Afternoon Discoveries: November 2, 2026

Literary Fiction & Poetry

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Literary Fiction & Poetry

Today's stories and poems pay close attention to the people we love. A Siberian girl covets her sister's best friend, a Filipino American father teaches his daughter to ride, and a Toronto-born writer follows a husband with dementia to the glow worms of New Zealand. The poems come largely from small and Canadian magazines, with a baker in the snow, a girl listening for wartime planes, and birds' nests lined with a mother's hair. The back shelf

brings two writers in conversation and two Canadian essays on how poems work. The classics end with Hopkins, Woolf, and a Maritime harvest.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 2, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Good Little Fox - Karolina Letunova

It is minus forty in Western Siberia, and young Natasha is hunting for a scrap of white silk to make new cuffs for her school uniform. She hopes the shimmer will finally make her older sister's best friend, Aleksey, notice her. At Baba Lena's flat, a visitor brings honeycomb, and the afternoon soon turns on a fox pelt and a woman's loss. Karolina Letunova, who grew up in Western Siberia, writes about jealousy, hand-me-downs, and the quiet rebellions of girlhood with tenderness and wit. The final pages show a child learning what it costs to want something too much.

Read "Good Little Fox" at The Common

The Discovery Desk

Cyclists - E. P. Tuazon

On Father's Day, a father insists the day belongs to his daughter as he wheels her new bike to the park. She is old enough to be embarrassed that she still cannot ride. He calls out tips about light hands and leaning into turns, while she wonders what all those fights with Mom were really about. His own father, Lolo, rode in what Dad calls the Tour de Force and always finished last. E. P. Tuazon writes about family love with humour and feeling, and a standoff between parents gives the story a lovely, wobbling finish.

Read "Cyclists" at Split Lip Magazine

Lifesaving - Gary Fincke

Gary Fincke's poem returns to a winter night when his father, a baker, heard a man calling from the snow below the bakery window. The man was a regular at one of the street's taverns, and his father took his time before going out. When he finally did, he led the man inside to sit by the space heater and offered him a warm roll. The poem unfolds in long, beautifully controlled sentences full of pies, coffee cakes, and ash spread on icy roads. It is a quiet study of grudging mercy and the stories families keep retelling.

Read "Lifesaving" at ONE ART

The Orchestra Conductor - J.E. Crossman

Trevor and Malcolm have been together for twenty-seven years, and they always planned to visit New Zealand once they retired. After Malcolm can no longer draw the face of a clock for his doctor, Trevor

books the flights before he can talk himself out of it. The journey from Vancouver to the South Island is exhausting and often frightening. J.E. Crossman, who was born in Toronto and worked in Thunder Bay for decades, writes about caregiving with honesty and warmth. A night among glow worms gives the story one of the most moving endings we have read this season.

Read “The Orchestra Conductor” at Plenitude Magazine

A Place Both Inside and Out - Vinita Agrawal

Vinita Agrawal’s poem begins with a land that is not a map but a slow erosion. Rivers change their minds, trees become historians of wind, and the speaker sets out to learn the grammar of rocks. Bit by bit, the speaker builds a home from what the weather discards, until the place itself begins to grow within. Agrawal, the author of seven books of poetry, was shortlisted for Arc Poetry Magazine’s 2026 Poem of the Year. This is a dense and lovely poem about climate, belonging, and the patience of the natural world.

Read “A Place Both Inside and Out” at Arc Poetry Magazine

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more stories and poems, a conversation and two essays about the craft, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

This is How it Begins - Elvis Bego

Over brunch, Josephine's widowed mother asks whether she is thinking about having a child. The answer comes too quickly, and her mother turns out to have something she has waited many years to say. At the cemetery, she leads Josephine to a small granite stone for a girl named Eva. Elvis Bego, who was born in Bosnia and now lives in Copenhagen, writes about grief and family secrets in long, flowing sentences. The story's gentle final scene explains its title beautifully, and it will stay with you long after you finish.

Read "This is How it Begins" at The Common

Pearl - Pauline Peters

Pauline Peters begins with ancestral magicians who perform truly magical acts instead of tricks. One of them places a blue and white pearl, the colour of the earth, in a mother's work-hard palms. That mother, entangled in sisters, has come to peace in age and thrown off years of bitterness like a hot fur coat. Peters, a queer African-Canadian writer in Toronto, had work included in Best Canadian Poetry 2025. This short poem builds toward a celebration of the real, which it calls luminous, merciful, powerful, and full of grace.

Read "Pearl" at Plenitude Magazine

Nest - Raquel Desiree DeGrasse

Every late spring, the speaker's mother gathered all the hairbrushes in the house, even the cat's. Together they sat on the back steps and pulled out the hair, strand by strand, to leave for the birds. The wind carried their honey blonde and brunette strands toward the New England tree line, knotted together. Raquel Desiree DeGrasse's prose poem is short, warm, and full of precise domestic detail. Its final lines, about believing a mother's stories then and now, are simply lovely.

Read "Nest" at Rust + Moth

Phyllis on the Homefront 1943 - Al Ortolani

On Phyllis's birthday, the speaker remembers sitting beside her on the couch as she read Longfellow aloud. She once described lying on her bed at her stepfather's Kansas farm, listening to planes drone toward the war. Al Ortolani fills the poem with black walnuts, slippery elms, chickens, and fragile eggs carried to the incubator. Ortolani is a poetry editor for the Chiron Review, with a new collection expected in 2027. The poem ends on a single vivid image that stays with you.

Read "Phyllis on the Homefront 1943" at ONE ART

On the Beach at Dusk - Brooke Wiese

At dusk, the windows glow in the houses along the water's edge, and the tide measures out the minutes, days, and years. A lone umbrella stands on the wet sand, and the speaker wonders where its owner has gone. Brooke Wiese's poem moves from the setting sun to a quiet hope for one more year. It comes from Cormorants Prepare for the End of Times, which placed third in the 2026 Vallum Chapbook Award. The closing lines find life remarkable and dear, if untidy, as sand crabs burrow underfoot.

Read “On the Beach at Dusk” at Vallum

Maker - Aaron Caycedo-Kimura

For the last class of the term, the speaker folds origami figures out of Post-it Notes for his students. He learned the craft as a child from his mother, beginning with a nineteen-fold crane. His grandfather once made cranes from silver paper to sell for gas money during the Depression. Aaron Caycedo-Kimura ties that family history to the Greek root of the word poet, which means maker. The poem ends with each student reading aloud and choosing a tiny lily, crane, or ninja star.

Read “Maker” at Rust + Moth

Beyond the First Shelf

Conversation Between Friends: Michael Kardos and Catherine Pierce - Michael Kardos and Catherine Pierce

Michael Kardos opens this conversation by admitting he has owed Catherine Pierce five dollars since a cheap breakfast in the autumn of 2000. The two met as first-year MFA students and have since shared a marriage, two children, and decades of writing. Pierce, a poet and former Poet Laureate of Mississippi, describes teaching herself to write the essays in her memoir. Kardos explains why short stories remain his

place to experiment between novels. It is a warm, generous exchange about craft, genre, and a creative life shared.

Read “Conversation Between Friends: Michael Kardos and Catherine Pierce” at CRAFT

How Poems Work: Jesse Ferguson on John Newlove’s “God Bless the Bear” - Jesse Ferguson

Arc Poetry Magazine’s How Poems Work column offers a close reading of one Canadian poem at a time. Here Jesse Ferguson studies John Newlove’s unrhymed sonnet, which moves from frightened prey animals to an arthritic dancing bear. Ferguson shows how the poem’s shifting voices blur the line between human and animal. He reads the bear’s embrace as both an invitation and a possible threat. The full poem is reprinted at the top, so you can read it first and then follow the argument.

Read “How Poems Work: Jesse Ferguson on John Newlove’s “God Bless the Bear”” at Arc Poetry Magazine

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The Quick & The Read: On ‘The Short’ Poem - Chris Banks

Chris Banks admits he rarely writes short poems, because doing them well takes great compression and a fresh metaphor. In this essay for The Woodlot, the Canadian poetry review site he edits, he looks closely at some favourite short poems. He reads Mary Ruefle’s four-line take on The Odyssey and Gregory Orr’s poem about why a poem cannot be sold. He also praises Kay Ryan for the way she stretches familiar idioms. Banks, who lives and writes in Kitchener, Ontario, teaches here with the ease of a fine reader.

Read “The Quick & The Read: On ‘The Short’ Poem” at The Woodlot

Special Recommendations

Pied Beauty - Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote this short curtal sonnet in 1877, and it remains one of the most joyful poems in English. It gives thanks for dappled things, from skies coloured like a brinded cow to rose-moles on swimming trout. The poem praises chestnuts, finches’ wings, ploughed fields, and all trades with their gear and tackle and trim. Hopkins packs every line with sound, stress, and surprise, so nothing feels ordinary for long. Read it aloud, because its music is half the pleasure.

Read “Pied Beauty” at Wikisource

The Mark on the Wall - Virginia Woolf

On a winter evening, just after tea, the narrator looks up from a book and notices a small mark on the wall above the mantelpiece. Instead of getting up to see what it is, the narrator lets the mind drift. The thoughts wander through the house’s previous owners, lost possessions, Shakespeare, the trees outside, and the strange rules of ordinary life. Virginia Woolf first published this story in 1917, and it shows her early experiments with the flow of thought. The answer to the mystery arrives in the final line, and it is wonderfully small.

Read “The Mark on the Wall” at Wikisource

The Potato Harvest - Charles G. D. Roberts

Charles G. D. Roberts, often called the father of Canadian poetry, published this sonnet in Songs of the Common Day in 1893. It paints a high bare field at sunset, with crows, a grey snake-fence, cattle, and the long call of a supper horn. Harvest workers empty their baskets into barrels while stoop-necked oxen wait beside a cart. The images are plain and exact, drawn from the Maritime farm country Roberts knew. In the last line, the day fades out like smoke, one of the loveliest endings in early Canadian verse.

Read “The Potato Harvest” at Project Gutenberg

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

Today’s writers keep finding love in small, practical acts. A baker opens his door, a mother saves her hair for the birds, a teacher folds paper cranes, and a husband follows his partner into the dark to watch glow worms. The classics remind us that a dappled sky or a field at sunset can hold just as much. We hope one of these pieces stays with you through the week.

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

Take care!