

MACMILLAN READERS

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**INTERMEDIATE LEVEL**

DAVID NICHOLLS

# One Day

Retold by F H Cornish

 **MACMILLAN**

## PART ONE – THEIR EARLY TWENTIES

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## *The Future*

Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1988

*Rankeillor Street, Edinburgh, Scotland*

**T**he important thing in life is to make a difference – to make a change to something,’ the girl said.

‘Ah – you mean we have to change the world?’ the boy replied.

‘No, not *all* of the world, we just have to change the bit of it around us,’ the girl said. She was silent for a moment, then she laughed at herself. ‘I can’t believe I said that. It’s such a predictable<sup>8</sup> thing to say, isn’t it? But what *are* you going to do with your life? What’s your plan?’

‘Well, my parents are coming to collect me later today,’ he told her. ‘Then I’ll go to France for a few weeks and after that, maybe I’ll go to China.’

‘Oh, you’re going *travelling*,’ she said wearily<sup>9</sup>. ‘You’re predictable too. You’ve got too much money, that’s your problem, Dexter. What you really mean is that you’re running away from real life.’

‘Travelling broadens the mind<sup>8</sup>, Emma,’ he said slowly. He was trying to copy the girl’s accent. Suddenly, he leaned over her and kissed her.

‘I think you’re too broad-minded now,’ the girl said, quickly turning her face away from him.

The girl was from Yorkshire, in the north of England. She was used to posh<sup>10</sup> boys from the south making fun of her soft northern accent. Sometimes she didn’t care, but now she

suddenly felt annoyed<sup>11</sup> with the boy. Everything was going wrong tonight. ‘Anyway, I’m not talking about the immediate future,’ she told him. ‘I’m not asking about tomorrow, I’m asking what you want to be in twenty years from now.’

At first, the best answer he could think of was ‘I want to be rich and famous’. But then he thought a bit more and spoke seriously. ‘I don’t ever want to be different from this,’ he said. ‘I’d like to stay exactly as I am now. Every fifteenth of July, I want to be just like this.’

The girl was called Emma Morley. The boy’s name was Dexter Mayhew. They were lying on the narrow bed in Emma’s room in a shared flat. It was four o’clock in the morning. The two young people didn’t know each other very well, but certainly this was a night for thinking about the future. It was the last night of their university life in Edinburgh. Earlier in the day, after four years, they had finally graduated<sup>12</sup>. Soon they would go in separate directions.

Emma looked up at the boy as he leaned over her. She was a little annoyed with him, but she still thought that he was handsome. ‘Mm – handsome. Perhaps “beautiful” is a better word,’ she thought. And she knew that lots of the other girl students agreed with her – especially the posh ones from the south. They all knew that he would get their clothes off and get them into his bed. His body was muscular and the skin of his face was tight. His eyebrows were slim and his lips were full. ‘Yes, he’s beautiful, but he looks a little like a cat,’ Emma told herself.

‘I think I can imagine you when you’re forty,’ she said unkindly. ‘You’ll have an expensive red sports car and live in the most expensive part of London. You’ll be married to your third wife – no, I’m wrong, your *fourth* wife. There won’t be any children. You’re too selfish<sup>13</sup> for children. No children, just three expensive divorces<sup>14</sup>.’

‘Well, Em,’ Dexter began crossly<sup>15</sup>.

'Who's "Em"?' Emma quickly asked.

'Your friends call you "Em", I've heard them call you that,' he said.

'Ah, yes, my *friends* call me that,' Emma replied.

'Can't I call you that?' he asked. He sounded worried.

'Oh, all right then, *Dex*,' she said. 'Go on.'

'Well, if you think I'm so terrible why are you sleeping with me?' he asked.

'Well, I don't think I really have slept with you, have I?' she replied. 'You can choose either meaning of "sleep" – I mean, we haven't been to sleep and we haven't done anything else, have we?'

'No,' the boy said, 'no, we haven't quite done that.'

Tonight Emma had wanted something different. She wasn't sure what it was, but their names sounded good together. 'Emma and Dexter,' she thought. 'Em and Dex.'

'Wait there,' Emma said. 'I'm just going to the bathroom. Don't go away.' She put on her thick glasses and walked towards the door.

In the bathroom, Emma asked herself why she was being difficult with the boy. 'He's certainly very bourgeois<sup>16</sup> and he isn't very clever, but I really like him,' she told herself.

Emma had liked Dexter since she'd first met him at a party two years before. But she'd never got to know him and in just a few hours he would be gone. And he certainly wasn't going to ask her to go to China with him. It was a bit sad. For the first time in four years she was with a boy she really liked. But she couldn't relax with him. They had been kissing and talking for eight hours now and she still didn't know what she wanted.

Dexter, waiting in the bedroom, looked around him. He had been in so many rooms like this one – rooms where girls like Emma lived. These girls always wore t-shirts with political slogans<sup>17</sup> on the fronts. There were always political posters on their walls. There were always CDs of political songs. They

were all the same, these girls with socialist<sup>18</sup> ideas. They always thought that *he* was horribly bourgeois and they always thought that being bourgeois was bad. Well, he had news for them. He thought that being bourgeois was just fine.

Dexter hadn't really decided yet on a map for his future life. But he was twenty-three years old and he had *some* ambitions<sup>19</sup>. He wanted to be successful at something – he just didn't know at *what*. He wanted to make his parents proud of him. He wanted to meet lots of women. He wanted to have lots of fun in his life and he wanted never to be sad.

Thinking about fun and sadness, Dexter was now feeling that this night had been a mistake. There were going to be tears. There were going to be angry phone calls.

Emma returned and lay down beside him again. She had put on a t-shirt with a political slogan on the front.

'Do you mind if we just cuddle<sup>20</sup>, Dex?' Emma said.

Dexter didn't think this was a good idea at all, but he didn't say so. 'OK, if that's what you want,' he said, without interest.

'I can't believe I just said "cuddle",' Emma said, after a minute of silence. 'What a terrible bourgeois word for me to use! I'm sorry.'

'We must get some sleep,' said Dexter. He was thinking, 'This must never happen again.'

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There was daylight outside the window. Dexter was still awake and he was looking at Emma, who was sleeping next to him. 'I could leave quietly now, before she wakes up,' he told himself. 'Then I don't need to see her again. Will she mind? Probably, girls usually do mind. But will *I* mind?'

It was strange, but the answer to this was not clear to Dexter. There was something about Emma. She was pretty, but she seemed to hate herself for that. The red colour of her hair was out of a bottle and her hairstyle was awful. Dexter guessed that Emma's hair had been cut by Tilly Killick, the large, noisy



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girl who lived in the other room in this flat. 'But never mind the hair,' Dexter thought. 'Her face is really pretty and her body's *amazing*.'

Soon he decided that he *would* leave quietly, never mind what Emma's face and body were like. 'I'll probably never see her again,' he told himself.

Dexter was about to get quietly out of bed when Emma woke up.

'What are you doing later today?' she asked, sleepily.

'Tell her you're busy!' said a voice in Dexter's head.

'I don't have any plans,' he said aloud.

'Shall we do something together then?' she asked.

'Yes, all right,' Dexter said.

A moment later, Emma was asleep again.