Afternoon Discoveries: October 29, 2026

Romance, Women’s Fiction, & Historical Fiction

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Romance, Women’s Fiction, & Historical Fiction

A young woman dances all night in her aunt’s courtyard on the eve of her first love’s wedding to someone else. In occupied Paris, a husband and wife share chicory coffee and a few precious grains of sugar. Today’s stories come from Substack writers and small magazines, with a Newfoundland love story and a Nova Scotia marriage in the paid section. The back shelf offers two Canadian

novelists on research, a romance writer on learning what she did not know, and three classics. Each piece asks what love is willing to risk.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 29, 2026.

Featured Discovery

The Dance Before the Wedding - Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar

Farha has loved her cousin Arshad ever since her aunt promised her to him as a bride when she was a baby. Now, on the night before he marries a classmate from his engineering college, she dances alone in her aunt's moonlit courtyard until her ankle bells are all she can hear. Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar tells the story through four people, each carrying a private regret. Two sisters watch, while the groom rides a bus home and wonders how to face her. A late phone call changes the whole evening, and Farha's final smile is perfectly earned.

Read "The Dance Before the Wedding" at CommuterLit

The Discovery Desk

Chicory & Sugar - Historical Snapshots

In occupied Paris, a man and a woman meet in a café that has run out of bread but still has a little sugar for their chicory coffee. Two young soldiers laugh at the counter, so the couple greet each other with only a touch on the arm. Their monthly meeting protects a painful cover story that even their children cannot know. The writer behind the Substack The Historian's Imagination, who signs as Historical Snapshots, builds the scene from small gestures and careful silences. A child's drawing in an envelope delivers the final quiet blow.

Read "Chicory & Sugar" at The Historian's Imagination

A Whole Lotto Love - Jayna Morrow

Every morning, a shy customer with shaggy blond hair buys coffee and scratch tickets from Daphne at Pappy's Gas-n-Go. Daphne does not believe in luck, but one rainy day she sells him a new romance-themed ticket called LOTTO LOVE. The next morning he returns with a twenty-dollar win and a theory about chance and choice. Jayna Morrow's sweet story appeared in Micromance Magazine, a Substack devoted to very short romance. Its final decision, settled with a penny from the register, is a small delight.

Read "A Whole Lotto Love" at Micromance Magazine

King Mark's Agony - Matias Travieso-Diaz

Everyone knows the legend of Tristan and Iseult, the lovers undone by a potion on the sea voyage to Cornwall. Matias Travieso-Diaz tells it instead from the side of King Mark, the older husband left brooding

alone in the throne room at Tintagel. Flour scattered on the floorboards has already exposed the lovers, and Tristan lies wounded after sneaking back. Mark must now choose punishments for his young wife, his beloved nephew, and finally himself. This story from The Freak!, a Toronto magazine, closes with a wry courtly twist.

Read “King Mark’s Agony” at The Freak!

Needlebird - Susmita Mukherjee

When Nina was eight, her mother called a dragonfly a needlebird, and the whole class laughed when Nina repeated it. Ever since, Nina has corrected her mother in airports, grocery stores, and hospitals, carrying a pocket dictionary like armour. Her mother keeps inventing words anyway, such as sleepside for the underside of a pillow and bone coin for a calcium tablet. Susmita Mukherjee, a writer from Kolkata, slowly reveals what those invented words have cost and saved. This tender story about a mother’s language rewards a careful reader.

Read “Needlebird” at Fictive Dream

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more stories of love, marriage, and history, three pieces on craft and research, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

The Champion of Quidi Vidi - Derek Puddester

In the Newfoundland village of Quidi Vidi, the ocean remembers every word spoken near it, and ill intent can bring disaster. That is why the annual spelling bee matters so much, and why shy bookkeeper Andrew Pike is the favourite to win again. Three days before the contest, he shares a harbour bench in St. John's with a giant of a man in a hand-knit scarf. Derek Puddester's folktale romance builds to a final word spelled while a gale batters the parish hall. Expect one cruel remark from a rival and a warm, happy ending.

Read "The Champion of Quidi Vidi" at The Freak!

The Last Tantrum of Youth - Krista Jane May

Alena is upstairs stomping on her husband's pillow after a hard moving day when Hamish has a heart attack on the back porch. Their new old house in Nova Scotia is full of half-unpacked boxes, and Hamish refuses to let her call an ambulance. Long ago, in the glow of early love, she promised he would never die in a hospital. Krista Jane May, who lives on Vancouver Island, turns the crisis into a wise and funny portrait of a long marriage. A neighbour emptying his compost bucket arrives at exactly the right moment.

Read "The Last Tantrum of Youth" at CommuterLit

If This Be Love - Paula Sather

Before a room full of guests, a composer plays his new piece for solo cello, which will soon premiere with the Toronto Symphony. His wife, who narrates, assumes it was written for her until she notices how their friend Cecelia stiffens at the first notes. Over the following days, a spare concert ticket becomes a quiet test of the marriage. Paula Sather, a writer from Oakville, Ontario, keeps the suspicion simmering under polite conversation. The final image of torn peonies in the garden says everything left unspoken.

Read “If This Be Love” at CommuterLit

Portrait of Luxury - Elena Goh

A young painter known for portraits of labourers seats a friend’s sister by a window and asks her to hold still. She wears a cheongsam, plaits her hair in neat rows, and stares away like an official posing for a portrait. Told in the second person, Elena Goh’s story is set in a young nation where paintings still feel like a luxury nobody can afford. As the brush moves, the painter realises the portrait has become a confession. One brief glimpse of the future makes her final smile ache.

Read “Portrait of Luxury” at Every Day Fiction

A Toy Train Ride - Shrutidhora P. Mohor

A woman imagines the man she loves riding a toy train through a long tunnel beneath a strange mauve sky. He rarely answers her questions, and he once asked whether it hurt that he did not love her. Shrutidhora P. Mohor, an Indian writer whose work has been listed for the Bristol and Bath prizes, moves between prose and broken lines of verse. She remembers him tapping tabla rhythms on a table while her favourite

songs played. The ending, in which she packs their silences into his luggage, is lovely and sad.

Read “A Toy Train Ride” at Micromance Magazine

Ghost Hunting for Love - Julia Rajagopalan

Amy has always wanted a tragic gothic romance, complete with black lace gloves, long skirts, and plenty of eyeliner. Instead of studying at the library, she sneaks off to an abandoned warehouse with cameras and an infrared scanner to hunt for ghosts. The rotten floor gives way, and a polite voice in the dark tells her she is in a bit of a pickle. Julia Rajagopalan’s playful story from Micromance Magazine’s Halloween week turns a scare into a bookish courtship. Her rescuer, a vampire devoted to literature, finally meets the internet.

Read “Ghost Hunting for Love” at Micromance Magazine

Beyond the First Shelf

Write What You Know … or Don’t - Liz Flaherty

Liz Flaherty, a retired postal worker and the author of more than twenty books, agrees that writing what you know prevents embarrassing mistakes. A local reader will notice if your town tests its sirens on the wrong day. Her trouble came when a minor character, a young pastor

who works in stained glass, demanded her own book and fell for a Navy pilot. Flaherty knew little about either life, so she learned to look things up and to feel them. Her better motto, she decides, is to write what you learn.

Read “Write What You Know … or Don’t” at Women Writers, Women’s Books

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Researching Is a Sleeves-Rolled-Up Process - Mary Tod

Mary Tod, a Canadian historical novelist, began writing about her grandparents’ lives through two world wars while living as an expat in Hong Kong. In this guest essay for Sarah Johnson’s long-running blog Reading the Past, now on Substack, she lists the sources behind her research. She reads the Canadian government’s battalion war diaries, soldiers’ letters, and books such as Pierre Berton’s Vimy. She also uses museums, old radio broadcasts, and online maps of French villages. Her advice dates from 2011 yet still feels practical and generous.

Read “Researching Is a Sleeves-Rolled-Up Process” at Reading the Past

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Three-Legged History: Paul Almond on Researching Historical Fiction - Paul Almond

Paul Almond, the Canadian filmmaker who created the documentary Seven Up!, spent his last twenty-five years writing The Alford Saga, eight novels about his ancestors on the Gaspé coast. This short piece, published by the Quebec Writers’ Federation soon after his death in 2015, explains his method. He compares research to binoculars resting on a tripod whose legs are oral tradition, documents, and intuition. A paper in a box under a hat rack revealed that his great-grandfather had

served on a British warship. It is a moving record of a lifetime spent listening.

Read “Three-Legged History” at QWF Writes

Special Recommendations

Aunt Olivia’s Beau - L. M. Montgomery

Prim Aunt Olivia Sterling keeps every cushion tassel in place and never allows a speck of dust in her parlour. One summer afternoon she shyly announces that Malcolm MacPherson, her beau from long ago, is coming home from British Columbia to marry her. Her nieces can hardly keep from laughing until a tall, bearded, wonderfully untidy man knocks at the door. L. M. Montgomery’s story from Chronicles of Avonlea is set on Prince Edward Island. Its last scene at the railway station is pure joy.

Read “Aunt Olivia’s Beau” at Wikisource

Her First Ball - Katherine Mansfield

Leila has grown up in the country, with the nearest neighbour fifteen miles away, so the ball she attends with her town cousins feels like the beginning of everything. She treasures each detail, from the tuberoses to the wisps of tissue paper from her cousin’s new gloves. Then a fat, shabby older partner tells her that one day she will be sitting on the

stage with the mothers. Katherine Mansfield captures how quickly a young heart falls and recovers. The final turn around the floor is delicate and true.

Read “Her First Ball” at Wikisource

The Son’s Veto - Thomas Hardy

Sophy was a parlourmaid who married the vicar she served, and after his death she lives in London as a lonely widow in a wheeled chair. Her son Randolph, educated at a public school and then Oxford, is ashamed of her grammar and her humble past. When Sam, a faithful gardener from her village who now runs a fruiterer’s shop, asks her to marry him, Randolph forbids it. Thomas Hardy’s story from 1891 is a quiet tragedy of class and love. Its final image at a shop door is unforgettable.

Read “The Son’s Veto” at Project Gutenberg

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

Many of today’s pieces turn on promises, kept or broken. An aunt keeps one made long ago, a wife keeps one made in early love, and a widow keeps one she should never have been asked to make. Others find love at a spelling bee, over a lottery ticket, and beside a window in good light. Romance and history remind us how much courage it takes to choose someone. We hope these stories keep you good company this week.

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

Take care!