

THE WEATHER

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 overstayed 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 filling the space, pushing Gretta down into the floor, 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 in 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 yoghurt. A woman at Mass told her it works and it does, up to a point, but it is never quite the same.

Instructions for a Heatwave

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Answer these questions on the passage:

What age do you think Gretta is?

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 20-30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 40-50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 50-60 |

Give reasons

Where do you think Gretta is from?

Why do you think this?

What else have you learned about Gretta from this extract? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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Describe how Gretta looks in your mind. Draw a picture of her. Alternatively, you could search for an image that matches Gretta in your mind. If you do this, please label the picture to show why this is the picture you have of Gretta.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw a picture of Gretta or search for an image that matches their mental image of her.

In pairs or small groups, imagine a backstory for Gretta. Think about her family; the decisions she has made in her life – is she happy? What are her dreams? What is her husband like? What future plans might she have? As a group, be ready to share your life story.