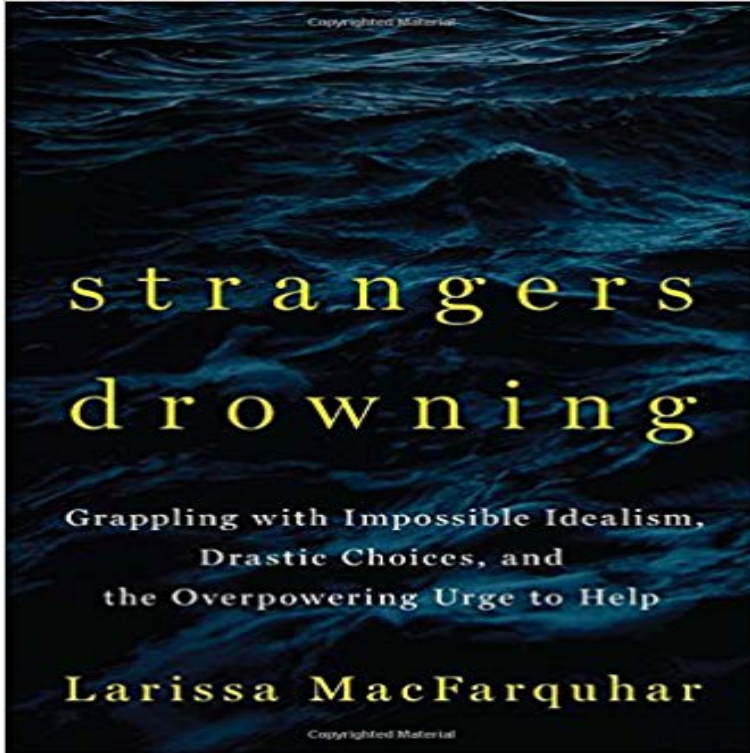


Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to Help



What does it mean to devote yourself wholly to helping others? In *Strangers Drowning*, Larissa MacFarquhar seeks out people living lives of extreme ethical commitment and tells their deeply intimate stories; their stubborn integrity and their compromises; their bravery and their recklessness; their joys and defeats and wrenching dilemmas. A couple adopts two children in distress. But then they think: If they can change two lives, why not four? Or ten? They adopt twenty. But how do they weigh the needs of unknown children in distress against the needs of the children they already have? Another couple founds a leprosy colony in the wilderness in India, living in huts with no walls, knowing that their two small children may contract leprosy or be eaten by panthers. The children survive. But what if they hadn't? How would their parents risk have been judged? A woman believes that if she spends money on herself, rather than donate it to buy life-saving medicine, then she's responsible for the deaths that result. She lives on a fraction of her income, but wonders: when is compromise self-indulgence and when is it essential? We honor such generosity and high ideals; but when we call people do-gooders there is skepticism in it, even hostility. Why do moral people make us uneasy? Between her stories, MacFarquhar threads a lively history of the literature, philosophy, social science, and self-help that have contributed to a deep suspicion of do-gooders in Western culture. Through its sympathetic and beautifully vivid storytelling, *Strangers Drowning* confronts us with fundamental questions about what it means to be human. In a world of strangers drowning in need, how much should we help, and how much can we help? Is it right to care for strangers even at the expense of those we are closest to? Moving and provocative, *Strangers Drowning* challenges us to think about what we value most, and why.

Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Oct 10, 2015 In Strangers Drowning, Larissa MacFarquhar seeks to understand That night, Larissa MacFarquhar describes in her engaging Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to . 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