

Love Is the Higher Law

By David Levithan

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Bestselling author David Levithan (*Every Day*; *Boy Meets Boy*; *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* with John Green) **treats the tragic events of September 11th with care and compassion in this novel of loss and grief, but also of hope and redemption.**

First there is a Before, and then there is an After. . . .


The lives of three teens—Claire, Jasper, and Peter—are altered forever on September 11, 2001. Claire, a high school junior, has to get to her younger brother in his classroom. Jasper, a college sophomore from Brooklyn, wakes to his parents' frantic calls from Korea, wondering if he's okay. Peter, a classmate of Claire's, has to make his way back to school as everything happens around him.

Here are three teens whose intertwining lives are reshaped by this catastrophic event. As each gets to know the other, their moments become wound around each other's in a way that leads to new understandings, new friendships, and new levels of awareness for the world around them and the people close by.

David Levithan has written a novel of loss and grief, but also one of hope and redemption. As his characters slowly learn to move forward in their lives, despite being changed forever, one rule remains: love is indeed the higher law.

A MARGARET A. EDWARDS AWARD WINNER

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up—Claire and Peter are friendly acquaintances at their New York City high school. Jasper is a freshman in college. They attend a mutual friend's party, and Peter and Jasper make a date for the evening of September 11, 2001. They reschedule and have an excruciating date a week later. Claire and Jasper meet again by chance at Ground Zero when neither can sleep. Claire is called to action, Peter is reverent, and Jasper, a kind of "expert dodger," can't feel a thing. The three come to develop a deep friendship. Levithan's character development is quick and seamless. He defines the trio's personae by how they perceive the tragedy, how they interact, and how they observe the world. The author's prose has never been deeper in thought or feeling. His writing here is especially pure—unsentimental, restrained, and full of love for his characters and setting. Though the trio's talks and emails are philosophically sophisticated, *Love Is the Higher Law* is steadily paced and tightly, economically written. Discussion of the U.S. invasion of Iraq feels like overkill, but it brings the novel to an appropriately queasy end. Levithan captures the mood of post-9/11 New York exquisitely, slashed open to reveal a deep heart.—*Johanna Lewis, New York Public Library* END

About the Author

David Levithan is a children's book editor in New York City. He lives in Hoboken, New Jersey.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Chapter One

Claire

My first thought is: My mother is dead.

When Mrs. Shields, the school secretary, shows up so gravely in the doorway and gestures for Mrs. Otis to come over to her, I am sure that my mother has died, that I am now going to have to pack up my books and go to Sammy's school and collect him and tell him that Mom is dead and I'm all he has now and somehow we'll get by. I am so sure that something is wrong, incredibly wrong, and I can't imagine what else it could be. I am already gathering my books as Mrs. Shields whispers to Mrs. Otis. I see Mrs. Otis nod, distressed, and then Mrs. Shields disappears back into the hall. I sit up straighter, waiting for Mrs. Otis to look at me, to say my name. But instead she looks at all of us and says, "Class, a plane has hit the World Trade Center."

Katie Johnson gasps. Other kids start talking.

I am blank.

And then Mrs. Otis asks, "Do any of you have parents working in the World Trade Center?"

We look around. No. But Teresa says that Jill Breslin, who's in one of the other senior English classes, has a father who works there. I think of our apartment, only ten blocks away from the towers. I know my mother isn't home. I know she left with me and Sammy this morning and continued uptown to her office. But suddenly I'm wondering: What if she forgot something? What if she went back to the apartment? What if she took the subway down to Chambers Street, underneath the towers?

I've gone from being sure she's dead to being unsure she's alive, and that's much scarier, because it almost feels rational.

Mrs. Otis informed us on the first day of school that there would be no cell phone usage tolerated in class, but now it's the fifth day of school and there's nothing she can do. She's trying to hold it together, but she's as confused as we are. Cell phones are ringing, and all these kids are telling their parents they're okay, we're all okay--our school is a good thirty blocks north of the Trade Center. Abby Winter's mom starts telling her what the news is saying, and then she tells it to the rest of us: "The plane hit around the ninetieth floor. The building's still standing, and people are evacuating. Firemen are going up. The other tower looks like it's okay..."

My friend Randy spots a TV in the back of the class, but when he tries it out, all we get is static. I know Randy has a phone and I ask him if I can use it. I try calling Mom's office, but nobody picks up. I leave a message on the answering machine, telling her I'm okay.

The principal gets on the PA and says that all the classes have been informed of the "situation downtown," and that if there are any "concerned students," they should come to the guidance suite. We all know what he means by concerned students--he means if your parents are there.

We're not a big school. There are only about seventy kids in each grade. So I can't help imagining Jill Breslin down there in the guidance office, and a few other kids. Teresa's getting frantic now, saying she has to go see Jill. And it's not even like they're best friends. Mrs. Otis tries to calm her down, saying the guidance counselors will take care of it. And I think that kind of makes sense, since the guidance counselors are adults, but it also doesn't, because even if Teresa isn't best friends with Jill, she definitely knows Jill more than any of the guidance counselors do.

The thought of Jill Breslin in that guidance office makes me feel I should go to the lower school and see Sammy. I wonder if they've told the second graders what's happening, or if Mrs. Lawson is closing the blinds and giving them a spelling test.

Suddenly there's this big scream from the classroom next to ours--at least ten people yelling out. Mrs. Otis goes to the door connecting her room to Mr. Baker's, and about half our class follows, so we're there when she asks what's going on. But nobody needs to answer--Mr. Baker's gotten his TV to work, and it's not one but two towers that are burning, and they're saying on the TV that there was a second plane, that the towers are under attack, and seeing it erases any premonitions I might have had, because even if I felt something was wrong, I never would have pictured this.

This isn't even something I've feared, because I never knew it was a possibility. Kids are crying now, both in Mr. Baker's class and in my class, and we're looking at each other like What do we do? and the principal is on the PA again telling everyone to remain calm, which only makes it worse. It's like the principal knows something he's not telling us, and the TV is saying that people are jumping, and Teresa just loses it completely, and we're all thinking about Jill and who knows who else, and people are trying to call their parents on their cell phones, but now all the lines are busy, or maybe they've stopped working, and I don't even have a cell phone and neither does my mother. I just want to get Sammy and go home.

All of our class is in Mr. Baker's room now--it's practically the whole twelfth grade. Mrs. Otis and Mr. Baker are in the front, talking to each other, and then Mrs. Otis heads to the office to see what's going on. Randy offers his phone to me again, but says it's not really working, although maybe it will work for me. It doesn't, and I don't know what else I can do, except I realize now I should've given my mom Randy's number. The

TV is showing people downtown running away. I tell Randy I have to get my brother, and saying it to him makes it mean I'm going to do it.

I go up to Mr. Baker and say my brother's in the lower school, in second grade, and I have to go get him. This girl Marisol hears me and says her sister's over there, too, in first grade, and is probably really scared. Mr. Baker says nobody is supposed to leave the school, but we tell him we're only going across the street, and we must sound really desperate, because he looks at us and says it's fine, as long as we come straight back.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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