A little extra kindness

drawn not to the main characters in history, but the people in the shadows.

I have a quote on my pinboard, which I try to use as a guide to being a mother, and a good creed to live by. It's by Vita Sackville-West: "They [Algerian irises] are the most obliging planters, even if maltreated, but a little extra kindness and understanding will bring forth an even better response. As is true of most of us, whether plants or humans."

When the Stammer Came To Stay by Maggie O'Farrell (Walker Books, £14.99) is published on 21 November. Order it now for £13.49 at guardianbookshop.com

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