



## Perfect Dirt: And Other Things I've Gotten Wrong

**Keegan Lester**

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Keegan Lester's lyrical memoir *Perfect Dirt* concerns what and where "home" really is.

The narrative, composed of poetic vignettes, zips between Lester's childhood in California, his creative tour across West Virginia, his work as a writer in New York City, and stories from his parents and grandparents about growing up in West Virginia. It hovers over each story in Lester's life, zooming in on poignant moments: memories of a friend from his peewee football team who was the first person he knew who died; sarcastic conversations between his grandparents that signified their love; a dog that was supposed to save a failing relationship; a tour van's quick obsession with Fleetwood Mac's "Rumours"; and the sudden urge his father felt to sail the Caribbean, where he was lost at sea for some time. Places are fleshed out alongside people, with West Virginia being the book's star.

On its surface, *Perfect Dirt* seems to be an insular, personal book, but it reveals itself as more of an open love letter to Appalachia. Its contemplations of humanity's need for identity and meaning from its roots are poetic, and it tells its stories in an immediate manner, with candor and minimal impositions of hindsight. In breathtaking, nuanced prose, Lester tackles the human experience: "getting older just means you hold all these things that have broken you inside you, and the only way to keep them still, to keep your body in tact, is by being quiet."

Powerful and insightful, *Perfect Dirt* is a musing memoir that's concerned with home, identity, and human relations.

ASHLEY HOLSTROM (November / December 2021)

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