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## READING GUIDE

### Jennifer Falkner's *Above Discovery*

Dear reader,

Thank you for choosing to read *Above Discovery*.

*Above Discovery* is for the adventurous reader. You may have found your way here as a fan of lingering works of historical fiction, yet these stories are short. Can we invest deeply in the lives of those with whom we'll only spend a short time? These stories also span centuries and genres, moving from historical fiction to magical realism. What connections will appear to you as you encounter new voices as you progress through these pages? You're also taking a chance on a debut writer, yet stories in this collection have previously won prizes across the UK and North America, and some of my previous work has appeared at the world's largest collection of printed works of William Shakespeare, the Folger Shakespeare Library website. Thank you for investing in a writer at the start of their career.

The stories that make up *Above Discovery* share a preoccupation with marginalized voices. Many of the characters are trapped in the narratives of others, the power structures of others, with a growing awareness of their own silencing. They push through this silencing to a point where they can create their own endings. This also holds true for the stories in this collection that have more contemporary settings. For characters who are bereaved or heartsick, who are fearful of war and climate change, they try to create a place for themselves within strictures not of their own making. These voices include a female prospector during the Gold Rush in Canada, servants and slaves from ancient Greece to Victorian London, an Anglo-Saxon nun who dedicated her life to solitary prayer, a clown in Shakespeare's theatre troupe who's not as funny as he used to be.

Rarely do I want to write stories about the lives of kings or generals. That ground feels well covered by now. In *Above Discovery*, I wanted instead to dig into what it was really like to live in these periods, and stories are the most efficient form of time travel I know, a combination of thought experiment and daydream.

While reading *Above Discovery*, I hope you consider themes of power/powerlessness, of who gets to speak and who is generally spoken over, of which experiences are particular to a certain time period and which are universal. Thank you for hopping in this time machine with me. I hope you enjoy the journey!

—Jennifer Falkner

