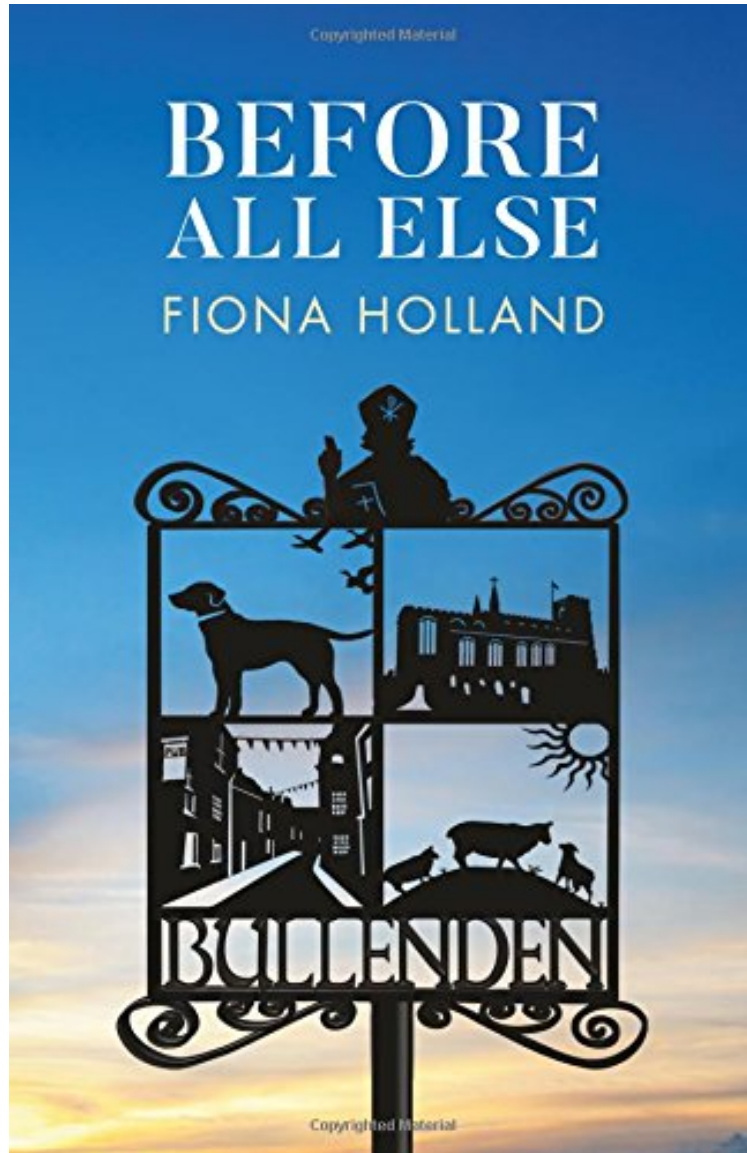


(Mobile book) Before All Else

Before All Else

Fiona Holland

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#7221224 in Books 2016-08-05 Original language: English 8.50 x .57 x 5.511, .71 #File Name: 1781325391252 pages | File size: 56.Mb

Fiona Holland : Before All Else before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Before All Else:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Slow, sedate, classic village life By Tracey Madeley This novel relies heavily on its use of language with a slow, sedate, country setting and a classical feel. A noticeable eccentricity are the headings for every change in point of view and there are numerous in the beginning, but with the introduction of Marcus this does settle down. For me the male characters are the most interesting. Marcus encapsulates the feelings of

freedom following the separation from his wife, with the disorganisation of not quite knowing how to function. Eventually he discovers a passion for local history which gives him a new purpose. Ned is the stereo typical white van driver running a young man off the road as he drives around the village. Yet he is there to help Ben, a teenager with obvious learning difficulties, acquire skills and purpose. This relationship is particularly well drawn as it shows Ben's character without spelling it out. The young traveller who Ned runs off the road is interesting, as he comes with new ideas and could be a potential flash point for the elderly village residents. The sisters, Cecily, Amelia and Tilly are the main characters, but for me they weren't particularly interesting. Cecily appears to disapprove of Marcus in the beginning and even though she offers to help him with the computer, you know they are not a match. She is contrasted very sharply with Madge's drunken, loud mouthed display at the funeral in the beginning of the book. Tilly tends a flock of sheep and has a daughter, Lizzy, with the lazy, good for nothing boyfriend. Cecily's secret is revealed at the end of the book, but does not appear to be referenced throughout the novel. As stated previously, the strength of this novel lies in its language. The idea that 'funerals are always funny affairs.' That there is an 'unnatural humidity and piousness brought on by the religious surroundings...of one's own position in the queue advancing of being ushered up the line faster than one would wish.' This is a wonderful way of referring to our own mortality, also alluding to the very British idea of forming a queue. It is also fitting that this view is attributed to Cecily the most respectable of the sisters. Marcus's experience when the removal men leave is 'a trail of cigarette butts between the pavement and his new front door, and grubby coffee cups lined up, helpfully, on the telephone stand in the hallway.' Yet despite the chaos and the mess he is surrounded by peace and quiet, something he has not known for a very long time. After the funeral at the beginning the pregnancy at the end is quite fitting, as it gives the hope of new life and something good for the sisters to look forward to.

How deep do we bury our secrets? The Suffolk village of Bullenden is the setting for this comic and bitter-sweet tale of peccadilloes, consequences and lemon drizzle cake. Cecily, long-time resident of the village and outwardly most respectable of the three de Mare sisters, cannot escape the murky events of her past. Loud-mouthed Mandy threatens to blow her secret wide open. Will Cecily's reputation survive or will she lose face to the two people who matter most in her life – her sisters? Marcus flees London at the end of his marriage to the vitriolic Velda while she blithely shares their relationship's most intimate secrets with her own outraged sisterhood. What are the post-break-up rules here? In this highly characterful village, we meet, amongst many others, Madge the irrepressible Post Mistress, Gwyddno the reluctant Pagan traveller and Major Welding, anxious to reinvent himself following a rather close shave with the authorities. During preparations for the annual summer fair, the village reveals its own hidden treasure – an ancient and holy space is unearthed. Marcus, amateur history sleuth, is given a chance to rebuild his tattered life as he investigates the magic, mystery and purpose of this rediscovered place. Layers – both personal and archaeological – are stripped away. Sometimes the silent voices of our past sing our way to a brighter future.

About the Author Fiona Holland was born in Malta during her parents' Navy posting. School, University and Secretarial College followed in due succession, as did a variety of jobs as au-pair, wedding car chauffeur, pig farmer, potato picker and foster carer. Her writing career was given a mighty fillip by winning the 2013 Gladstone's Library Short Fiction prize for her story Looking The Other Way. Gladstone's Library is home to the Victorian, three-times Prime Minister's book collection, and the prize was awarded from submissions from all over the world judged by established writers. Since that time Fiona has focussed on her creative writing together with running a 5-acre small-holding in North Wales and offering a writers retreat in her hand-crafted Shepherd's Hut. Before All Else is her first published novel. To find out more, visit www.fionaholland.co.uk