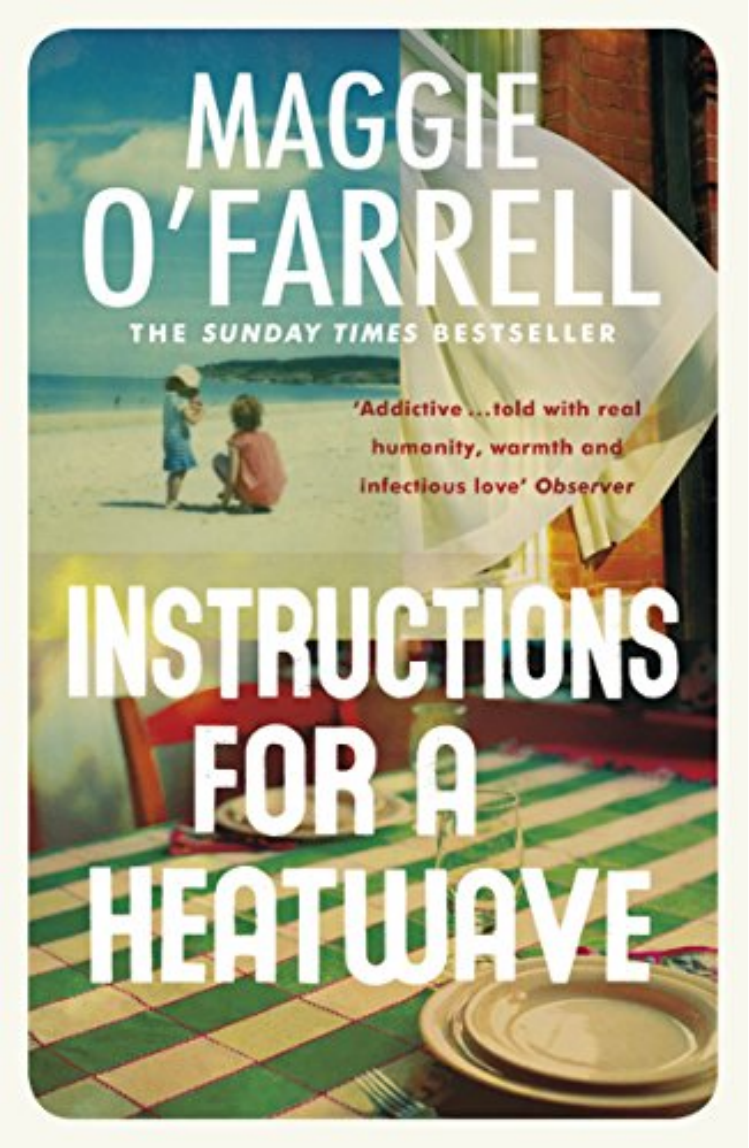
Instructions for a Heatwave (English Edition)



Par Maggie O'Farrell
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(Online library) Instructions for a Heatwave (English Edition)

Par Maggie O'Farrell : Instructions for a Heatwave (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Instructions for a Heatwave (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA story of a dysfunctional but deeply loveable family reunited, INSTRUCTIONS FOR A HEATWAVE by Maggie O'Farrell already feels like a contemporary classic. It was shortlisted for the 2013 Costa Novel Award and was a Sunday Times Top Ten bestseller.It's July 1976. In London, it hasn't rained for months, gardens are filled with aphids, water comes from a standpipe, and Robert Riordan tells his wife Gretta that he's going round the corner to buy a newspaper. He doesn't come back. The search for Robert brings Gretta's children - two estranged sisters and a brother on the brink of divorce - back home, each with different ideas as to where their father might have gone. None of them suspects that their mother might have an explanation that even now she cannot share.ExtraitHighbury, London The heat, the heat. It

wakes Gretta just after dawn, propelling her from the bed and down the stairs. It inhabits the house like a guest who has outstayed his welcome: it lies along corridors, it circles around curtains, it lolls heavily on sofas and chairs. The air in the kitchen is like a solid entity lling the space, pushing Gretta down into the oor, against the side of the table. Only she would choose to bake bread in such weather. Consider her now, yanking open the oven and grimacing in its scorching blast as she pulls out the bread tin. She is in her nightdress, hair still wound onto curlers. She takes two steps backwards and tips the steaming loaf into the sink, the weight of it reminding her, as it always does, of a baby, a newborn, the packed, damp warmth of it. She has made soda bread three times a week for her entire married life. She is not about to let a little thing like a heatwave get in the way of that. Of course, living in London, it is impossible to get buttermilk; she has to make do with a mixture of half milk and half yogurt. A woman at Mass told her it worked and it does, up to a point, but it is never quite the same. At a clacking sound on the lino behind her, she says, Is that you? Breads ready. Its going to be he begins, then stops. Gretta waits for a moment before turning around. Robert is standing between the sink and the table, his large hands upturned, as if hes holding a tea tray. He is staring at some-thing. The tarnished chrome of the tap, perhaps, the runnels of the draining board, that rusting enamel pan. Everything around them is so familiar, its impossible sometimes to tell what your eye has been trained upon, the way a person can no longer hear the individual notes of a known piece of music. Its going to be a what? she demands. He doesnt reply. She moves towards him and places a palm on his shoulder. You all right? She has, of late, been nding herself reminded of his age, the sudden stoop of his back, the look of mild confusion on his face. What? He swings his head around to look at her, as if startled by her touch. Yes. He nods. Of course. I was just saying its going to be another hot one today. He shufes sideways, just as shed known he would, towards the thermometer, which clings, by a spit-moistened sucker, to the outside of the window. It is the third month of the drought. For ten days now the heat has passed 90F. There has been no rainnot for days, not for weeks, not for months. No clouds pass, slow and stately as ships, over the roofs of these houses. With a metallic click, like that of a hammer tapping a nail, a black spot lands on the window, as if pulled there by magnetic force. Robert, still peering at the thermometer, inches. The insect has a striated underside, six legs splaying outwards. Another appears, at the other end of the window, then another, then another. Those buggers are back, he murmurs. Gretta comes to see, jamming on her glasses. Together, they peer at them, transxed. Swarms of red-backed aphids have, in the past week, been passing over the city. They mass in trees, on car windscreens. They catch in the hair of children coming home from school, they nd their way into the mouths of those crazy enough to cycle in this heat, their feet adhere to the sun-creamed limbs of people lying in their back gardens. The aphids ing themselves from the window, their feet detaching at the same moment, as if alerted by some secret signal, and they disappear into the azure sky. Gretta and Robert straighten up, in unison, relieved. Thats them gone, he says. She sees him glance at the clock on the walla quarter to seven. At precisely this time, for more than thirty years, he would leave the house. He would take his coat off the peg by the door, pick up his bag, call goodbye to them all, shouting and squawking in the kitchen, and slam the door behind him. He always left at six forty-ve, on the proverbial dot, no matter what was happening, whether Michael Francis was refusing to get out of bed, whether Aoife was kicking up a stink about Godknowswhat, whether Monica was trying to take over the cooking of the bacon. Not his department, all that, never was. Six forty-ve, and he was out the door, gone. He seems to feel a twitching in his limbs, shes noticed, a kind of vestigial urge to set off, to get going, to be out in the world. Any minute now, she knows, hell be off to the newsagents. With a hand on her bad hip, she pushes the chair out from the table with her foot, and Robert says, Ill just go round the corner and get the paper. Right you are, she says, without looking up. See you in a bit. Gretta sits herself down at the table. Robert has arranged everything she needs: a plate, a knife, a bowl with a spoon, a pat of butter, a jar of marmalade. It is in such small acts of kindness that people know they are loved. Which is, she reects as she moves the sugar bowl to one side, surprisingly rare at their age. So many friends of hers feel overlooked or outgrown or unseen by their husbands, like furniture kept too long. But not her. Robert likes to know where she is at all times, he frets if she leaves the house without telling him, gets edgy if she slips away with-out him seeing, and starts ringing the children to question them on her whereabouts. It used to drive her crazy when they were rst marriedshe used to long for a bit of invisibility, a bit of libertybut shes used to it now. Gretta saws a hunk from the end of the loaf and slathers it with butter. She gets a terrible weakness in her limbs if she doesnt eat regularly. She told a doctor, years ago, that she thought she had hypoglycemia, after reading about it in a Sunday newspaper. Which would have explained her need to eat quite so often, wouldnt it? But the doctor hadnt even looked up from his prescription pad. No such luck, Im afraid, Mrs. Riordan, hed said, the cheeky so-

and-so, and handed her a diet sheet. The children all love this bread. She makes an extra loaf if shes going to visit any of them and takes it, wrapped in a tea towel. Shes always done her best to keep Ireland alive in her London-born children. The girls both went to Irish-dancing classes. They had to catch the bus all the way to a place in Cam-den Town. Gretta used to take a cake tin of brack or gingerbread with her to pass around to the other mothersexiled like her from Cork, from Dublin, from Donegaland they would watch their daughters dip up and dip down, tap their feet in time to the ddle. Monica, the teacher had said after only three lessons, had talent, had the potential to be a champion. She always knew, the teacher had said, she could always spot them. But Monica hadnt wanted to become a champion or to enter the competitions. I hate it, shed whisper, I hate it when everyone looks at you, when the judges write things down. Shed always been so fearful, so cautious, so backwards in coming forwards. Was it Grettas fault, or were children born like that? Hard to know. Either way, shed had to allow Monica to give up the dancing, which was a crying shame. Gretta had insisted on regular Mass and communion for each of them (although look how that had turned out). Theyd gone to Ireland every year for the summer, rst to her mothers and then to the cottage on Omey Island, even when theyd got older and started to moan about the journey. When Aoife was little, shed loved the excitement of having to wait for the tide to draw back off the causeway, revealing the slick, glassy sand, before they could walk over. Its only an island sometimes, Aoife had said once, when she was about six, isnt that right, Mammy? And Gretta had hugged her and told her how clever she was. Shed been a strange child, always coming out with things like that. They were perfect, those summers, she thinks now, as she bites down into her second slice of bread. Monica and Michael Francis out roaming until all hours and, when Aoife came along, a baby in a crib to keep her company in the kitchen, before she went out to call the others in for their tea. No, she couldnt have done any more. And yet Michael Fran-cis had given his children the most English of English names. Not even an Irish middle name, shed asked. She wouldnt allow herself to think about how they were growing up heathen. When shed mentioned to her daughter-in-law that she knew of a lovely Irish-dance school in Camden, not far from them, her daughter-in-law had laughed. In her face. And saidwhat was it?is that the one where youre not allowed to move your arms? About Aoife, of course, the less said the better. Shed gone off to America. Never called. Never wrote. Living with some-body, Gretta suspects. Nobody has told her this; call it a mothers instinct. Leave her alone, Michael Francis always says, if Gretta starts to question him about Aoife. Because she knows Michael Francis will know, if anyone does. Always as thick as thieves, those two, despite the age gap. The last theyd heard from Aoife was a postcard at Christ-mas. A postcard. A picture of the Empire State Building on it. For the love of God, shed shouted, when Robert handed it to her, is she not even able to stretch to a Christmas card, now? As if, shed continued to shout, Id never given her a proper upbringing. Shed spent the better part of three weeks sewing a communion dress for that child and shed looked like an angel. Everybody said so. Whod have thought then, as shed stood on the church steps in her white dress and white lace ankle socks, veil uttering in the breeze, that shed grow up so ungrateful, so thoughtless that shed send a picture of a building to her mother to mark the Christ Childs birthday? Gretta sniffs as she dips her knife into the red mouth of the jam pot. Aoife doesnt bear thinking about. The black sheep, her own sister had called her that time, and Gretta had own off the handle and told her to mind her bloody tongue, but she has to concede that Bridie had a point. She crosses herself, says a swift novena for her youngest child under her breath, under the ever-watchful eye of Our Lady, who looks down from the kitchen wall. She cuts another slice of bread, watching the steam vanish into the air. She will not think about Aoife now. There are plenty of good things to focus on instead. Monica might ring tonightGretta had told her shed be near the phone from six. Michael Francis had as good as promised to bring the children over this weekend. She will not think about Aoife, she will not look at the photo of her in the communion out t that sits on the mantelpiece, no, she will not. After putting the bread back on the rack to air for Rob-ert, Gretta eats a spoonful of jam, just to keep herself going, then another. She glances up at the clock. Quarter past already. Rob-ert should be back by now. Maybe he bumped into someone and got talking. She wants to ask him will he drive her to the market this afternoon, after the crowds heading to the football stadium have dispersed? She needs a couple of things, some our, a few eggs wouldnt go amiss. Where could they go to escape the heat? Maybe a cup of tea at that place with the good scones. They could walk down the street, arm in arm, take the air. Talk to a few people. It was important to keep him busy: ever since the retirement, he can become brooding and bored if con ned to the house for too long. She likes to organize these outings for them. Gretta goes out through the living room into the hall, opens the front door and walks out onto the path, sidestepping that rusting carcass of a bicycle Robert uses. She looks left, she looks right. She sees next doors cat arch its back, then walk in mincing, feline steps along

the wall, towards the lilac bush, where it proceeds to scratch its claws. The road is empty. No one about. She sees a red car caught mid-maneuver, farther up the road. A magpie keens and moans overhead, wheeling sideways in the sky, wing pointing downwards. In the distance, a bus grinds up the hill, a child trundles on a scooter along the pavement, someone somewhere turns on a radio. Gretta puts her hands on her hips. She calls her husbands name, once, twice. The flank of the garden wall throws the sound back to her. Stoke Newington, London Michael has walked from Finsbury Park station. A mad decision in the heat, even at this time of day. But the roads had been choked when hed emerged aboveground, the buses stranded in traffi c, wheels motionless on the softening tarmac, so hed set off along the pavement, between the houses that seemed to transpire heat from their very bricks, making the streets into sweltering runnels through which he must toil. He pauses, panting and perspiring, in the shade of the trees that fringe Clissold Park. Removing his tie and freeing his shirt from his trousers, he surveys the damage wreaked by this neverending heatwave: the park is no longer the undulating green lung he has always loved. He has been coming here since he was a child: his mother would pack a picnichard-boiled eggs, bluish under their crumbling shells, water that tasted of Tupperware, a wedge of tea cake each; they would all be handed a bag to carry off the bus, even Aoife. No shirkers, his mother would say loudly, as they stood waiting for the door to open, making the rest of the bus look around. He can remember pushing Aoife in her striped buggy along the path by the railings, trying to get her off to sleep; he can remember his mother trying to coax Monica into that paddling pool. He recalls the park as a space of differing shades of green: the full emerald sweeps of grass, the plintering verdigris of the paddling pool, the lime-yellow of the light through the trees. But now the grass is a scorched ocher, the bare earth showing through, and the trees offer up limp leaves to the unmoving air, as if in reproach. He draws in a breath through his nose and, realizing that the dry air burns his nostrils, takes a look at his watch. Just after five. He should get home. It is the last day of term, the start of the long summer holidays. He has made it to the end of another school year. No more marking, no more classes, no more getting up and getting out in the mornings for six whole weeks. His relief is so enormous that it manifests itself physically, as a weightless, almost dizzy sensation at the back of his head; he has the sense he might stumble if he moves too quickly, so unburdened, so untethered does he feel. He sets off in the most direct route, straight across the burntout grass, out into the shadeless open, where the light is level and merciless, past the shut caf where he longed to eat as a child but never did. Daylight robbery, his mother called it, unwrapping sandwiches from their grease-proof shrouds. Sweat breaks out in his hairline, along his spine, his feet move jerkily over the ground and he wonders, not for the first time, how others might see him. A father, returning from his place of work to his home, where his family and his dinner will be waiting. Or a man overheated and sweaty, late, carrying too many books, too many papers, in his briefcase. A person past youth, hair thinning just a little at the crown, wearing shoes that need resoling and socks that require a darn. A man tormented by this heatwave because how is one supposed to dress for work in temperatures such as this, in a shirt and a tie, for Gods sake, in long trousers, and how is one meant to concentrate when the female inhabitants of the city walk about pavements and sit in offices in the briefest of shorts, their legs bare and brown and crossed against him, in narrow-strapped tops with their shoulders exposed, just the thinnest of fabrics separating their breasts from the unbearably hot air? A man hurrying home to a wife who will no longer look him in the eye, no longer seek his touch, a wife whose cool indifference has provoked in him such a slow-burning, low-level panic that he cannot sleep in his own bed, cannot sit easily in his own house. The edge of the park is in sight now. Hes almost there. One more stretch of grass in full sun, then a road, then around the corner, then its his street. He can make out the roofs of his neighbors and, if he stretches on tiptoe, the slates of his house, the chimney pot, the skylight beneath which, he is sure, his wife will be sitting. He swats a bead of moisture from his upper lip and switches his briefcase to the opposite hand. At the end of his street, there is a queue at the standpipe. Several of his neighbors, a lady from down the road and a few others he doesnt recognize, straggle across the pavement and onto the road, empty drums at their feet. Some of them chat to each other, one or two wave or nod to him as he passes. The thought that he ought to offer to help the lady passes through his mind; he ought to stop, fill her drum for her, carry it back to her house. It would be the right thing to do. She is his mothers age, perhaps older. He should stop, offer help. How will she manage otherwise? But his feet dont hesitate in their movement. He has to get home, he cant brook any further delay. He unlatches his gate and swings it open, feeling as though it has been weeks since he last saw his home, feeling joy surge through him at the thought that he doesnt have to leave it for six weeks. He loves this place, this house. He loves the black-and-white-tiled front path, the orange-painted front door, with the lion-faced knocker and the blue glass insets. If he could, he would stretch himself skywards until he was big

enough to embrace its red-gray bricks. The fact that he has bought it with his own moneyor some of his own money, along with a large mortgagenever ceases to amaze him. That, and the fact it contains at this very moment the three people most precious to him in the world. He unlocks the door, steps onto the mat, flings his bag to the floor and shouts, Hello! Im home! He is, for a moment, exactly the person he is meant to be: a man, returning from work, on the threshold of his home, about to greet his family. There is no difference, no schism, between the way the world might see him and the person he privately knows himself to be. Hello? he calls again. The house makes no answer. He shuts the door behind him and picks his way through the flotsam of bricks, dolls clothes and plastic teacups on the hall floor. Revue de presse'Here is an author whose depth and insight hover just below the surface of an apparently effortless lightness...There is a deliciousness to this novel, a warmth and readability that render it unputdownable and will surely make it a hit. She's done it again' Joanne Briscoe, Guardian 'Consolidates her reputation as a writer who depicts relationships with piercing acuity in haunting, intense prose. O'Farrell is a deliciously insightful writer, observing the dynamics of relationships and astutely filleting them to the bone. Her sharp but humane eye dissects every form of human interaction' Independent on Sunday'Instructions For A Heatwave, evocative, articulate and joyously readable, does not disappoint. An author at the top of her game.' Sunday Express 'O'Farrell is a great storyteller... All of the Riordans will stay in your mind long after you finish this book. They re funny, infuriating and impossible not to love. They feel like family' The Irish Times 'This is a surprising, beautiful novel, full of the intricacies of family life.... you'll find yourself wanting to devour it in one sitting' --The Sun's Fabulous Magazine