Afternoon Discoveries: October 28, 2026

Mystery, Thriller, Crime, Horror, & Dark Fiction

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Mystery, Thriller, Crime, Horror, & Dark Fiction

A woman buys a car built in 1939, and it keeps turning toward a house that burned down long ago. A lonely girl is followed by a monster that feeds on sorrow, and a young couple learns why their neighbours are always watching. Today's stories come from small magazines, Substack writers, and a new Toronto magazine, with a Toronto writer's grim garden in the paid section. The

back shelf offers a Canadian novelist on ghosts, a loyal dog at Halloween, and three classics for the darkest week of October. Each piece asks what the past still wants from us.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 28, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Turn Left for the Past - Jeanette Winterson

The narrator, bored with her marriage and her job writing reports about potholes, buys a pre-war Austin Ruby from the local garage. On her dawn drives, the little car keeps turning left onto a closed track that ends at the ruins of a burned country house. A polite man in corduroys is waiting there, and he seems to know the car very well. Jeanette Winterson shared this ghost story free on her Substack for the spooky season. Its gentle chill gives way to a moving ending about choosing to live.

Read "Turn Left for the Past" at Jeanette Winterson's Substack

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The Discovery Desk

It Eats - Mariela Deynes Tofani

A monster has followed the girl ever since the day her mother drove away through the snow. It hides under her bed, steals light from her rooms after her sister dies, and feeds on every lonely moment. One night she puts on a sunflower-yellow blouse and walks into a bar, hoping for a single friendly smile. Mariela Deynes Tofani tells the story in two diverging versions, and both lead to the same dark end. This Editor's Pick from The Freak!, a new Toronto magazine, is a haunting portrait of loneliness.

Read "It Eats" at The Freak!

Cul-de-Sac - Françoise Harvey

Ruth and Tom rent a cheap bungalow on a quiet cul-de-sac where every other house belongs to a tidy pensioner. The neighbours wave endlessly, fix the gutters without asking, and notice every dandelion in the drive. Ruth suspects the street is quietly warning them to behave, while Tom only wants to be liked. Then one afternoon Tom does not come home, and the old woman next door invites Ruth in for tea. Françoise Harvey's story is a sly and deeply unsettling piece of suburban folk horror.

Read "Cul-de-Sac" at The Dark

Hotel Room - Andrew Kass

Andrew Kass bases this noir story on Edward Hopper's 1931 painting of a woman on a hotel bed, studying a railroad timetable. He calls her Eve, a travelling saleswoman who sells opium tinctures to pharmacies, with a

profitable sideline in concentrated product. Late one night in New York, a man with a boxer's shoulders knocks on her door. Eve has a blackjack hidden in her samples case, and she knows how to use it. The final scene at Penn Station lands with quiet, perfect irony.

Read "Hotel Room" at Mystery Tribune

The Kindly One - Jonathan Oliver

A detective named Frankie arrives at a motel room where a beautiful young woman lies dead on the bed without a mark on her. Her notebook is full of half-finished poems that name him and list his crimes. Frankie pockets the evidence, grumbling all the while that proper poetry ought to rhyme. Jonathan Oliver's gothic tale, published on the Mindfork Substack, slowly reveals what the detective has spent years trying to forget. The title, borrowed from Greek myth, makes sense in the chilling final lines.

Read "The Kindly One" at Mindfork

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more stories of horror, mystery, and crime, three pieces of criticism and craft, and three special recommendations from the back s

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

More From the Discovery Desk

In the Garden of Death - Chris Clemens

Monsters have crawled out of the sea and remade Toronto, and the narrator lives alone in a collapsing condo near the ruined CN Tower. Each day a creature he calls Death drags him to a garden where it grows strange fruit bearing the faces of his lost children. It wants his grief, and its crab servants spell out messages in black stones below his balcony. Chris Clemens, a Toronto teacher and writer, turns this nightmare into a startling story about mourning. Expect body horror and a parent's raw sorrow.

Read "In the Garden of Death" at Flash Fiction Online

Falling - Steve Rasnic Tem

Grant is an old bachelor whose spells of vertigo are growing longer and stranger. One morning his patio is buried in leaves that do not match his tree, and insects begin to rain from a cloudless sky. Soon birds are falling all over the neighbourhood, and something much larger is on its way down. Steve Rasnic Tem, a winner of the Horror Writers Association Lifetime Achievement Award, writes the quiet terror of ageing with real tenderness. The Dark reprints this story from a Stephen Jones anthology.

Read "Falling" at The Dark

The Old Book in the Library - J.D. Iredell

A lonely, sickly child spends his days in his grandfather's library, reading an old handwritten book of spells and strange cyphers. Some of its pages look blank, though he feels certain that something is written

there. Soon a kindly old man begins whispering to him in his dreams, and the whispers sound like words from the book. J.D. Iredell, who writes noir occult detective stories on his Substack, offers this short ghost story free to every reader. Its twist is both eerie and unexpectedly comforting.

Read “The Old Book in the Library” at J.D. Iredell’s Substack

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Too Much Dough - Peter Glazebrook

Jim used to be a police officer, but the stress drove him to retrain as a maintenance engineer. Called to a bakery factory about a foreign body in the dough breaker, he finds an apprentice’s legs sticking out of the hopper. One sniff of the machine’s grease tells him almost everything he needs to know. Peter Glazebrook’s cozy mystery is short, clever, and very funny about office mugs. The closing exchange with the detective in charge is the best joke in the story.

Read “Too Much Dough” at Mystery Tribune

Jove’s Bicycle - Wilbert Turner III

The rules are simple. You spend thirty days locked in a neon green room with a bed and a stationary bike, and each day you must ride longer than the day before. Win, and the Jove company pays you ten million in stock. Lose, and the game starts over for twice as long. Wilbert Turner III tells this dystopian horror story in the second person, while a jeering crowd gathers outside the window with buckets of black paint.

Read “Jove’s Bicycle” at The Freak!

Saturday Night at the Hideout Hotel - Bobbi Chukran

Mac runs the Cactus Motor Court, a ramshackle 1960s motel beside the highway, just outside the county line. Men on the run hear in prison that he will give them a room for whatever they can afford. Tonight a nervous man with an old duffel bag arrives and takes the last vacancy, room number seven. Bobbi Chukran, author of the Nameless, Texas stories, builds this crime tale toward a satisfying twist. Even Mac's small cash fee ends up somewhere surprising.

Read "Saturday Night at the Hideout Hotel" at Mystery Tribune

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Beyond the First Shelf

How to Write a Ghost Story - Simone St. James

Simone St. James, the Canadian author of The Sun Down Motel, admits that she invented that novel's ghosts last. First she had to make a modern motel frightening, so she filled three notebook pages with ideas and used nearly all of them. Her short essay argues that a ghost is not a story on its own. It comes alive only through the living characters, the setting, and the questions they need answered. This is practical and encouraging advice for anyone writing a haunted tale this week.

Read "How to Write a Ghost Story" at Simone St. James's Substack

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A Very Good Dog: Roger Zelazny's A Night in the Lonesome October - Judith Tarr

Every October, many readers work through Roger Zelazny's final novel, A Night in the Lonesome October, one chapter a day until Halloween. Judith Tarr explains the appeal of the book, in which players gather near Victorian London to open or close a portal for the Elder Gods. Each player has an animal companion, and the narrator is Snuff, the loyal watchdog of a man named Jack. Tarr praises his friendship with Graymalk the cat and the odd charm of Gahan Wilson's illustrations. Her verdict is right there in the title.

Read "A Very Good Dog" at Reactor

Kevin Moore on Femme Fatales, Tropes, and Learning from the Women of Noir - Kevin Moore

Kevin Moore fell in love with noir watching Barbara Stanwyck pause at the top of the staircase in Double Indemnity. In this CrimeReads essay, he argues that the great femmes fatales were never simple stereotypes. They were intelligent and ambitious, and they were dangerous because nobody fully understood them. Moore traces the type from The Maltese Falcon and Chinatown to the heroine of his own neo-noir novel. He wanted to give her something noir rarely allowed its women, a full emotional life.

Read "Kevin Moore on Femme Fatales" at CrimeReads

Special Recommendations

Man-Size in Marble - E. Nesbit

A young painter and his new wife, Laura, rent a cottage in a quiet village and spend three happy months there. Their housekeeper, Mrs. Dorman, tells them a local legend about two marble knights lying on their tombs in the church. On All Saints' Eve, she says, the figures rise and walk back to their old house. The narrator laughs off the warning as charming folklore. E. Nesbit, best known for her children's books, set this chilling ghost story on the night of October 31.

Read "Man-Size in Marble" at Wikisource

The Hammer of God - G. K. Chesterton

In the hilltop village of Bohun Beacon, the dissolute Colonel Norman Bohun is found dead beside the church, his skull crushed by a small hammer. His brother, the devout curate Wilfred, had been praying inside. Suspicion falls on the powerful village blacksmith, whose beautiful wife the colonel had been pursuing. Father Brown wonders why anyone would choose such a small hammer when larger ones lay close at hand. Chesterton's story from 1910 is a classic puzzle with a sharp moral sting.

Read "The Hammer of God" at Wikisource

The Traveler's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed - Wilkie Collins

A young Englishman in Paris goes looking for a truly disreputable gambling house and finds one near the Palais Royal. He wins a fortune

at rouge et noir, and an old soldier insists on celebrating with champagne and strong coffee. Feeling strangely dazed, he takes a bed for the night in the house itself. As he lies awake, he notices something wrong with the heavy canopy above him. Collins's tale from 1852 is a masterclass in slow, breathless suspense.

Read "The Traveler's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed" at Wikisource

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

Many of today's pieces turn on what refuses to stay buried. A car finds its way home, an old book keeps its blank pages, and marble knights walk on the last night of October. Others follow people who hide their crimes and monsters that feed on loneliness. Horror and mystery give shape to fears we rarely say aloud. We hope these stories keep you good company as Halloween draws near.

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

Take care!