



Late Fragments: Everything I Want to Tell You (About This Magnificent Life)

Kate Gross

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Ambitious and talented, Kate Gross worked at Number 10 Downing Street for two British Prime Ministers whilst only in her twenties. At thirty, she was CEO of a charity working with fragile democracies in Africa. She had married 'the best looking man I've ever kissed' – and given birth to twin boys in 2008. The future was bright.

But aged 34, Kate was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. Now terminal, it is clear that she will die before her children finish primary school and probably before they reach the grand old age of 6.

She began to write as a gift to herself, a reminder that she could create even as her body tried to self-destruct. Written for those she loves, her book is not a conventional cancer memoir; nor is it filled with medical jargon or misery. Instead, it is Kate's powerful attempt to make sense of the woman who has emerged in this strange, lucid final chunk of life.

Kate should have been granted decades to say all that she says in these pages. Denied the chance to bore her children and grandchildren with stories when she is fat and old, she offers us all her thoughts on how to live; on the wonder to be found in the everyday; the importance of friendship and love; what it means to die before your time and how to fill your life with hope and joy even in the face of tragedy.

Late Fragments: Everything I Want to Tell You (About This Magnificent Life) Details

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From Reader Review *Late Fragments: Everything I Want to Tell You (About This Magnificent Life)* for online ebook

Sarah says

Thought provoking and so honest

Sylvia says

I know I have already read this book because it was very familiar but I somehow missed logging it the first time. If anything, it is better the second time. Kate's ability to express herself, her mastery of words are simply phenomenal. It simply is the most beautiful book even though the subject matter is so terribly sad.

Rebecca says

By the end of this clear-eyed, charming cancer memoir, I felt I knew Kate Gross as a dear friend. A high-flying British civil servant who worked with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and later helped Blair found an NGO in Africa, she was shocked to learn in her early thirties that her occasional 'bottom trouble' was end-stage colon cancer with liver metastases. "I'm a golden girl, a people-pleaser, something who is used to graft and a pleasant smile being rewarded," she writes, yet here was a situation she could not control. She died at age 36 in 2014.

In her short but carefully structured book, she balances a brief recounting of her life with observations about terminal illness and trying to ensure a good future for her five-year-old twin sons. Throughout she uses playful shorthand: cancer is "the Nuisance," she spent her sullen adolescent years as a "grub," her career days were about "trying to save the world, one paperclip at a time," and her boys are "the Knights." The title phrase is from Raymond Carver, a key point of reference here; Gross includes passages from many literary works that meant something to her (see the Bibliography for a full list).

Memoirs by people facing death can often skirt close to cliché, but I felt Gross had fresh things to tell me about many subjects:

Cultivating "bitter gratitude": "How strange, how brilliant it is that this awareness of wonder, this sense of the sublime, has been so closely intertwined with my illness as it has progressed."

The value of literature: "Reading is an experience by which we connect ourselves to what we are, to this magnificent, awful life, in which the same grooves are being scored over and over again in different times and tongues."

Sharing yourself with others: "We can choose what we reveal of ourselves ... The more you show, the more you seek, the more involved you are with mankind."

How to act around the dying: "we don't expect great words of wisdom or solace. I just want this shit to be acknowledged"

I appreciated the encouragement to remember what gave you joy when you were younger, what at age 10 felt like the most worthwhile things you could be doing, and get back to those as much as possible. Gross doesn't believe in an afterlife beyond her children's memory and this book – “nothingness-with-benefits.” I could sympathize with her picture of death, “me in the back of a black taxi, leaving an awesome party before the end, just when everyone else was starting to have real fun.” I wish she'd had longer at the party, but I'm glad she left these thoughts behind.

Hayley Mac says

One of the best books I've ever read! It's about dying but it's really about living. Extremely beautiful and inspiring. I'm going to tell everybody I know to pick up a copy.

Alex Laycock says

although it feels wrong to be critical of anyone writing such a heart felt story,i am afraid i found this book very tedious indeed,seemed to wade about each topic stringing it out,probably more mean to be read by her kids than the general public,hoped it helped her and her family.i guess i bought it as i am always searching for something to make me fully right to the deep spot enlightenment about the length of life and what matters (and so toss away an eating disorder that has robbed me of so many things) which is a very self centered thing to say

Carole Mills says

Not really sure how to describe this book. I enjoyed it immensely in parts and other parts went straight over my head!

Obviously, a very sad & poignant story, but told in Kate's upbeat & off the wall manner. I totally admire her courage and practical way of dealing with her situation.

However, some of the musings were too deep for me and about subjects that I have little interest in and that's the reason with only giving it 3 stars.

Jess Walker says

Lovely book. Heartfelt and full of the 'real-ness' of life and love and such heartbreakingly sad. Absolutely love the quotes and has helped me with my own grief.

Angela Young says

This is a brave, honest, funny, heartbreaking and heavenly book ... essential reading for anyone who has a

dying friend or relation for its suggestions about what to do and what not to do when we go to see dying friends or relations and don't know what to do (ask them what they'd like). And essential reading for any young parent who's in the middle of dying too young and leaving behind even younger children. It's also a reflection on 'This Magnificent Life' as the subtitle tells us and is full of wisdom and kindness about life and love ... and how, if ever you have what Kate Gross calls 'a dodgy bottom' remember that a colonoscopy is only valid for five years: ask for another one if five years have gone by and question the specialists about your treatment if you aren't happy that all that can be done is being done.

This is how she ends *Late Fragments* with a mantra for the living:

Pay attention to the wonder all around you. Get your dodgy bottoms checked out. Always *always* eat from your very best crockery, because where can we live but days? Be grateful that you love and are beloved.

And read it with a box of kleenex nearby.

Sharon says

Just finished reading and sitting with tears in my eyes. So sad. The way that Kate writes makes this book so relatable in a way that it was really hard to read in places, as well as being very readable. Inevitably it makes you reflect on yourself and relationships with friends and family (my husband and growing family and my original 'five pentagon') and my own memories of the 'grub years'. The life that Kate Gross led was inspiring and undoubtedly happy, even in the final reflective years, months and weeks. The literary references have also added to my reading list. Thanks for the bibliography at the end. I have no doubt that I will read this book again in my life.

Jess Hancock says

A truly inspirational book written by an incredible woman, wife to Billy and mother to the Knights. From the start Kate shows strength, self control and determination like no other, upon finding out she has terminal cancer.

Ultimately an eye opener to what is truly important in life.

Kate's advice for the living.....

'Pay attention to the wonder all around you. Get your dodgy bottoms checked out. Always always eat from your very best crockery, because where can we live but days? Be grateful that you love and are beloved.'

Carolinemawer says

Like those (few) others not liking this book, I feel hesitant to criticise this book
But surely, it was written for her family - especially her children.

And why leave your children with bad memories?

sisterimapoet says

I spent a fair portion of this book struggling to like Gross, and then feeling guilty about feeling that way about a dead woman. There were plenty of times when we seemed worlds apart as people, but one or two moments towards the end where sparks of recognition drew me closer to her. A powerful book, honest to the point of being quite uncomfortable in places. A treasure for her loved ones, but useful to the rest of us too, reminding us of what surrounds us if we just take a moment to notice.

Denny John says

It is difficult to imagine someone who is dying writing this book as it is full of energy and hope. It made me want to find out more about her and the fate of her children and husband. It is full of references to other books she has found inspirational and lots of insights into the mind of a dying person. In the end you get a hint at the essence of what worries a person has when their time is running out but feel that their tasks are incomplete, even though she achieved a lot in her life. Very thought provoking, worth a read.

Nancy Hooley says

I read this book in one sitting last night and was incredibly inspired by the legacy Kate has left in writing this uplifting yet honest look at her heartbreaking situation; having to leave a husband and twin boys as she has terminal cancer. A book which made me reconsider what really is important in life. Rest in Peace Kate, I never knew you but you've made me realise I need to take more time to see the wonder in the little things.

Charlie says

I love biographies and I love memoirs but this was different to most I had read before, perhaps because it doesn't quite fit in either of those categories. The book is cut into chapters, that more or less represent areas of her life (her upbringing, her love life, the relationship with her parents, friends, children etc..). I personally did not quite enjoy that editing although I am sure that it made things clearer than it would have been otherwise. I feel terrible for rating and reviewing this "badly" but I could not relate to anything in here, even though Kate certainly wrote a lot more about life than death and matters that are fairly universal. It was all too "light" for me. The topic isn't. I cannot begin to imagine what it is like to know that you are soon going to die leaving behind your husband and young twin boys as well as the rest of your life, it's a terrible situation of course and I could only empathise but there was not enough material for me to enjoy it. Maybe because of time limitations or because the writer didn't want to fall into a sappy cliché, or because this was just not meant to be an essay on life and death, but still what was in here was very *deja vu*. After all she wrote this book so her loved ones could enjoy it and I am certain that they did/will, with the few anecdotes and after all it is quick paced and her writing style is good, it's just not for me.

