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The Memory Of Things: A Novel



Synopsis

"[A] gripping, emotional story set in the part of history we'll never forget." - New York Daily News
On the morning of September 11, 2001, sixteen-year-old Kyle Donohue watches the first twin tower come down from the window of Stuyvesant High School. Moments later, terrified and fleeing home to safety across the Brooklyn Bridge, he stumbles across a girl perched in the shadows, covered in ash, and wearing a pair of costume wings. With his mother and sister in California and unable to reach his father, a NYC detective likely on his way to the disaster, Kyle makes the split-second decision to bring the girl home. What follows is their story, told in alternating points of view, as Kyle tries to unravel the mystery of the girl so he can return her to her family. But what if the girl has forgotten everything, even her own name? And what if the more Kyle gets to know her, the less he wants her to go home? Gae Polisner's *The Memory of Things* tells a stunning story of friendship and first love and of carrying on with our day-to-day living in the midst of world-changing tragedy and unforgettable pain. It tells a story of hope.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For a generation of teens who have no memory of 9/11, this title will give context to a tragedy they may not fully understand. This work opens with the confusion and commotion of the morning of September 11, 2001. On the rush home from his evacuated high school, 16-year-old Kyle rescues a girl ready to jump from the Brooklyn Bridge wearing giant wings and covered in ash. Suffering from temporary amnesia, the girl develops an intimate relationship with Kyle in the chaotic week following the terrorist attack. The alternating narration between the two

of them, with the girl's free verse aptly fitting her befuddled state, presents two different perspectives. Captured by the way Kyle keeps busy with mundane tasks like cooking and doing laundry despite the crisis outside, the feelings of restlessness and uncertainty that follow any catastrophe are well portrayed. Comparisons are drawn to the bodies found in Nazi concentration camps and the destruction of the Ugandan Bush War, which Kyle's best friend lived through. Newspaper headlines and pop culture references plant this tale firmly within the time period, while the imagery of the white ash and black smoke is effectively described. The story is told without dipping into sentimentality, although the author's voice does slide through occasionally when Kyle refers to the resilient spirit of New Yorkers. An author's note relays Polisner's personal connection to the story and her process in creating this ultimately hopeful offering. VERDICT A poignant novel for all YA collections. — Carrie Shaurette, Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"...a touching look at the power of selflessness, memory, and hope in the face of tragedy."- Booklist "A love letter to the New Yorkers who rallied together, this is also an exploration of the intense bonds that form during a crisis. Detailed and well-researched, it's sure to make young readers curious about those unforgettable days after the twin towers fell. A fictional but realistic tale of how two New York City teens survived the unthinkable together." - Kirkus "[An] ultimately hopeful offering. A poignant novel for all YA collections." - School Library Journal "Lyrical, devastating, extraordinary, and full of heart, *The Memory of Things* reminds us that in our darkest times, there is so much light to be found in the human spirit. It is, of course, a love letter to New York, but more importantly, it is a love letter to human beings, one that masterfully weaves hope through pain, loss, solace, and connection." - C. Desir, author of *Other Broken Things* and *Bleed Like Me* "An absolute gem... This one is going to be around for a LONG time." — Chris Crutcher, Margaret A. Edwards Award-winning author of *Deadline* and *Whale Talk* "We know what happened on 9/11. What remains a mystery and a wonder is how life goes on in the face of such darkness. *The Memory of Things* is a story about where people find their light, and how it shines through all the places we've been broken. Heartfelt, hopeful, this is a story fed by humanity and the enduring human spirit." - Martha Brockenbrough, author of *The Game of Love and Death* "A poetic and hypnotizing portrait of compassion." - Kate Scelsa, author of *Fans of the Impossible Life*

The timing of reading this book couldn't have been more appropriate. Flying in an airplane to go to my Grandmother's funeral, a month before my wedding, nearly a month after my youngest

daughter's first birthday (which happened to be 9/11). My mind was overwhelmed with a multitude of emotions, good and bad, and my own questions of what it meant to survive, or even thrive, in the midst of tragedy. My 12 year old daughter said that her favorite part of the book was how the main characters, a young man named Kyle and a young lady known for most of the story as just "the amnesiac bird girl," were "humans to each other." I asked her what she meant and she shrugged, but she continued to insist that what she loved the most was how "human" and "nice" the characters were- so I was intrigued to see what exactly she meant. Kyle finds the bird-girl, a frazzled young lady wearing angel wings and suffering from intense bouts of suicidal ideation and frazzled thoughts, as he's fleeing his school during the 9/11 attacks. Even people who weren't in New York City that day have heard the stories of how hectic, crazed, and full of peculiar circumstances those days were. We remember calling our friends, panicked at the phones not working. The stories of people wandering around days later not remembering who they were, attempting to go through a now defunct routine in a fugue state. I attempted to describe some of my own fractured memories of that time to my soon-to-be-husband, a Canadian who is missing the vast shared cultural memory of that time. The two things that stood out to me most were how intense the fear and pain were, friends and family separated, people trying to figure out how to go about their days when suddenly the everyday was broken; but coupled with that, the tales of uncommon kindness and decency where strangers filled in the gaps, helping to hold communities together as we all tried to stumble into survival. There was such intense pain, such unbelievable kindness and grace to match it. And that is, more than anything else, what Gae Polisner's incredible book grasps so delicately in each hand. The girl, embodying the sense of loss and lost-ness that so many people experienced, her thoughts and memories fractured as so many people's were, but in the other hand, the basic decency and kindness of Kyle, a stranger, whose humanity redeems the pain that falls into the background. There may not be anything that is harder to write about with any honesty than grief, but each of Gae's works deals with this painful subject in it's own way. Yet, *The Memory of Things* is it's own unique masterpiece, speaking to the need to grasp on to our own humanity and hope for the future in a season when hope, and even a future, can seem so abstract in relation to our cultural fears. Highly recommended.

One of the books that I eagerly awaited this year was Gae Polisner's *The Memory of Things*. I loved Gae Polisner's first two books *The Pull of Gravity* and *The Summer of Letting Go* and so couldn't wait to read the new

book. It came out this week and that is what I have been reading for the past few days. Here is what I think.

The Memory of Things is set on the day of 9/11 and the story continues during the subsequent days of that fateful week. It is a beautiful Tuesday morning and suddenly there is an explosion and initially people ignore it but when more explosions happen and everyone realizes what is happening, people start moving out of buildings. The narrator of our story, Kyle, is a teenager who is presently at school. Once the seriousness of the events become apparent, everyone from Kyle's school gets evacuated and teachers try to get their students home. Kyle has to cross the bridge to get to Brooklyn, where his home is. He sees something strange at the bridge, which looks like a big bird. When he moves back and tries to take another look, he discovers that it is a girl, who is wearing huge wings. It appears that she might be trying to jump into the river. Kyle rushes and gets her and takes her home. She appears to have suffered temporary amnesia probably because of the shocking events of the day. She can't even remember her name. We also learn that Kyle's father and Uncle Paul are officers with the NYPD and are at Ground Zero, his other uncle Matt who used to be at the NYPD is paralyzed because of an accident and lives with them, while his mother and daughter are in LA for an audition. How does Kyle handle this situation? Who is this mysterious girl whom he feels responsible for but whom he also feels attracted to? Is Kyle able to reach his dad during this day filled with crisis? Is Kyle able to reach his mom? How does the story of each of them pan out? You should read the book to find out. I loved *The Memory of Things*. I loved the way the book evoked the atmosphere of that time, the fear and uncertainty that followed the disastrous events and also the calm of the people who stood strong. It is a story of everyday heroes who stood strong amidst adversity and handled the situation with grace and dignity. I loved the way the relationship between Kyle and the girl evolved, from being uncertain strangers to friends to something more. I also loved the character of Uncle Matt though he couldn't walk or speak much he was a cool character and has a wonderful sense of humour. In one place he says "Am pah-lyze, Ky-uh. Not brain dead." I loved the way the story is told, the narrative voices alternating between Kyle's and the girl's. Kyle's voice narrates the story and moves the action along, while occasionally contemplating on life and the deeper meaning of things. The girl's voice is poetic, dreamy, surreal. Both of them complement each other so beautifully. I liked some of the little things in the book that we discover when we look carefully

It's like this nod to Dickens "it occurs to me that, in the middle of one of the worst things that has ever happened to me, is now also one of the best things." The ending of the story is bittersweet but perfect. There is a note by the author at the end of the book in which she describes how she was inspired to write the book. It was beautiful to read. I loved many passages from the book. Polisner's prose is beautiful and I couldn't stop highlighting passages. Here are two of my favourites. "Well, it feels like that, Kyle, back there. Like I'm adrift, in soaking wet clothes that are too heavy with the weight of things I don't even know. And then the water doesn't drown me but carries me and, for a second it lightens everything a little, and I feel momentarily hopeful. But always, there are things, beneath the waves, threatening to pull me under. And the land is right there, close enough to swim to • I can see it • but I'm not sure I want to come back to shore again. It's like I'm here, solid, but I'm not connected to anything. I'm completely untethered. I know that makes no sense," she says. "It does," I say. "I think I get it. But you're wrong. You're tethered to me." Change comes in two ways. The first is the blindside way that comes without warning. Like Uncle Matt's motorcycle accident. Or the Twin Towers collapsing one Tuesday morning as you're minding your own business in school. Or a girl showing up out of nowhere, covered in ash, and wearing some costume wings. That kind of change takes your breath away. But other times, change comes gradually, in that sure, steady way you can sense coming a mile away. Or maybe a day away. Or, maybe, a few short hours. And, since you know it's coming, you're supposed to prepare. Brace yourself against the stinging blow. But just because you plant your feet wider, doesn't mean the blow won't take you down. I loved "The Memory of Things." It is a story about normal people handling extraordinary situations with great dignity and courage. It is also a story about friendship, love and family. It is one of my favourite books of the year. If you haven't read it already, go get it now :)

What a fantastic read. This was such a beautiful read and one that has just continued to linger with me since I finished it. I'm pretty sure it will be sticking with me for a long time. This story is told from the perspective of two main characters, Kyle and the mystery girl he found covered in ash and wearing wings as he returned home on the morning of the attacks of 9/11. It is told in both narrative

and verse and weaves them together beautifully. While this is a tragic tale of people directly effected by the attacks of September 11, it is so much more than that. This is a story, most importantly, of hope. It teaches us that through tragedy, through disaster, through sadness, we can all find hope that things will be better. We can all believe in the hope that things will be good again, that things can one day return to normal. It is also a story about family and all the ways that our family plays a part in our lives. About how our family is our life line, our tether to everything that is important to us. It is about first love and discovering who we are. Discovering what our face looks like, even if that means we have to learn all of this through terrible tragedy. I can't recommend this book highly enough!!!

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