Afternoon Discoveries: October 18, 2026

Emerging Writers, Debuts, & Reading Worth Revisiting

AMONG THE LETTERS
OCT 18, 2026 PAID



Emerging Writers, Debuts, & Reading Worth Revisiting

Crows gather over a prairie schoolyard in late fall, and a daughter traces a mother taken in the Sixties Scoop through blacked-out government records. An ecologist counts mayflies in a river shrinking into ponds, and a washed-out medical student tries to read a map on a rehab trip in northern Alberta. Today's shelf holds emerging writers, debuts, and reading worth revisiting, with

Canadian prize winners beside new voices from journals we trust. The back shelf returns to older pages that still teach patient attention. Each piece is a first meeting worth keeping.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 18, 2026.

Featured Discovery

A Season of Crows - Larah Luna

Larah Luna's narrator sees the first crow land on a soccer goalpost, and by mid-September the birds line the wires along Main like notes on a staff. Her prairie town answers with noise cannons, prayers, and a plastic owl, while the narrator leaves peanuts for a bold crow called Button. Ms. Bell returns from the city carrying a grief the town cannot name, and the flock seems to notice. Luna's story won the 2026 CBC Short Story Prize and marks her first public literary recognition. It is a tender autumn story about witnesses and the quiet work of looking.

Read "A Season of Crows" at CBC Books

The Discovery Desk

Wawa Indian - Jenna Timmons-Oikawa

Jenna Timmons-Oikawa begins in a 1993 third-grade classroom where children pick an Indian name from a projected list. The essay then moves across decades in short dated sections, from blacked-out adoption records in Winnipeg to apples peeled with a grandmother's quick precision. Her mother was taken in the Sixties Scoop, and the family slowly learns how much that word holds. Timmons-Oikawa won the 2026 CBC Nonfiction Prize with this piece, written as a newcomer to creative nonfiction. It is generous, unsettling, and exact about how a missing history can live inside an ordinary kitchen.

Read "Wawa Indian" at CBC Books

Low Water - Andy Stefan

Andy Stefan opens with a field log from the Clearwater River, where depth is measured in millimetres and the riffle has stopped flowing. The narrator nets thousands of insects, circles the boxes for healthy habitat, and watches a great blue heron feed in a pool the size of a bathtub. At home the well runs dry, the laundromat rations loads, and a toxic algae bloom closes the quarry. Stefan, an ecologist, made the 2026 CBC Short Story Prize shortlist with this story. It is quiet climate fiction about data, neighbours, and what a town does when the water stops.

Read "Low Water" at CBC Books

Broad Horizons - Brandon Ingalls

Brandon Ingalls sends Josiah, a washed-out medical student, to Broad Horizons Rehab, where he holds a map he cannot read on a half-frozen

boat in northern Alberta. Counselor Mike barks for way points, the mist soaks everything, and Josiah's nemesis Rory begins showing signs that no one else wants to see. The brochure promised sun-drenched hikes, while his mother calls from a kitchen where her chemo is not going well. Ingalls, an emergency physician in Chicago, writes recovery as a test of attention and trust. It is gripping fiction about being believed when it matters most.

Read "Broad Horizons" at The Masters Review

The Parrot with Three Painters - Pravy Jha

Pravy Jha begins with a painted parrot whose tail has lost its paint to monsoon seepage in an old family room. The narrator's mother finds the damage the morning after Chhath, just as her daughter arrives with a small suitcase and unspoken news. Lotus flowers, bamboo, and circling fish crowd the walls. Jha, a writer from India, folds a marriage, a mother, and a grandmother's old grudge into a single repair. It is compact flash fiction about inheritance, silence, and the colours a family chooses to restore.

Read "The Parrot with Three Painters" at SmokeLong Quarterly

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more works from emerging writers, three conversations about debuts and the long road to a first book, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

Special Recommendations can be found near the bottom of the article.

More From the Discovery Desk

Pattern Recognition - Amber Allen

Amber Allen's narrator starts the morning with the microwave, the latest sound her five-year-old son Theo cannot bear, and adds it to a list for the pediatrician. Garbage trucks, satin sheets, maple syrup, and even the sun already share that list. At the park Theo lines up die-cast cars in a careful crimson-to-lavender gradient while another mother complains that he will not share. A psychologist's intake questions become an unbroken string of yesses, and the narrator starts to hear her own history in the answers. Allen's shortlisted CBC story is precise and tender about parenting, diagnosis, and inheritance.

Read "Pattern Recognition" at CBC Books

Radiation Nights: Voice memos to a friend - Jacky Sawatzky

Jacky Sawatzky writes in numbered voice memos to a friend, sent from Lanark Highlands, Ontario, where she helps care for a herd of llamas and alpacas. A clogged tear duct, likely from alpaca spit by her own diagnosis, leads to Mantle Cell Lymphoma and long drives to Toronto for treatment. Between scans she bottle-feeds a premature cria, shelters thirteen gossiping alpacas during a tornado warning, and helps turtles cross the road. The piece made the 2026 CBC Nonfiction Prize shortlist. It is funny, grieving, and wholly alive to the animals that keep a person company.

Read "Radiation Nights: Voice memos to a friend" at CBC Books

Watch Her Go - Pauline Holdsworth

Pauline Holdsworth imagines a world where every child is guarded by Illusions, blurry companions that fall away as hard truths arrive. Her narrator wakes on the last Tuesday of eleventh grade with only two left, braiding each other's hair at the edge of her bed. A favourite teacher who loves Camus as much as she does has been drawing closer, and the Illusions press around her. Holdsworth, a Toronto public radio producer, handles a predatory relationship with clarity rather than spectacle. It is speculative coming-of-age fiction about protection, trust, and the cost of growing up too quickly.

Read "Watch Her Go" at The Masters Review

Strawberries, Metal, and Blood - Caoimhe McKeogh

Caoimhe McKeogh follows a middle sister who decorates cakes and drives a small pink car through an intersection crowded with squeegee workers. One of them remembers her car, and their Tuesday mornings become a running joke drawn in soap hearts. Her older sister has been sentenced to stay home with weekly counselling, and her younger sister answers peanut brittle with workshop wisdom. McKeogh lets syrups, luster dust, and edible gold leaf carry a slow search for what actually makes her happy. It is warm, tactile fiction about families that define us until we define ourselves.

Read "Strawberries, Metal, and Blood" at The Masters Review

Bad Habit - Robert B. Miner

Robert B. Miner seats his narrator at a New York poker game where Sister Catherine Anne O'Hara, in a white perm and wool sweater, has bullied the table for hours. She slides her chips as if they might break and never seems to sweat. The narrator owes money to a man named Rollo and soon agrees to a strange proposition outside her school. Miner, a West Point graduate whose debut novel is due in 2027, writes the city's card rooms with voice. It is funny, surprising fiction about how complicated people turn out to be.

Read "Bad Habit" at The Masters Review

Things My Father Said On His Last Day - J.M.C. Kane

J.M.C. Kane records a father's last day as a sequence of sentences spoken among machines and clean sheets. He calls the narrator by a brother's name, asks whether the dog buried decades ago has been fed, and says the light in the room is borrowed. The narrator writes each line down like an instruction that might make sense later. Kane, whose essay about his life as an autistic adult won the 2026 Ellis Prize for Nonfiction, keeps the flash spare and luminous. It is a brief, aching piece about listening when meaning arrives sideways.

Read "Things My Father Said On His Last Day" at SmokeLong Quarterly

---

Beyond the First Shelf

When Your Debut Is Not Your First Book - Cherry Lou Sy with Siang Lu

Cherry Lou Sy opens this conversation while feeding her toddler yogurt pancakes on Zoom, and Siang Lu kindly offers to reschedule. Lu's published debut was The Whitewash, yet Ghost Cities was written earlier, went unwanted for years, and later won the Miles Franklin Award. He talks candidly about writing since nineteen, the two early books that had to fail, and the long wait with a manuscript nobody wanted. Sy, a debut novelist herself, asks about the translator at the novel's centre who leans on Google Translate. It is honest reading for anyone measuring a writing life in drafts.

Read "When Your Debut Is Not Your First Book" at Electric Literature

---

True Love Is Recognizing A Place's Flaws: Our Conversation with Amber Blaeser-Wardzala - Michael Welch

Michael Welch talks with Amber Blaeser-Wardzala about her debut novel Another Name for Red, in which Middle Daughter searches for answers about her missing sister, Belle. Blaeser-Wardzala explains how a single setting detail can change a story's tone and how memory haunts the corners of real places. She describes true love as seeing a place's flaws and loving it anyway, without pretending that harm has no history. The conversation stays practical about patient drafting and characters who are never purely good or bad. It is generous craft reading for writers who want home on the page.

Read "True Love Is Recognizing A Place's Flaws: Our Conversation with Amber Blaeser-Wardzala" at the Chicago Review of Books

---

Writer’s Block: Elizabeth Ball - All Lit Up with Elizabeth Ball

All Lit Up asks Montreal writer Elizabeth Ball about Missy Whynaught, her debut novel from Baraka Books, in a short and lively Q&A. Ball explains that she cannot build characters from scratch, so she draws on a memory bank of real people collected as a self-described extrovert. She writes between single motherhood, social work, and a kitchen table where her laptop waits amid the morning mess. Her answers are funny, frank, and haunted by Granny’s disapproving ghost. Ball was longlisted for the 2026 CBC Short Story Prize, which makes this a fitting companion to today’s CBC stories.

Read “Writer’s Block: Elizabeth Ball” at All Lit Up

Special Recommendations

Miss Brill - Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield’s Miss Brill takes her fur out of its box on a bright autumn Sunday and walks to the Jardins Publiques to hear the band. From her special seat she listens in on strangers and begins to feel that everyone in the park belongs to one great performance. Mansfield builds the afternoon from small pleasures, a woman in an ermine toque and the music’s changing moods. The ending turns on a single overheard remark, and it still lands with surprising force. It is a perfect Sunday story about loneliness, imagination, and the courage of small routines.

Read “Miss Brill” at Wikisource

Paul’s Case - Willa Cather

Willa Cather’s Paul is a Pittsburgh high school student with a red carnation in his buttonhole and a contempt for Cordelia Street that his teachers can feel. He ushers at Carnegie Hall concerts and haunts the theatre, where the lights and music seem more real than home. Cather first published the story in 1905 and gathered it into The Troll Garden, her first collection of stories. Her portrait of a boy starving for beauty remains sharp, sympathetic, and unsettling. It is essential reading for anyone curious how an early collection can still hold a lasting classic.

Read “Paul’s Case” at Wikisource

To Autumn - John Keats

John Keats wrote “To Autumn” in September 1819 after a walk near Winchester, and it became one of the last great poems he finished. The ode moves from ripe apples and swelling gourds to a figure asleep on a half-reaped furrow, then to gnats, crickets, and gathering swallows. Keats was still a young poet with only a few years of work behind him, yet the poem feels entirely sure of itself. Its three stanzas treat the season as abundance rather than decline. It is worth revisiting this weekend for its patient, generous attention to an ending.

Read “To Autumn” at the Academy of American Poets

Thank you for spending part of your day among the letters with us.

Many of today's writers are appearing in public for the first time, or nearly so, and their work already knows how to hold a room. A crow on a goalpost, a dry well, and a painted parrot all ask for the same patience. The older pages on the back shelf show how long that patience can last. We hope the newer voices here earn a place beside the classics on your own shelf.

I hope one of today's pieces gives you somewhere worth staying for a while.

Take care!