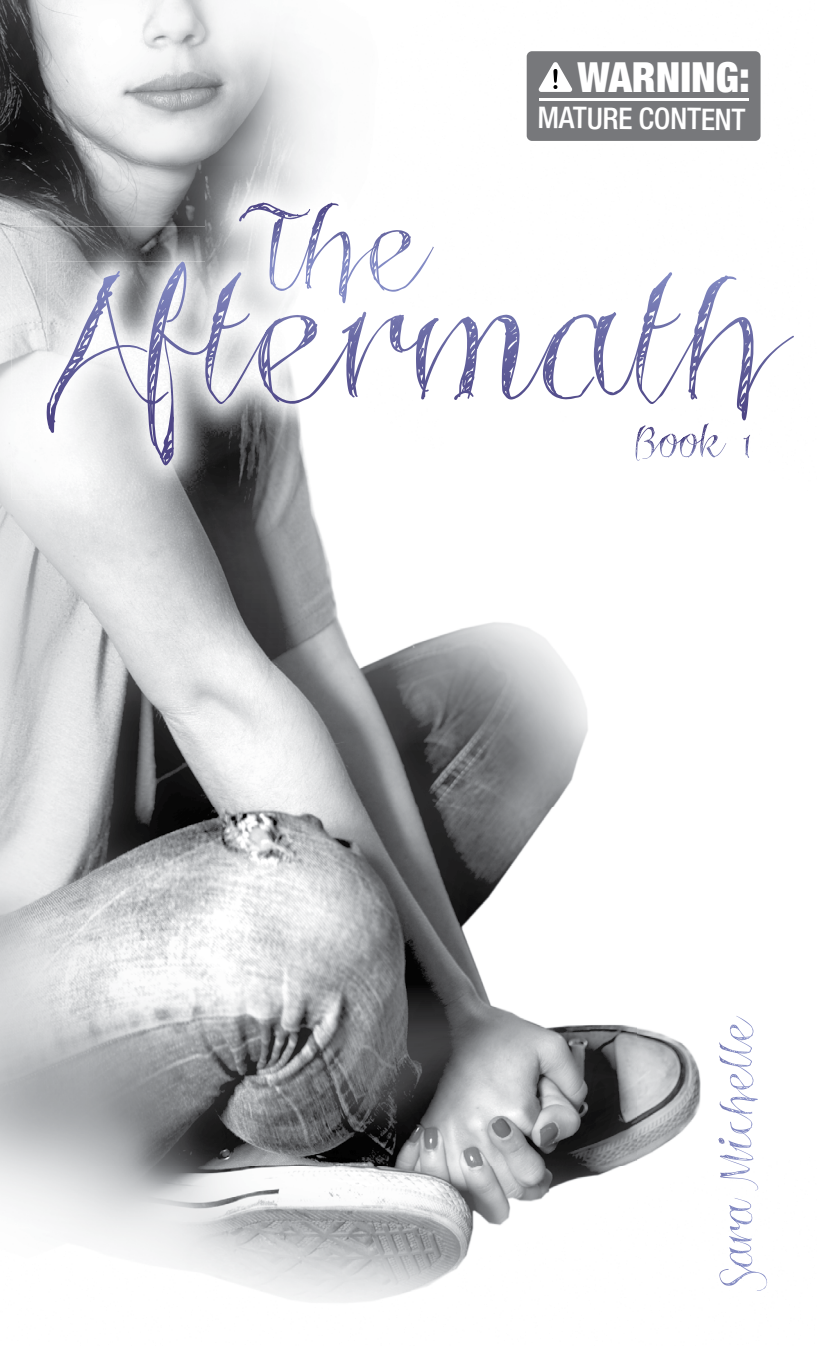

WARNING:
MATURE CONTENT
The Aftermath
Book 1
Sara Michelle

Day 7

I almost wish I hadn't made it. At least then I'd be dead. I don't really know what happens after we die. But I know it would sure beat this situation I've found myself in. Still, I don't think I'll ever fully grasp how lucky we are to be alive—if you can call it luck. I sometimes find myself thinking that it would've been so much easier to have died. That would be easier than this new life—my new normal.

It was freezing. It felt as if the sun had lost every joule of heat. Sure it was shining bright—a little too bright given the tragedy. But the air was angry, frigid. This was the kind of cold that couldn't be eliminated with sweatpants and fuzzy slippers. This was the kind of cold you got when you had the flu. Not even the hottest bath could make you feel warm enough. The wind penetrated your brain, and every breath you took turned your blood to ice. Our throats were raw.

Finding a decent heat source was nearly impossible. All the power was out here along with the rest of the city. And the state. And the country. At this point I wouldn't have been surprised if the entire planet had been damaged by this catastrophe.

There were no civil humans around. All the people left were fighting for their lives. We were all looking for the same things. Food, water, shelter, and more importantly, an answer to this mess.

Ryan and I kept to ourselves. Thank God I've got him. Pure fate kept us together, that's for sure. From what we've calculated, it's been seven days since *The End*. We don't really have a more suitable name for it right now.

There was absolutely no warning. Quite frankly, I don't think anyone expected anything out of the ordinary to happen. It was three days after Christmas. The only thing unusual was the clear sky. Typically, we're pelted with snow at this time of year. But it was cold and sunny. Perfect holiday weather.

We'd just finished celebrating Christmas. Our two-year anniversary was a short two days away. Then our entire lives were shaken—literally. This earthquake was no ordinary earthquake. I'd grown up in California, and I'd experienced what I thought was the worst. But this was no California quake. It was as if the Lord himself had shaken the earth with every bit of power he held. Every bone in your body rattled and collided. Pain soared through your joints and nerves. Frantic screams could be heard; small explosions, then larger ones.

I do remember seeing panic sweep across Ryan's face. Then darkness. But I'll never fully remember or know how terrifying that day really was. I was

completely unconscious for two days after it happened.

I awoke to Ryan's gentle embrace. That must have been on day three. He was stroking my hair. I remember it being so bitterly cold. After my eyes adjusted, I was hit with a painful dose of reality. This was no dream. No ordinary nightmare either. This was real.

The city looked like a creepy ghost town from a cheesy cable movie. Every building in sight was destroyed and covered in a blanket of ash and gray snow. Every once in a while, a crazed survivor could be seen, running, calling out, looking for help. Their cries were left unanswered.

We were alone and scared. Nobody expected the theories and stories to

actually come true. I think that people had put the thought of the apocalypse out of their minds. After 2012 passed with no strange activity, the whole idea seemed like rubbish. Seemed like a lifetime away. We were proven terribly wrong. Nostradamus got it right after all. The earth had played a sickening joke, caving into itself, destroying everything it could. Now here we were with no idea of where to go or what was yet to come.

It continued to get colder. I prayed that the weather stayed clear. A blizzard would kill off every last survivor. We were able to find some torn blankets and dirty coats in the midst of all the rubble. They were filthy and smelled of death and raw sewage. But hygiene

would have to come after warmth. Cold meant death.

I hadn't bathed since it happened. I'm sure I looked like a monster. My hair felt dry and caked with mud and other unknown garbage. I was bruised and cut from the impact of the quake. My mouth was dry. I could taste vomit. But I didn't complain. I needed to be thankful. Not only for the fact that I was alive, but because I was alive with Ryan. He rocks me to sleep each miserable night, and I know he's never going to leave me. Yes, I can say I'm grateful.

We walked past a young boy today, probably around seven years old. I'll never know how he made it. His blue eyes stood out like jewels against his

bruised body. The look of terror and bewilderment on his face made my heart ache. I looked at Ryan with pleading eyes. He shook his head.

"Cecilia," he said taking my hand, "he won't make it. At this point, it'd only frustrate him and slow us down. We don't know what happens next, and we can't take risks. It's every man for himself."

He was right. We couldn't have any extra baggage on our hands. But I looked at the boy with sympathy. I wondered how he felt. Was he confused? Well I guess that was obvious. Where was his mom? How was his life before … this? I almost began to argue with Ryan's decision, but reality set in.

Emotionally I was drained. My body ached from being shaken to its core. My stomach longed for food. My throat was dry and thirsted for water. The snow was too dirty to touch. We had to walk. We had to figure out the severity of the situation. We needed food. We needed water. We needed shelter. So far, we'd only come across moldy food and dirty water. I'd tried drinking some, but it only made me sick. Other than that, we'd only found more dirt, mangled bodies, and the rubble of what used to be. It seemed as if someone had come and stolen all the necessary items to live.



Sara Michelle

Texas teen, Sara Michelle, pens her debut series. Currently attending an arts magnet program, this young author has big dreams.

My New Normal

The Aftermath * Book 1

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