Afternoon Discoveries: November 6, 2026

Nonfiction, Memoir, Essays, & Narrative Journalism

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Nonfiction, Memoir, Essays, & Narrative Journalism

A Winnipeg songwriter turns from the stage to a basement loom, and tenants in a Toronto Community Housing tower build a food pantry of their own. Today's nonfiction comes from Hazlitt, The Local, Geist, Longreads, Brevity Blog, and Hippocampus Magazine, with Canadian reporting and essay work throughout. In the paid section, a poet works among museum skulls, a

journalist tracks vanished time capsules, and a Montreal writer watches frog memes take over the feed. The back shelf brings memoir craft, a Transcendentalist plea for solitude, and Bacon on why we read.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 6, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Keep the Fire Burning: Examining the Love of God and Neighbour - Al Gagne

Al Gagne wrote Keep the Fire Burning because so much in ordinary life still needs noticing. He holds that each of us has only a finite time on earth to share love and experience. Concentrating on the Dialogues of Saint Catherine of Siena, the book treats spirituality as keeping faith alive and growing it toward a brighter closeness with God. The Perpetua Press Kindle edition runs about two hundred pages and offers a free sample before purchase. This Featured Discovery is a quiet invitation to neighbour-love and devotion.

Read the free sample of Keep the Fire Burning at Amazon

The Discovery Desk

Lay It Down - Luke Ottenhof

In 2020, John Samson Fellows released two new songs, including a hymn for Winnipeg's public libraries, and few listeners knew they were hearing a kind of goodbye. Under the name John K. Samson, he had made music since the mid-1990s with Propagandhi and the Weakerthans, collecting JUNO nominations and Hollywood syncs along the way. When Montreal writer Luke Ottenhof visited him in Winnipeg in December 2024, songwriting no longer held any interest. The passion had moved to an old Leclerc floor loom in a cold basement. This Hazlitt profile is tender, funny, and clear-eyed about what craft can become.

Read "Lay It Down" at Hazlitt

Tired of Waiting, Social Housing Tenants Find Help Amongst Themselves - Nic Hotchkiss

On a Wednesday morning at 200 Wellesley Street East in St. James Town, carts and mobility chairs fill the lobby as residents gather. Sasha, a single mother who emigrated from Guyana as a child, volunteers with a tenant-run food pantry that grew out of hunger and slow repairs. Toronto Community Housing rates the building's condition as poor even after millions in work since 2021. Nic Hotchkiss reports for The Local, a Toronto magazine, on neighbours who stopped waiting for promises and began feeding one another. It is a grounded portrait of mutual aid inside a tall, tired tower.

Read "Tired of Waiting" at The Local

Soul Blind - Larissa Diakiw

After a dim sum conversation about bats, an artist texts Larissa Diakiw two viral photographs of golden-crowned flying foxes, megabats with five-foot wingspans. The images send her back to Thomas Nagel's essay on whether we can know what it is like to be a bat, then into echolocation, fear, and human connection. Diakiw, whose work has appeared in Brick and The Walrus, writes with a careful, searching patience. She watches how a call softens in the ear as prey draws near, and how testimony differs from fact. This Hazlitt essay asks what we refuse to see in one another.

Read "Soul Blind" at Hazlitt

Elizabeth Smart's Rockcliffe Park - rob mclennan

After a photography session in Rockcliffe Park, rob mclennan drives past Elmwood School, where Elizabeth Smart studied from 1922 to 1929 and began the diaries that shaped her prose. The Ottawa neighbourhood of embassies and grand homes feels far from his Alta Vista routines, yet Smart's presence hangs in the tree-lined air. He returns to her as a touchstone, recalling By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept and her years as England's highest paid copywriter. Geography matters less than how she escaped provincial expectations for the large romantic gesture. This Geist essay is a quiet Ottawa literary pilgrimage.

Read "Elizabeth Smart's Rockcliffe Park" at Geist

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more essays and reports on craft, care, and public life, three pieces on memoir practice, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Beyond the Glass - Daniel Barnum

The Hyrtl Skull Collection faces every visitor who enters the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, one hundred thirty-nine skulls assembled in part through grave digging for nineteenth-century teaching. Poet and essayist Daniel Barnum takes a job there after his mother's death and finds strange comfort among the dead. He recalls an earlier visit when a woman in a fanny pack squealed and turned away from the wet specimens. Co-published with AGNI, this Longreads essay moves between museum work, private grief, and what cabinets of curiosity still ask of the living. It is exacting without becoming cold.

Read "Beyond the Glass" at Longreads

Burying the Evidence - Ashley Stimpson

In 1976, covered wagons rolled toward Valley Forge for the Bicentennial Wagon Train, carrying rededication scrolls signed by some twenty-two million Americans. Organizers planned to microfilm the papers and bury them in an aluminum time capsule for a century, then the scrolls vanished. Fifty years later, Ashley Stimpson reports for Longreads on that missing archive and on the International Time Capsule Society, which estimates that nine in ten capsules go missing. The essay is less a

scavenger hunt than a study of why we bury messages for strangers we will never meet. It is wry, patient, and oddly moving.

Read “Burying the Evidence” at Longreads

The Threshold - Meg Bernhard

In a Southern California dining room during the hottest summer on record, Meg Bernhard’s grandmother, eighty-eight, shares a bed with an eight-month-old great-grandchild. The two stare for long stretches, as if trading news from opposite ends of life. Bernhard drives from Las Vegas to the ICU, trains as a death doula, and watches potassium, oxygen, and appetite fail. Her grandmother drank senior Diet Cokes, hated police, and taught a brother to read. This Hazlitt essay sits at the threshold where birth and dying briefly share a room.

Read “The Threshold” at Hazlitt

So Much Grows - Allison LaSorda

Allison LaSorda sits in a fertility clinic waiting room lined with photographs of chubby babies and none of the women who wait alone. She has not decided to have a child, yet she wants to know what her body can still do after years of undiagnosed digestive illness. Later she drives into Saguaro National Park with her mother, watching cacti throw shadows across red land while her relationship at home feels murky. Desire and decision refuse to line up. This Hazlitt essay from a Maritime writer is frank, lyrical, and free of easy answers.

Read “So Much Grows” at Hazlitt

Picture This: You’re a Frog - Alex Manley

Long before frog costumes turned up at Portland protests, Montreal writer Alex Manley noticed a quieter online habit he calls frogposting. Feeds fill with frogs in hammocks, toads late for work, mice, raccoons, and other small undomesticated beings that seem to refuse modern life. He traces the trend through pandemic years and older animal fantasies, from Disney to werewolves. The joke is cute, yet the longing underneath is serious. This Hazlitt essay reads meme culture as a pastoral daydream in which people wish to be almost anything else.

Read “Picture This: You’re a Frog” at Hazlitt

Lessons From Covering Toronto’s First AI Election - Inori Roy

While overseeing The Local’s Candidate Tracker for Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton, Features Editor Inori Roy noticed campaign flyers that shared the same fonts, park photos, and tilted headlines. She could recreate a near match by asking ChatGPT for a 2026 municipal flyer. With more than six hundred candidates across three cities, the 2026 race became the region’s first mass AI election, full of passable generic campaigns. Roy asks what that sameness does to democratic choice. The piece is sharp civic reporting from a Toronto newsroom.

Read “Lessons From Covering Toronto’s First AI Election” at The Local

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Beyond the First Shelf

Writing a Memoir that Sells: You Need a Mystery - Allison K Williams

Allison K Williams argues that mysteries teach memoirists a useful trick. In a whodunit, death makes a stranger's life worth investigating. Memoir often does the reverse, opening on a funeral or diagnosis before readers know why they should care. She urges writers to begin with a live problem rather than a finished grief, so attention has somewhere to work. Posted on The Brevity Blog, this craft note is practical, a little ruthless, and immediately useful at the desk.

Read "Writing a Memoir that Sells" at The Brevity Blog

But What Did You Feeeel? - Heidi Croot

Heidi Croot tells her therapist she does not do feelings, then admits the joke is only half a joke. Her mother, paralyzed by polio at eight, taught swallow, blink, conceal, and Croot still rarely cries even when her throat hurts. On the page she can paint a vivid scene yet resists naming emotion, wary of telling rather than showing. She tests T. S. Eliot's objective correlative and asks how much feeling a reader still needs. This Brevity Blog essay is honest craft talk from a writer learning to let magma rise.

Read "But What Did You Feeeel?" at The Brevity Blog

Interview: Kelly Grace Thomas, Author of Future Tense - Renée Reese with Kelly Grace Thomas

Renée Reese talks with Kelly Grace Thomas about Future Tense, a memoir-in-verse from Alice James Press on infertility, her mother's

cancer, and the adoption of a daughter. Thomas says she wrote the poems in the middle of the storm as a life raft, never expecting a book. She describes the body as the most honest clock when stakes are life and death. The table of contents itself becomes a story about waiting. This Hippocampus Magazine interview is generous on form, time, and why some stories insist on poetry.

Read “Interview: Kelly Grace Thomas” at Hippocampus Magazine

Special Recommendations

Self-Reliance - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Self-Reliance, first published in 1841, remains one of the sharpest American essays on conscience. He urges readers to trust the bit of divinity that speaks in solitude rather than the secondhand opinions of the crowd. The famous lines about consistency and envy still sting because they ask for courage in ordinary speech. Read beside today’s craft pieces, it is a reminder that attention begins at home in the self. Project Gutenberg hosts the essay in his First Series collection.

Read “Self-Reliance” at Project Gutenberg

Walking - Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau wishes to speak a word for absolute Freedom and Wildness, not merely civil liberty. In Walking, he praises sauntering as a kind of crusade, a daily departure that treats the woods as holy land. Most townsmen, he says, remember one good walk from years ago and have kept to the highway ever since. The essay is playful, stubborn, and still useful for anyone who confuses exercise with attention. This Project Gutenberg text keeps the full nineteenth-century cadence intact.

Read “Walking” at Project Gutenberg

Of Studies - Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon’s short counsel Of Studies opens with a line many readers still know by heart, that studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. He sorts reading by temperament, warns against using books only for show, and recommends different paces for different volumes. Some books are to be tasted, others swallowed, and some few chewed and digested. The essay is brief enough for a lunch break yet dense with advice that still fits a working desk. Find it in Project Gutenberg’s Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral.

Read “Of Studies” at Project Gutenberg

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

Many of today’s pieces ask what we notice when ordinary systems stop answering. A musician relearns his hands at a loom, tenants stock a pantry, and a reporter watches campaign flyers blur into one template. Others keep company with bats, skulls, vanishing scrolls, and an old woman sharing a bed with a baby. Good nonfiction gives those hours a second chance to be seen. We hope a few of these pages keep you company this weekend.

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

Take care!