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It's a summer's day in 1946. The English village of Wealding is no longer troubled by distant sirens, yet the rustling coils of barbed wire are a reminder that something, some quality of life, has evaporated. Together again after years of separation, Laura and Stephen Marshall and their daughter Victoria are forced to manage without "those anonymous caps and aprons who lived out of sight and pulled the strings." Their rambling garden refuses to be tamed, the house seems perceptibly to crumble. But alone on a hillside, as evening falls, Laura comes to see what it would have meant if the war had been lost, and looks to the future with a new hope and optimism. First published in 1947, this subtle, finely wrought novel presents a memorable portrait of the aftermath of war, its effect upon a marriage, and the gradual but significant change in the nature of English middle-class life.

## One Fine Day Details

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Author : Mollie Panter-Downes

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## From Reader Review One Fine Day for online ebook

### Leah says

An utterly beautiful short novel, exquisitely written and delicately handled.

This is a fascinating subject for me: the uneasy settling into life after such monumental upheaval as six years of total war, the stark knowledge that things will never go back to the way they were, the overwhelming relief tempered still with sadness and disorientation. These drifting sentiments are all tenderly dealt with by Panter-Downes, and sit beautifully alongside the musings about a woman's lot in life, the little agonies and disappointments and discomforts that make up a housewife's day.

Laura's fate has been kinder to her than many others': her husband came home from the war, her house is standing and her family safe. Stephen has a job, and their daughter is flourishing happily. But the undeniable truth is that their house, once replete with the caps and aprons of comfortable servitude, is unmanageable when those caps and aprons are replaced with factory uniforms and headscarves, and the wearers are never coming back again. The house is gently falling apart, dust gathers beneath the beds, the garden is running slowly wild, and the comfortably-middle-class Marshalls cannot hold back the tide. Their frustration runs through their internal lives, an undercurrent of loss and confusion and despair.

Both, separately, consider leaving, but never seriously. The love of their land, their England, binds them firmly to home, to the Weald, to the Barrow Down and the smell of the sea air just over the hills. Barbed wire may rust in the fields and the young people all may leave the villages to find work in the cities, but those who knew life here as it once was cannot forget it.

Though we stay mainly with Laura in this omniscient narration, we dip smoothly in and out of the lives of the people she encounters on her fine summer's day: the inimitable Mrs Prout, popping up like a Punch and Judy puppet over and over again throughout and enjoying the fates of her neighbours, the hobbling old retainer of the crumbling (and finally given-up) Manor house who remembers the old days, the young walking man with his open-necked shirt who had promised himself this journey for years, and we spend some little time with Laura's husband and with her daughter.

The preoccupations of each are delightfully sketched: ten-year-old Victoria wonders what it would be like to have her friend Mouse's family instead of her own, and how pleasant it is to eat cream and butter for tea; Stephen muses on how many years he has been catching the same train to the same job, and how many more he must do so; and yet each and every one address the novel's central theme in their own way - how to go on, how to move forwards, after such unbearable upheaval, when all one wants is for things back the way they were, and the only certainty in this new life is that things will never go back.

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### Girl with her Head in a Book says

For my full review: <http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2...>

What a beautiful novel this was - a peculiar dreamy quality made it feel like more of an 'impression' than a story, as though Panter-Downes was conveying the experience of post-war life rather than anything specific to the particular characters she draws out so effortlessly. We follow Laura Marshall as she goes about her

day, safe and secure after the conflict but discovering herself to be living a life entirely different to the one that she had before. The sun is bright, the air shimmering with heat, the tarmac soft on the road and the crops ripe for harvesting in the fields - all that they have fought for all of these years has been returned to them. Panter-Downes paints England at its most idyllic - there are no clouds in the sky, the storm clouds are all internal as the Marshalls contemplate what has changed and who they will be in this new landscape.

One Fine Day manages to maintain a placid tone despite simultaneously dealing with the trauma of war. The Marshalls are back together in their big country house with husband Stephen recently returned from the war. He is startled to find his daughter Victoria a grown up girl of ten and still more discomforted to find his wife in charge of the cooking and cleaning with all the servants gone. Stephen looks back with longing to a time when the garden was not a jungle, when he could look out on it with pride and comment casually to visitors that his 'man was good on roses', but the gardener was killed in France. He thinks of the food that their old cook used to serve and remembers guiltily that she died in an air raid. Life pre-war was simpler, tidier - Victoria came to them spick and span in Nanny's charge while now they must look to their child themselves. The 'anonymous caps and aprons who lived out of sight and pulled the strings' are gone - either killed in the conflict or moved on to work in factories and the workings of the home are exposed.

The feeling of One Fine Day is of a nation who are exhausted, mentally and emotionally. Stephen is tired, coming home from work and then having to spend his evenings trying to get some kind of order back in the garden, his daughter barely remembers him and his wife has suddenly become middle-aged. Laura is uncertain in her resumed role as wife, concerned by the prospect of disappointing her husband, her daughter, dreading her mother's judgment. Mrs Herriot laments that after the trouble she took in bringing Laura up that her daughter should find herself doing housework is a tragedy, wishing that she had married the other man, who still manages to keep his servants. Both Stephen and Mrs Herriot are intensely nostalgic, they have expectations for Victoria's up-bringing, that she should have the 'Herriot trimmings', learn the piano, have accomplishments, but Laura is quietly becoming aware that the era of being decorative is over and that it is 'perfectly clear that [Victoria] would have to work seriously for her living'.

Reading this as a twenty-first-century woman gave me real pause - Mollie Panter-Downes is capturing a moment of real social change. What is the use of having the 'agile foot' and 'nimble finger' that Mrs Herriot so prized? How many of us have held on to these skills in this day and age? Laura marvels at the child conceived out of a wedlock by a village girl by a Polish officer, thinking it a strange thing that this working-class child should have such exotic genetic heritage after generations and generation of his family have lived in the village. Moments later, the boy's uncle declines Mrs Marshall's kind offer to come and work in her garden since he will be leaving to get a job elsewhere soon - travel during the services has opened his eyes to the world beyond the village. Laura knows, as Stephen is unable yet to accept, that the caps and aprons will not be coming back, no matter how many notices he has put in the paper.

I was reminded of *Gone with the Wind* in an odd way, of how helpless Ashley Wilkes and his peers were once transplanted to a world without slaves to manage their lives - the oppression on which the system was based is different but the strange way in which the 'overlords' have relied on others is the same. The irritation that Mrs Herriot feels that the working class no longer wish to work in service is mirrored by the kindly contempt felt by the working class Mrs Prout, who does still come in to the Marshalls to clean for a few mornings a week and who watches bemused as poor Mrs Marshall lets the milk boil over while tending to a bird that has fallen out of its nest, or her inability to stop the dog from running off. But by contrast, Laura is beginning to acknowledge that perhaps, after all they have been through, keeping up appearances is not as vital as they had all believed. She considers how little she minded the gentle chaos of repeated house guests during the war, when they were a cluster of women with husbands far away, all making do and helping each other.

As Laura travels round the countryside, trying to track down her errant dog, she witnesses a series of events caused by war. She meets a war widow who is making a remarriage to a man who is not in any way the equal to her first husband. The jagged shock as the woman looks back at Laura and dares her to comment is fiercely felt - there is nothing to be said. She visits the home of the local squire, about to be sold to the nation, while the local 'rascal' makes a profit in the soaring building trade, the accepted social order tipped on its head. Laura travels up the hill and remembers coming here on a picnic with a pregnant friend, whose husband was killed without ever meeting their child. The emotional moment as Laura rejoices that she is free, after five years of terror, that she still has the things that matter most - it is a beautiful moment of patriotic delight and relief, something that I feel could only have been captured so perfectly by a survivor. The world had changed, the culture of deference was gone, but how can one do anything other than be recklessly glad to have come out on the other side?

One Fine Day is a powerful piece of work, managing despite its short length to catch the reader off guard. Panter-Downes seems to have caught that particular moment in amber, as the world tried to decide how to move forward, what to do better and what to give up entirely. I was reminded of the film *A Diary for Timothy* which I studied at university, which is an account of the first six months in the life of a baby during 1945, but what I remember most is the way that the narrator, with words scripted by E.M. Forster seems to reflect on the world which is on offer to this child and how we can make it better. There are obvious parallels to be made between Laura Marshall and other parallel 1940s literary ladies, perhaps the one who springs most immediately to mind is *Diary of a Provincial Lady* but there is less slapstick and more naturalism to Laura. We sense her spirit, how her quiet demeanour masks determination - just as she decided against the suitor approved by her mother, she is deciding how she will lead her life. One Fine Day is a keenly observant novel, tracking not just the Marshall family but also the village and by extension England as a whole as the nation rebuilds and recovers from harrowing warfare. Despite the darkness that it recalls, this is a warm and uplifting book which champions survival and fresh beginnings and makes one feel a sense of pride in those generations who truly lived this experience.

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### **Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says**

Clearly the strongest I've read from Virago thus far. Reminds me of *Mrs Dalloway* in that day-of-life manner.

Please, I am wishing you one fine day.

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### **Catie says**

Read October 2016 for @simondavidthomas's 1947 Book Club

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### **Proustitute says**

(I'm not really writing reviews here anymore, but this book is too good to go unremarked on. Apologies for the very generic sort of review below, but don't let this book slip past your radar, whatever you do.)

Imagine *Mrs. Dalloway* taking place during the first summer of peace after the Second World War, and you have something very similar to Panter-Downes's *One Fine Day*. The prose here is eerily similar to Woolf's, in fact, as well as Bowen's and even Elizabeth Taylor's, but the overarching debt here is very obviously to Woolf's novel. Much more so than there, though, does Panter-Downes get more under the skin of the class system, its destabilization after WWII, and the sense of delusion under which most privileged Brits lived during the war. While Laura holds the center, and causes Panter-Downes to focus a lot on women's changing roles in and out of the domestic sphere, comments about class and aging, class and bias, class and hypocrisy—all combined with an attention to gender—, there are some very astute portraits in here, too, of a crisis in masculinity that the war prompted more so than WWI did, a sense of displacement, and, even still, a nationalistic pride and all but unfounded optimism that is never droll, trite, or sentimental.

It's a damn shame this book is out of print; even more so, that Panter-Downes has written several other novels, about which I can find hardly any information at all, anywhere. If anyone finds information out, please do comment below. This is a fantastic writer whose insight into humanity just in the aftermath of chaos is so worthwhile and prescient to read given the current political climate.

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### **Cathy says**

One of the best short novels I have read in a long time. Exceptional writing.

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### **Sylvester says**

Spotted this on Overbylass' site, it sounded like my kind of book - and was. Couldn't get a more fitting title - one day in the life of Laura Marshall. Every so often I crave a book like this, quiet, where nothing much happens (except life as it really is) but where I am given moments and thoughts that rush up from the past or loom in from the future. I found the reflective description superb, and could relate to the main character in so many ways.

"All those windows, she thought in horror. For the rest of her life, now, she would see things from the point of view of cleaning them. Confronted by a masterpiece of architecture, she would think merely, How much floor to sweep, how many stairs to run up and down."

(So help me, I've had that exact thought!) While not for the thrill-seeking, this was a beautifully written and thoughtful novel. It moves slowly, but has rhythm and a sense of change and time -something not easily accomplished, in my experience.

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### **Jeanette says**

In this beautiful and lyrically told novel Mollie Panter-Downes chronicles a day in the life of the Marshall family, a middle class family living in post World War II England.

While Britain has come out of the war victorious, life has not returned to what it once was and for most, it never will.

The change the Marshall family feels most keenly is domestic. They have been left to manage a house and garden without the servants that they once had.

"And it suddenly struck him as preposterous how dependent he and his class had been on the anonymous caps and aprons who lived out of sight and worked the strings. All his life he had expected to find doors opened if he rang, to wake up to the soft rattle of curtain rings being drawn back, to find the fires bright and the coffee smoking hot every morning as though household spirits had been working while he slept. And now the strings had been dropped, they all lay helpless as abandoned marionettes with nobody to twitch them."

The gardener who kept Stephen's garden growing and vital was killed in Holland. The maid, nanny and cook left to help with the war effort and won't be returning. Finding new help is all but impossible as the younger generation looks to expanding possibilities that have opened up beyond their country villages.

Flighty Laura is left to keep the once beautiful, now crumbling, house together and keep dinner from boiling over, burning or being eaten by the cat. Stephen is left with only the occasional help of a slow, plodding, half-deaf old man in the garden. Their daughter, Victoria, does not remember much about life before the war and does not understand her parent's present concerns and stresses.

Mollie Panter-Downes created a very powerful, character driven novel illustrating how life has been irrevocably changed on all levels of society following the war. Through following the seemingly mundane day in the life of one family on a hot summer day we see an entire nation coming to grips with a new way of life and a new social order.

While there is a strong sense of what has been lost throughout the novel, there is also a sense of hope and optimism.

"But never, even then, had Laura felt quite this rush of overwhelming thankfulness, so that the land swam and misted and danced before her. She had had to lose a dog and climb a hill, a year later, to realize what it would have meant if England had lost. We are at peace, we still stand, we will stand when you are dust, sang the humming land in the summer evening."

Originally published in 1947 this novel examines the war and its impact on those left to pick up the pieces of a post war life.

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### **Jane says**

This is a lovely book which gives you a sense of post WW II England as felt by those who had formerly been able to count on hired help for so much of their daily lives. It is far more than that, though, with the author's wry humor and humane observations about the human condition everywhere present.

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### **JacquiWine says**

In this beautifully written novel, we follow a day in the life of the Marshalls, an upper-middle-class family struggling to find a new way to live in an England irrevocably altered by the Second World War. While Britain has emerged victorious from the conflict, life in the country has not returned to 'normal', to the way things were before – and for many people, it never will. Set on a blisteringly hot day in the summer of 1946, the novel captures a moment of great social change as thousands of families find themselves having to adapt to significant shifts in circumstances. For some inhabitants of Wealding, a picturesque village in the home counties, the war has opened up fresh opportunities and pastures new; but for others like Laura Marshall and her husband Stephen, it has led to a marked decline in living standards compared to the glory days of the late 1930s.

To read my review, please visit:

<https://jacquiwine.wordpress.com/2017...>

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### **Ali says**

At the time Panter Downes was writing this novel, thousands of families were adapting themselves to the changes that came with the end of the war. *One Fine Day* goes right to the heart of those difficulties. Mollie Panter Downes doesn't limit her story to a plot driven domestic drama, although a small middle class family are the focus. She is a superb observer of people and communities, and demonstrates an astute understanding for the challenges for people coming out of a long, uncertain conflict.

Laura and Stephen Marshall and their ten-year-old daughter Victoria must learn how to live with each other again in this new world. A world inhabited by widows, where food is as strictly rationed as ever, and domestic help is hard to come by. The Marshalls' garden is badly overgrown, attended to by a man too old for the work. Laura is helped in the house by her daily Mrs Prout – a local woman who jibbs at calling her employer Madam. Laura is vague, distracted a slightly bohemian character, she isn't as distressed by the domestic disharmony as her puzzled husband who views the evidence of these more straitened times at home with some dismay.

<https://heavenali.wordpress.com/2016/...>

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### **Arpita (BagfullofBooks) says**

4.5

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### **Katrina says**

It's a day in the life of Laura Marshall as she and everyone around her try to get back to a normal life after the end of World War 2. Humorous at times - a very good read.

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### **Jonathan says**

Splendid. Compact and precisely delineated. The pages echo with sadness and loss, with hesitation, with that disoriented post-war moment where a whole social structure felt itself tremble and tumble and turn. The prose is beautiful too - not flashy, just calmly crafted and sighing melodically in that particularly southern English way.

As I grew up in that landscape of hedgerows and fields and low hills, of old thatched cottages and "lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace", it successfully summoned up in me a nostalgia for all that particular Englishness. The melancholy she explores, at its strongest in the post war decade, still lingered in those communities even by the time I came along, so my response to this work is conceivably at least partly shaped by that. Regardless, a lovely piece of work deserving of a much wider readership.

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### **Tania says**

A beautifully written, rather contemplative story.

It takes place over the course of one day, shortly after the end of WW2. We mainly follow Laura, as she struggles to maintain a crumbling house, and a garden that resembles a jungle, in the absence of servants, who are almost impossible to find. She has the help of an ancient gardener, and a lady who comes in to chat in the morning, but feels that it's all too much. We also hear briefly from her husband Stephan and daughter Victoria.

There is a strong sense of the changing times. The people who would have been servants are moving on to better places, opportunities are opening up for them, leaving those who would have expected to have help to fend for themselves.

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### **Caroline Scott says**

Full of herbaceous border and crisp observation, this one-day-in-a-life text is a real optimism enhancer. Very much of its era in certain attitudes, it's also strikingly modern in some of its angles. The Dorothy Parker comparison is perhaps overdone, but Mollie Panter-Downes does have a just-so turn of phrase and enjoyable edge. She also *evokes* beautifully – lots of scent and texture in the writing here – and creates a lovely mood; in its feeling of bright, sweet melancholy I was reminded of *A Month in the Country*. A book that's pleasurable to inhabit. The joy is in the detail and the precious ordinary.

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### **Alana/MiaTheReader says**

Beautifully written! Makes you think about the small things in life and how to take your days from tedium to glory. I also loved the historical aspect of seeing how things changed for small towns and for women after WWII.

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### **Tfitoby says**

A fascinating look at the after effects of WWII on every day life in a small English village, possibly the first time I've read something about that war that has managed to make me understand the truth of what happened to English society after the jubilant celebrations of peacetime - the sheer volume of loss in terms of bodies, the empty spaces and haunting memories everywhere you turn, the impact this had on the economy, the jobs that just went undone, another reason why rationing lasted SO long - despite spending an entire term discussing it in year 7 history classes. And that alone makes this a worthwhile experience, in spite of the insecure narrator who spends half her life questioning her every action and imagining that everybody is so much better at everything or happier than her, which is quite exhausting to be around for any length of time.

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### **Mary says**

Beautifully written.

Set in a hot day in July 1946.

The war has ended and life will never be the same again for the middle classes.

Mollie has an eye for character.

This is such a wonderful book which I devoured in a day.

It has a beautiful cover on the original Virago edition which I recently bought in a charity shop.

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### **Hilary says**

I enjoyed this book, but it felt similar to others I have read and didn't stand out for me in any way.

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