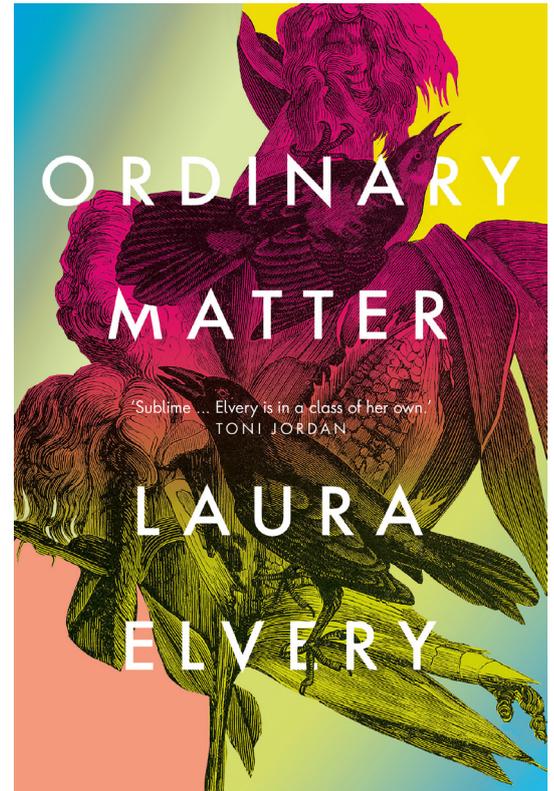


Inspired by the twenty times women have won Nobel Prizes for science, this short story collection from award-winning author Laura Elvery is a dazzling, thought-provoking follow-up to *Trick of the Light*.

In 1895 Alfred Nobel rewrote his will and left his fortune made in dynamite and munitions to generations of thinkers. Since 1901 women have been honoured with Nobel Prizes for their scientific research twenty times, including Marie Curie twice.

Spanning more than a century and ranging across the world, this inventive story collection is inspired by these women whose work has altered history and saved millions of lives. From a transformative visit to the Grand Canyon to a baby washing up on a Queensland beach, a climate protest during a Paris heatwave to Stockholm on the eve of the 1977 Nobel Prize ceremony, these stories interrogate the nature of inspiration and discovery, motherhood and sacrifice, illness and legacy. Sometimes the extraordinary pivots on the ordinary.

**BOOK DETAILS**

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## Questions

1. The heatwave in 'You Run Towards Love' was a real catastrophe that bore down on Europe in 2003. Which thematic threads does this first story set up for the rest of the book?
2. A reluctant traveller, shy and averse to publicity, Marie Curie was indeed greeted by thousands of fans when her ship docked in New York City in May 1921. How does this story – using a 'minor' made-up character in Frank Wagner – shed light on desire, health, bravery and fame?
3. Did you predict Lillian's disappearance in 'Something Close to Gold'? How did you think this story would end?
4. In 'Night Blindness', Gerty's hunger is literal and figurative. How does her ambition reveal itself during her time on the ship?

Questions cont.

5. In 'Hyperobject' the narrator observes, 'How strange, then, that those women still felt something like triumph.' What other moments of triumph can you find in this story?
6. How did you feel about the voice, and the unusual storyteller, in 'Frost', who leads the reader through several decades of Maggi's life?
7. Rosalyn in 'Stockholm' reflects on luck and hard work with Lena, the visitor who comes to find her. How do you feel about luck in your own life?
8. Questions of motherhood recur throughout *Ordinary Matter*. Connie in 'Corn Queen' has lost her mother. How did you think this story would end?
9. In 'Growth', key elements of Rita Levi-Montalcini's life are plotted throughout to intersect with the narrator's life. What elements of Rita's life were most fascinating to you?
10. Why do you think Josie has the reaction she does when she sees her old friend on the doorstep in 'Witnessing'?
11. What is Bridie in 'Fruit Flies' guilty of? Thinking about your own time at high school, which parts of her experience ring true to you?
12. What are some of the conflicting emotions that Brooks and Kathleen, in 'Titan Arum', have about their daughter, Rose? What do you think finally drives Brooks into the yard with the machete?

MORE QUESTIONS OVER PAGE

Questions cont.

13. How would you describe Fiona and Livi's relationship in 'The Bodies Are Buried'? In what ways might Baby Heidi have brought them closer together?

14. Do you think Maddy and her boyfriend, Julian, in 'Better Nature' will reunite in Australia? What might Maddy's future hold?

15. How does 1960s Australia come through in the details in 'Wingspan'?

16. The bridge in 'The Garden Bridge' was a real engineering proposition that almost made it to construction in London. What else almost – but not quite – happens in this story?

17. In 'The Town Turns Over', what do you think Ken and Lupita will do with their small red knives?

18. How did you feel about the projected future of the baby in 'Little Fly' and what hints exist about the work she might do as an adult?

19. What has been revealed to Tess in 'The Fix'? What sort of woman, mother and wife do you think she was before the surgery?

20. In 'A Brief History of Petroleum', Phoebe covers her 'face so [she] wouldn't scream'. At what other points in the story does Phoebe have a similar reaction of rage or frustration? How hopeful do you feel about the 'precipice' at the end of the story?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Laura Elvery is a writer from Brisbane. She has a PhD in Creative Writing and Literary Studies. Her work has been published in *Overland*, *Griffith Review*, *Meanjin*, *Kill Your Darlings* and *The Big Issue* fiction edition. She has won the Josephine Ulrick Prize for Literature, the Margaret River Short Story Competition, the Neilma Sidney Short Story Prize and the Fair Australia Prize for Fiction. In 2018 Laura's first collection of short stories, *Trick of the Light*, was a finalist in the Queensland Literary Awards.



'Elegant, wise and humming with insight – this sublime collection proves that Elvery is in a class of her own.'

Toni Jordan

'There is nothing ordinary about these stories – extraordinary, yes ... an experimental and literary triumph.'

Ceridwen Dovey

'A beautifully crafted and moving collection of stories about women who change history while struggling against its constraints.'

Abigail Ulman

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