of Dirt and Wildflowers* uses everyday objects as starting points in its discussions of moments of personal transition.

Marshall remembers being teased in the course of her Colorado childhood on a ranch; she found solace in books and studies. She also learned to work hard and to hold in her pain. Later, as a single mother, she pursued meaning in her work as an English teacher, a real estate agent, and a writer. She forged new relationships; she and her partner bought property in the mountains. Herein, she uses objects as starting points to meditate on the lessons that she's learned throughout her life.

A chapter is devoted to each object, which include heart-shaped rocks, ski boots, and old cameras: reminders that home is found in other people, symbols of learning to ask for help, and memories of passing moments that might otherwise be forgotten. The tools of play and work lead to other, purposeful meditation. The chapters also repeat the phrase "I am" until it becomes almost a chant. Object rituals also arise; each item is handled prayerfully and wishfully, with peace and solace sought in Marshall's interactions with them.

Poetic passages precede the chapters, piquing related questions and ideas. They set an inquisitive, dreamy tone that runs throughout the book, which also makes use of short sentences and trailing phrases. A sense of the importance of relationships is an additional constant: while the text alludes to tragedies in Marshall's past, including an abusive relationship that she escaped, it is more concerned with centering her love for her family and friends. There are stories about Mother's Day gifts, get-well presents, and warm gatherings. And even as Marshall makes connections with others, she learns to connect to herself, too: she relishes solitary moments spent reading, sipping tea, and walking. She heals; she develops a sense of clarity and personal conviction. And the significant moments that led her there are preserved, in part thanks to their associations with the tangible items that she catalogs.

In the wistful memoir *Of Dirt and Wildflowers*, natural, tactile items are used to reflect on the idea that all people, plants, and cherished possessions have stories to tell.

MARI CARLSON (June 6, 2023)

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