



Before You Were Everything: Reflections on Finding Love, Legacy, and Becoming in a Life Rewritten

Mya Fort-Marshall

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Cataloging personal joys and sorrows as they relate to family members and friendships, Before You Were Everything is a memoir that evinces hunger for life.

Mya Fort-Marshall's humorous memoir and self-help book *Before You Were Everything* is about navigating the complexities of family life and relationships.

Made up of stories about Fort-Marshall's friends, large family, and relationships with men, this book muses through themes of self-discovery, illness, and resilience. Each vignette is amplified by lists of songs, and recipes are included at the end of the book, along with reflections on their deeper meanings and connections to Fort-Marshall's family members. Indeed, tales about meals shared with supportive friends stand out in the text, which celebrates community bonds during moments of celebration and crisis.

The unapologetic and personable prose features rollicking, rhythmic word choices and a heavy use of staccato phrases that speak to intentional storytelling. Bridging different backgrounds and experiences, Fort-Marshall's tales about relationships are engaging and poignant. For instance, she captures a mother's profound love for her children, describes friendships with clarity, and fleshes out her favorite people to call multiple times a day with tenderness.

Illuminating descriptions, as of "kneading ancestral blessings and griefs" into bread, the "whispers and quiet signals" of eroding rejection, and the experience of being raised by women who were "editors of memory," abound in the linguistically expansive text. Moving memories arise, as of an honest exchange between a daughter and father, the shock of dealing with breast cancer, and a breakdown following from the exhaustion of "pretending"—intimate insights into Fort-Marshall's life and particular challenges. Recollections as of having a "mirror" held up by a friend during late-night conversations prove stirring because of their candid revelations of private pains.

Indeed, in the end, this is more of a memoir than a guide for others. In the place of outward advice come lessons, as with the bullet-point list of morals that might be extracted from each chapter that appears, in summary form, at the end of the book, but which is somewhat superfluous given the book's personal focus. Further, the portion of the book that's titled "Return to Myself" is more scattered than the text's other sections, made up of brief, disjointed stories that jump between topics, as when the book shifts from a discussion of hope to consideration of "performing" on social media, and then covers Fort-Marshall's travels in Ghana.

Cataloging personal joys and sorrows as they relate to family members and friendships, *Before You Were Everything* is a lively memoir.

ANDREA HAMMER (April 30, 2026)

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