

A Very Unordinary Matter

D.M. Lloyd

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In the extraordinary philosophical novel A Very Unordinary Matter, a dedicated scientist puts forth a theory that could change the world.

While it begins with the line “Leonidas’s discovery shocked the world,” D. M. Lloyd’s thoughtful, compassionate novel *A Very Unordinary Matter* encapsulates far more than scientific discovery, delving into the complex subject matter of what it is to be human, and of how human relationships, religion, and science intertwine.

Brilliant but socially inept to an aggressive degree, Leonidas is a scientist who makes a discovery that has immediate, incendiary, and irreversible effects on the scientific, political, religious, and cultural worlds. Leonidas is introduced in the throes of his postpublication worries, after which the story covers all of his research and the relationships that curated and created the project. Leonidas conceals his early hopes for catharsis throughout, and he finds that he cannot anticipate the truest forms of discovery to come.

Philosophical explorations abound, delivered both from Leonidas’s perspective and via brief jumps to other points of view. Though secondary characters express doubt about his work, Leonidas’s research premises are detailed in a structured way that makes them seem sound even to laypeople; examples from scientific, cultural, and religious lenses are used to support his theories. Thus, his discovery generates genuine excitement—and a credible sense that he could be responsible for jarring belief systems across the world.

The novel also holds space for cultures that cover the ground that Leonidas researches. Indeed, he travels to locations including London, Haiti, and Tibet, meeting people with different perspectives than his to flesh out his work. And he is an idiosyncratic guide who only seems more so as the novel progresses. He displays innate curiosity and compassion, belying his stiff, tweed-clad exterior. The more that he interacts with the world around him, the more endearing his story is.

Though the story rambles toward its close in time with Leonidas’s growing awareness, following a jumping and uncertain timeline, its glimpses into its hero’s mind remain compelling throughout. At an inner level, Leonidas’s memory is spiraling, and his internal monologue is unending. Still, Leonidas is consistent in trying to heal from his past despite his fears. Ultimately, his interpretations of connection, spirituality, and the idea of personhood are generous and intriguing.

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NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (December 28, 2023)

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