ABOUT THE BOOK

A gritty but hopeful love story about two struggling teens—great for fans of The Spectacular Now, Willow, and Eleanor and Park.

Tyler has a football scholarship to Stanford, a hot girlfriend, and a reliable army of friends to party with. Then his mom kills herself. And Tyler lets it all go. Now he needs to dodge what his dad is offering (verbal tirades and abuse) and earn what his dad isn’t (money). Tyler finds a job that crashes him into Jordyn, his former childhood friend turned angry-loner goth-girl. She brings Tyler an unexpected reprieve from the never-ending pity party his life has become. How could he not fall for her? But with his dad more brutally unpredictable than ever, Tyler knows he can’t risk bringing Jordyn too deeply into the chaos. So when violence rocks his world again, will it be Jordyn who shows him the way to a hopeful future? Or after everything, will Tyler have to find it in himself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Levy hails from Denver, Colorado and now lives in Los Angeles, California, where she works as a casting director for film and television, casting for such projects as Six Feet Under, Deadwood, Bruce Almighty, and more. Not After Everything is her debut novel.

Visit Michelle online at michellelevybooks.com, Follow her on Twitter @m_levy, on Facebook at MichelleLevyBooks, and on Pinterest at MichelleLevy13.
PURCHASE LINKS:

- Amazon: http://bit.ly/NotAfterEverythingAmazon

PRAISE FOR NOT AFTER EVERYTHING:

"Tragic and intense, but ultimately hopeful. The protagonists are fully developed and three-dimensional teens and their story is captivating. Fans of Robyn Schneider’s The Beginning of Everything should add this to their must-read lists. A moving story with tons of heart." —School Library Journal

"Tough and uncompromising . . . The voice of a real teen searching for answers while walking a razor-thin fence between salvaging what remains or throwing it all away . . . Raw and unforgettable." —Kirkus (starred review)

"Believable dialogue and emotions—especially Tyler’s simmering rage at the outset of the novel—make this a solid first showing." —Publisher’s Weekly

"If you never thought a single book could make you laugh, cry, scream, ache, throw things at the wall, and then beg for more, the you’re never read Not After Everything. Michelle Levy doesn’t just join the all-star pool of contemporary young adult authors. she rises straight to the top." —Jessica Brody, bestselling author of 52 Reasons to Hate My Father and the Unremembered trilogy

"One of the best young adult novels I’ve ever read." —Jennifer Echols, award-winning author of Endless Summer and Forget You
ONE

A thick, pink-polished fingernail strikes the edge of my desk—two succinct taps—and I look up from my poetic masterpiece, right into Mrs. Hickenlooper’s eyes. They bulge like her three hefty chins are trying to choke the life out of her.

“Am I boring you, Mr. Blackwell?”

I return to scratching the letter $S$ into the top left corner of my notebook. “I assume that’s rhetorical.”

Muffled laughter from the class. Mrs. Hickenlooper’s bulbous eyes narrow—no easy feat.

“Out.” She juts her talon in the direction of the door, as if I’m too stupid to locate it myself.

I feel another sarcastic remark bubbling up, but I swallow it back as I casually finish the last of my scratching.

There.

Now F-U-C-K T-H-I-S will be visible in the top margin of at least the next thirty sheets of notebook paper. I know it isn’t particularly clever or imaginative, but I smile all the same. Then I calmly collect my belongings and stroll out of AP macroeconomics, unsure how, exactly, being forced to leave all this is a punishment. She expects me to report to the guidance counselor’s office like she has the last three times, but of course I won’t.
I drift down the mostly empty hallways until . . . I don’t know, whatever. Truthfully, I kind of hope the asshole hall monitor will find me and dole out some sort of actual punishment.

“S up, Tyler?” one of my old teammates says as I pass the gym. Before, I would have taken my frustrations out on the weights. Now it just seems so stupid. I nod a greeting to Ted and continue walking.

Time’s not the same as it used to be, and suddenly the hallways are filled with people I used to be able to stand. I never even heard the bell. I have AP chem now, but it doesn’t really matter if I show up. Mr. Waters wouldn’t dare fail me. Even crusty Mrs. Hickenlooper will probably still give me an A. I wish she wouldn’t. I wish they would all stop tiptoeing around me just because my mom offed herself over the summer.

A firm hand grips my shoulder, forcing a jolt of adrenaline through me.

“Jeez, man. Relax.”

Marcus.

His girlfriend clings to his arm like if she let go, he’d instantly find another chick to hook up with. In all fairness, he probably would. Marcus isn’t picky. Well, that’s not entirely true. Marcus, much to the chagrin of his mother and the entire African American female population of our school, only likes white girls. Preferably blondes, although this one—number twelve, I think?—is a rare brunette. Probably because she has huge tits. I make the mistake of looking at her face. She stares back at me with that infuriatingly caring look. If people knew how that face really made me feel, they’d be more careful. One of these days the wrong person is going to look at me like that, and I will seriously lose my shit.

“Baby,” Marcus says to poor unsuspecting number twelve, “I’ll meet you after gym by my locker, ’kay?”
After a disgustingly public tongue bath, Twelve finally leaves.

“Yo, Tyler, where you headed?” Marcus yells down the hall after me.

“AP chem,” I say, not stopping.

“I got English,” he says, catching up.

Marcus was my best friend, but now . . . I don’t know. It’s just kind of awkward. I mean, I guess we mostly only ever talked football. But football just doesn’t seem all that important in the grand scheme of things. Not to me. Not anymore.

“Well, I’ll see you in gym,” Marcus says, slowing until he’s fallen behind me.

. . .

When I reach the lab, I hesitate by the door. Do I really need to be here? The first week of school is always pointless, but the first week of your senior year when you could feasibly fail everything and still get into a state school seems even more pointless. I’ve always done well in school. Not because I needed to prove something or impress my parents or whatever. I just like it. I actually like learning.

The guys give me shit about my grades, but I don’t care. Especially when Coach contacted Stanford about a football scholarship. The scout came toward the end of the season last year when I was totally on my game, and they flew my mom and me out to visit the campus, where they offered me a National Letter of Intent. I signed without batting an eye. A Pac-12 school with an Ivy League–level education for practically free? Um, hell yeah. It’s not that I’m all that great a player, but I’m fast as hell. Plus with my 2340 SATs and 4.3 GPA, let’s just say the admissions department was happy to offer me a football scholarship. And a
scholarship is the only way I’d ever get any kind of college education, let alone one at freaking Stanford.

The second bell rings. Class is about to start. Mr. Waters makes eye contact with me out in the hallway. Damn. Too late to turn and run.

Running is the only thing that brings me any release these days. Thank god for gym. I’m in a groove, way ahead of the others. That is, until Marcus catches up with me, practically killing himself in the process.

“Man, you’re on fire,” he gasps, like he’s not used to the mile-high altitude, when he’s lived in Denver his whole life.

I nod, trying not to let the interruption slow my pace.

“You coming to practice today?”

I haven’t been to practice since early summer. Since I found my mom in a tub of her own blood. A few weeks before school started, I told Coach, Marcus, and a few others who were in Coach’s office, that I wouldn’t be back this year because I had to work, that I wouldn’t have the time. Coach told me to “take as long as you need,” like he thought I didn’t really mean it. But I did. And I wish Marcus would stop hounding me about it.

“Gotta work.” I push myself harder, setting my quads on fire. It feels good.

I make it a few laps without thinking about anything, but then I’m about to lap the rest of the class, so I slow my pace, keep my distance. Marcus slows down until he’s running next to me again.

“So what, are you, like, quitting?” he asks. I can barely understand him, he’s breathing so hard.
“What can I say? My dad’s a prick. I gotta work.”

“What about your scholarship?”

“I guess I’m not going to college.”

Marcus stumbles, but recovers and catches up to me again.

“Look, that was my mom’s plan, and she didn’t have the guts to see it through, so why the hell should I?”

He ignores my tone and presses on. “Well, what are you going to do?”

“No fucking clue.” I don’t wait for a reply. I push myself again, weaving through the others, focused, until all I can hear are my feet hitting the asphalt, my steady breathing, and the beat of my heart pounding in my head.

...

“Um… Uh… You want ham and cheese?” the chubby, middle-aged woman asks her tween daughter, who couldn’t look more horrified about being in public with her totally uncool mom. She grunts what I think is meant to be a “Yes” and goes back to texting.

“Six-inch or foot-long?” I ask.

Roger glances over at me from the register. I have somehow managed to not meet his high standards of sandwich artistry yet again.

“Let’s do a foot-long. Then we can share it,” the mom says. The girl snorts her annoyance.

“What kind of bread would you—”

“Wheat,” the girl says, the duh implicit.

I pull out one of the older pieces of wheat, one that’s dry and extra-crunchy.
“Can you cut it now?” the girl says. “I don’t want her fatty mayo near my half.”

I do as told. The daughter goes back to texting, not even looking up as she orders me to add toppings, like she has eyes on the top of her head. Every time her mother asks for a topping she doesn’t approve of, the daughter sighs heavily.

Roger grabs the sandwiches from my hands the second I finish stuffing them into the bag and rings them up. He’s aggressively polite to everyone, including me, even though I’m pretty sure he hates my guts. It makes me want to punch him, just to see how he’d react if confronted with any unpleasantness.

It’s not like I’m dying to spend all my free time working at Subway, but it was the first job I found after my dad informed me that if I wanted to continue driving my crappy car or, you know, eating, I would have to figure shit out for myself. I don’t think he cares that technically he’s responsible for me until my eighteenth birthday, which is exactly 217 days away.

The second I turn eighteen, I plan to get the fuck outta Dodge. I will leave this godforsaken place behind and never look back. Screw graduation. Everyone knows the ceremony is really only for the parents. And that would require parents who A) are alive, or B) give a shit.

This year was supposed to be about maintaining my GPA and keeping the Stanford people happy so I didn’t lose the scholarship, and then I could be on my way to a better life. I was going to take my mom far away from my prick father, show her that she didn’t have to live the way she did. I don’t know exactly what I had planned to do—get an MBA and work my way up the corporate ladder at some Fortune 500 company? Maybe. But whatever. She selfishly took that away from me. I’d been doing it all for her anyway. So now what?
“Ty? You want to take your break? I can hold down the fort,” Roger says. It takes every ounce of restraint for me not to choke him for calling me Ty. Only my girlfriend calls me that, and the only reason I don’t choke her is ‘cause she’s a girl.

I must look sad or something. I try to hold that shit in for when I’m alone—it makes people uncomfortable.

... 

Shit. Brett’s black 3 Series Beemer’s parked at the Conoco. But my tank’s on E, so I don’t have a choice—I won’t make it home if I don’t stop.

I park at the pump farthest from Brett. It doesn’t keep him from spotting me.

Brett’s the new running back. He should be grateful I’m no longer playing, but for some reason he hates me. I suspect it has something to do with Sheila.

Brett shakes his blond hair out of his eyes and greets me with a raised middle finger. Then he bends to say something to the passenger or passengers—his windows are so tinted, you can never tell who’s inside—before throwing his head back and making a face like he’s having an orgasm. Apparently this is him laughing. What is it about BMWs? Do they make you an asshole or are you already an asshole and that’s why you have a BMW?

The back door on the driver’s side flies open and Sheila sprints toward me at full speed.

I really don’t have the energy.

I rub my hand across the back of my neck and wait for the attack.
“Ty, baby!” She launches herself into my arms, and I turn my head just before her lips assault mine; they land at my ear instead. I pretend to be distracted by something on the pump screen as I slide her off of me.

She traces her finger over the letters of my stupid Subway hat. “Did you just get off?”

I nod.

“Wanna do it again?” she says suggestively.

I manage a small smile.

“That’s better.” She nuzzles into me, gently scratching the back of my neck with her acrylic nails. It doesn’t feel as good as it used to. “You smell yummy,” she says. “I haven’t had bread in forever.”

“Perks of the job,” I say, probably a little too sarcastically. I used to love the smell of freshly baked bread. At this point, let’s just say it’s lost its appeal.

“Sheila!” Cara, one of the other cheerleaders, calls.

“Hang on, bitch.” Sheila flips her brown hair all dramatically. “Say the word and I’m yours.”

The gas pump clicks, so I turn to finish my business. “Sorry. It’s just . . . It’s been a long day.”

“Your loss.” She grabs my ass and snakes under my arm, shoving her tongue in my mouth while I attempt to tear off the receipt. Then she bounces back to her friends. “See you tomorrow, baby!” she sings as she climbs back into the Beemer. There’s a symphony of giggling from inside. I wonder just how many girls are actually in there.

Brett grins at me like he’s beaten me at something as they drive past. I hate that guy.
It takes my car three tries before finally starting, and then it dies again. It doesn’t want to go home either. I halfheartedly pound the steering wheel and try again. It finally starts.

A giant pickup honks angrily as it passes me on the way home. I’m going ten under the speed limit. I’m in no hurry. If I get there after 10:30, there’s a good chance my dad’ll be locked away in his room. Hopefully passed out. He’s always been an asshole, but it’s gotten exponentially worse since Mom. It’s the nights he’s in that in-between state that I have to worry about—where he’s not sober enough to be depressed, and not drunk enough to be numb. I just never know what I’ll get. He’s like Schrödinger’s cat. Except instead of both dead and alive, he’s both passed-out drunk and not drunk enough until I open the front door and find out for myself.

... 

I sit in the car staring up at the window above the garage. The light is on in the guest room. As if we need a guest room. Mom was an only child, and Dad’s alienated everyone who’d ever want to visit. It’s also the room Mom used as her office. There’s a crappy rolltop desk that she squeezed between the bed and the window. She had to push the bed out of the way to get a chair back there when she used it. I’m surprised my dad hasn’t hawked the thing yet. He got rid of its contents along with everything else as soon as he could. People think it’s because he couldn’t handle the reminders, but I’m convinced he just wanted extra cash for booze.

There’s no movement in the window—maybe he passed out and forgot to turn the light off.

I strangle the steering wheel and let out a silent scream. Then I go in.
Captain comes running to the door the second he hears my feet hit the porch. At least someone’s happy to see me.

"Hey, buddy." I lean down and let Captain lick my chin while I give him some pats. If you didn’t know him, you might think he was threatening me, baring his teeth and all, but his tail’s wagging so fast, he almost throws himself off balance. His teeth are just too big for his mouth, so he looks like he’s aggressive when he’s excited. I like to think he’s smiling.

“Who’s a good boy? Who’s a good boy?”

Captain tilts his head like he’s trying to understand me. He’s an Australian shepherd mix but looks mostly Aussie, only with a long, thick tail. He’s brown and white, and he has one black leg and a black patch over his brown eye, which offsets his light blue one. Hence the name: “Captain Jack Sparrow.” Even though Jack Sparrow didn’t have an eye patch or a peg leg. Mom named him. He was the only pirate she could think of. And she loved Johnny Depp.

“Should I give you two some privacy?” Dad thinks he’s hilarious when he’s in that in-between, not-quite-drunk condition. I do not. “At least I know you won’t go knocking the dog up. Just do something about his hair all over the goddamn floor first, that’s all I ask. Or are you testing me to see if I’ll make good on my word?” Dad loves to threaten to get rid of Captain. It’s all talk. He’s too lazy to actually follow through.

I slowly get up and start past him toward the closet, leaving my backpack on the living room floor.

“Where the fuck are you going?” He grabs my arm. My muscles flex involuntarily. I know he’ll take this as a challenge and immediately wish I could take it back.
He shoves me as hard as he can. I reach out to catch myself but I’m not positioned right and I fall into the closet. My head hits the doorframe on the way down. These are the nights I resent my mother most.

“Answer me.” Dad kicks the back of my leg. It’s not meant to hurt so much as humiliate. And that he has done.

“I’m getting the vacuum for all the goddamn dog hair,” I mumble as I pull myself up and remove the vacuum from the closet.

He smacks the spot on my head where it hit the doorframe. “Wanna say that again?”

I shake my head. My face is on fire and I’m torqued inside from how much I just want to go off on him. At six feet, 210, I have a few inches and about fifty pounds on him. I could do serious damage. And he knows it. Sometimes I wonder if that’s what he really wants.

He snorts at me and turns back out of the room. I think we’re done, but then just before he reaches the stairs, he kicks Captain in the ribs hard enough for him to let out a high-pitched yelp. I lunge at Dad without thinking. Knowing how I’d react before I did, he easily steps out of the way, and then, using my own momentum, shoves me so that I almost land on Captain.

When I look back at him, he stares me down with a smug smile. He knows I won’t try anything else. Asshole.

When I finally hear his bedroom door shut, I feed Captain, vacuum the floors, and lock myself away in my cellar.

Okay, my room’s not a cellar. It’s a converted basement. With scratchy industrial carpet the color of old oatmeal, and shitty, scratched-up wood paneling halfway up the walls with white drywall above it covered in small holes because I use it as a corkboard. The focal point
of the room is a mattress sitting only on the box spring, which I hate, being as tall as I am. And there's a do-it-yourself-quality bathroom next to the wall of bars hung with clothes that would normally be hidden behind the doors of an actual closet.

It’s not great but it’s mine. Mom let me put a lock on the door when I turned sixteen, like it’s my own private apartment or something. Dad hates that. He thinks I’m hiding stuff. Which I am. Only not stuff he would be interested in.

I pull some loose paneling from the far corner and feel along the floor until my hand makes contact with a metal box. I carefully pull the box out and take it to my bed.

Captain jumps up and circles about five times before finally settling in next to me.

I take off the key I always wear on a chain around my neck and unlock the box, like I do every night. Then I pull out the plastic divider holding my secret emergency fund and set it aside.

Six photos stare back at me.

Mom on her wedding day—I cut Dad out of that one.

One of her when she was my age; she was so beautiful: long, shiny dark brown hair and light brown eyes that are full of life. She looks happy. I look a lot like her.

The two of us in Halloween costumes: She’s a black cat and I’m a ninja. I think I was ten.

One I remember taking when she finally went back to school. She was getting in her car and I raced out after her with the camera and said, “First day of school! My baby’s all grown up.” And she laughed. She’s mid-laugh in the photo.
The two of us hiking my favorite running path up in the foothills near Red Rocks. Captain was all muddy and jumping on her. Again she’s laughing.

And the last one: just the two of us at an awkward angle, slightly out of focus because she’s holding the camera out in front of us. We’re lounging on the couch after school let out last June. Dad wasn’t home and we were watching a Die Hard marathon and eating popcorn. She made a big deal about taking that picture of the two of us because it would probably be the last time we’d ever be like that. I was getting too old, she said, and soon I would think it was lame to hang out with my mom. I’m practically rolling my eyes in the picture, but Mom’s smiling away.

That’s part of what makes it hurt so much. I just never saw it coming.

I set the photos aside and reach for the one last thing Mom ever left me. And no, it’s not a note. She couldn’t even be bothered to leave an explanation. Oh, no—can’t give Tyler closure. Can’t leave him a note telling him I’m sorry. Nope. The only thing left of hers is the razor blade that ended her life. Nothing flashy, nothing special. Just a little silver rectangular straight-razor replacement blade.

I don’t know why I grabbed it. I’m not even sure if it really is the blade or just one of the others in its pack of ten or whatever. The protective plastic container was on the edge of the tub, which, in the chaos of pulling her out and trying to stop the bleeding while dialing 911, I stepped on, scattering all the others in the mess of blood on the floor. It still had her blood on it. I wish now that I hadn’t cleaned it off. I know that sounds morbid, but it’s all I have of her.

I run my finger along the blade lightly enough so it doesn’t cut me. It’s still sharp. Probably its only use was to tear through the flesh of her wrists.
Exsanguination.

That’s the term the EMT used. It sounds so much better than: “She slit her damn wrists and bled out.”