

Afternoon Discoveries: October 7, 2026

Mystery, Thriller, Crime, Horror, & Dark Fiction



AMONG THE LETTERS

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A pet tarantula is carried to a row of garages in a cage with a handle, and a summer game among six bored children starts to cost something. A young woman hauls a wagon of groceries up a mountain to a couple who have lost their daughter to a cougar, while a woman knitting a retirement blanket looks up to find a bleeding man with a gun in her doorway. Elsewhere a widower's

nature videos take an odd turn in the Maine woods, a palm reader in Jackson Square keeps passing the same missing-girl flyer, and five colleagues leave a lake cabin knowing exactly why there were six of them when they came. Today's shelf covers mystery, crime, horror, and the darker kinds of fiction, though most of these pieces care less about the scare than about what people agree not to say. Many of them begin in ordinary places, such as garages, kitchens, living rooms, and care homes, and let the dread gather at its own pace.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 7, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Tarantula - Seán Padraic Birnie

Seán Padraic Birnie's narrator looks back on a heatwave summer when he was eleven, a few months after his grandmother died and in the year his parents' marriage finally came apart. Six children fill the empty days around Kimberley Road with water fights, football, and the stamping of flying ants, until boredom pushes them toward a spin-the-bottle game they call Dare and treat as a sacred pact. At the centre of the group is Billy Roberts, a bully who never bullies the narrator, who carries little knives his stepdad brings back from France, and who one day brings his pet tarantula up to the garages in its cage. Jake Pegler, the short-sighted latecomer who spent two years earning a place at the edge of their group, is never quite safe from the others. Birnie lets the grown narrator's voice do much of the unsettling work, wry and self-implicating, admitting he did not care about spiders and wondering whether the way he remembers that summer is simply an excuse. The

story is less interested in a single shocking act than in how a group of children can agree to something none of them would choose alone.

[Read "Tarantula" at The Dark](#)

The Discovery Desk

The Lights Go Out in South Boston - Jerry Cronin

Jerry Cronin's narrator grew up in the old South Boston of the early 1980s, a neighbourhood of working-class Irish families, dive bars along Broadway, and men who claimed to be protecting their own. The story opens with Barry Watkins, a bar-to-bar brawler whose single straight right earns him the name One Punch and, eventually, steady work as the muscle for a local boss named Joe Matarano. The narrator's father, Little Murray Coughlin, runs the numbers for the same crew, checks the morning scores over poached eggs, and finds a Hershey bar or a Post-it note his wife has tucked into his jacket. Cronin writes in a loose, talkative voice that keeps admitting when it has drifted off track, and its digressions about Whitey Bulger, real estate developers, and boiled potatoes carry their own grim comedy. As the old neighbourhood gives way to condos and the bookmaking business dries up, the pressure on Little Murray starts coming from inside his own world. The result is a hard-boiled story about loyalty that is also about a family watching the only place it understands turn into somewhere else.

[Read "The Lights Go Out in South Boston" at Mystery Tribune](#)

We Were Once Twelve - S.C. Pires

S.C. Pires opens in a house where silence is the children's only protection and their oldest brother, Jeremiah, will not stop whispering. Ruth, the narrator, is fourteen and has just become the third oldest after her brother Peter was taken, and when she recites her siblings' names to herself she still feels the gap where his used to be. Something called Uncle lives in a room of the house, the villagers leave supper at the iron gate and send gifts in gratitude for the family's sacrifice, and a bitter taste in one child's meal tells everyone at the table who has been chosen. Pires keeps the horror in small domestic details: carrots drizzled with honey, chalk and boards in the garden, a kind teacher who rubs healing balm on their scars. Ruth's calm acceptance is what makes the story so hard to shake, because she has been taught to see the arrangement as duty and still hopes to teach children of her own someday. Jeremiah's question, what would happen if Uncle went unfed, hangs over every page.

[Read "We Were Once Twelve" at Apex Magazine](#)

The Not-Dog-Thing - Corey Farrenkopf

Corey Farrenkopf frames his story as segments of an interview with Jimmy Lectre, conducted through a shared document by a site called Unexplained Maine, about the disappearance of his father. After his wife's death, Paul Lectre began posting videos from the Maine woods, his bearded cheek pressed close to sassafras leaves as he recited plant facts gathered over a lifetime of weekend hikes. His following grows, then sours after an awkward remark about seeing his late wife's eyes in a frog, until he finds a nearly hairless creature beneath a white pine and brings her home. The videos show what looks like an abandoned mixed-breed pup, and only later does Jimmy dwell on the slightly longer legs, the mouth that opens a little too wide, and the blue, childlike eyes. Farrenkopf uses the vocabulary of online content, with its montages,

engagement numbers, and promised name reveal, to show how grief can be packaged for strangers and still remain private and strange. Jimmy's parenthetical asides, half joking and half refusing to know, give the story its particular chill.

[Read "The Not-Dog-Thing" at Bourbon Penn](#)

Dial 0 for Widowhood - Dylan Demasi

Deloris has been asking for three years to have her screen door fixed, and Dylan Demasi opens with her hatred of it: splintered at the bottom, curling at the corners, hanging crooked as a lawyer. On a hot June day in rural Oklahoma, the man who comes through it is bleeding through his suit jacket and carrying a .45, and he sinks into the leather chair she has sat in only once. He blames her husband, a lawman, for what happened to his brother at the credit union that morning, and he wants Deloris to phone the station and get her husband home within twenty minutes. Demasi builds the story out of the house itself, from the mother's rug she was permitted to keep to the walls of photos and clippings that never include her and the retirement blanket she was not allowed to buy fabric for. In well under a thousand words, those details sketch a whole marriage before anyone mentions it directly. The story leaves Deloris with her hand on the rotary phone, and the reader wondering what kind of choice she is about to make.

[Read "Dial 0 for Widowhood" at Shotgun Honey](#)

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more works of mystery, crime, horror, and dark fiction, three pieces about reading and writing in these genres, 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 Hanged Man - Katherine Conner

Roman reads palms at night in Jackson Square, and on his way there he keeps passing the same flyer asking *Have You Seen Me?* above the photograph of a sixteen-year-old named Camilla Guidry. He is sure he has seen that photograph before, though he cannot place where. Katherine Conner makes him an appealing fraud, a salesman trained from childhood by a mother who sold Mary Kay around their Mississippi neighbourhood and taught him to wear his saddest-child face. His former partner Anna, who believes she truly sees things, threw him out after catching him selling a grieving woman a vision of her dead son for a hundred dollars. When Roman shows her the flyer, she studies the girl's face and tells him only that it is all dark. Conner sets the story in the French Quarter's dusk hour, between the day psychics and the night psychics, and lets Roman's half-formed memory pull at the line between reading people and reading fate.

Read "The Hanged Man" at [Electric Literature](#)

I'm Sorry Your Daughter Got Eaten by a Cougar - Abbey Mei Otis

In Abbey Mei Otis's mountain valley, a young woman everyone calls Pickle hauls a wagon of canned corn, bacon, rice, and peaches up to

the Drakes, whose small daughter has been killed by a cougar. Inside their house she notices a clothesline piled on the floor of a half-open room, little pink sweaters and polka-dotted skirts still pinned to it, carried in from the rain so that nobody had to touch them. When the Drakes reappear in town, wandering the grocery store as if they have forgotten its layout, their eyes have taken on a yellowish tint and Mr. Drake's hand feels cold on her arm. Pickle wonders whether this is simply what grief looks like, and the story holds that question open with unnerving patience. Otis surrounds it with a small-town cast, from bar regulars plotting an escape to the suburbs to an absent ex-husband and a lover who has been dead for two hundred years, and treats the strange and the ordinary in the same unbothered voice. The result is a story about mourning in which the most frightening thing may be how politely everyone looks away.

Read "I'm Sorry Your Daughter Got Eaten by a Cougar" at Guernica

Everyone Wants to be a Part of Sasha - J.N. Bilse

In J.N. Bilse's story, the greatest honour at school is to be selected as a part of Sasha, a celebrity assembled from pieces of chosen teenagers. Jessica B gave her eyes and had to switch to independent study, Dustin P lost his fingers and became popular, and the narrator, preparing for her third audition, has been studying Sasha videos for flaws and worrying about her dry feet. Her mother cries whenever auditions are announced, while her father agrees that two good fortune cookies at dinner are a sign. The voice is breathless teenage chatter, full of rivalries, a jealous best friend, and the word spiralling picked up from a therapist, which lets the horror slip in sideways. Bilse pushes the logic of fandom and self-improvement until a body becomes a set of replaceable parts, all while the narrator insists this is the best thing that could happen to her. The audition line, with its waiting pods and its

adults who should have taken the hint years ago, is where the satire turns cold.

[Read "Everyone Wants to be a Part of Sasha" at Diabolical Plots](#)

My Parts, Collected - Melissa A. Watkins

Melissa A. Watkins begins with a body scattered across a city: a foot under leaves in a ditch near the highway, a hand beneath what will be someone's tulip bed next spring, and a head whose location the narrator cannot determine. The narrator, somehow still thinking, wills the hand to dig itself out and go looking for the rest. What follows is a grisly and oddly practical search through a park, a dumpster behind a convenience store, a graveyard, a junkyard, and a series of discarded coolers. Watkins keeps the tone dry and almost fussy, as when the reunited arm turns out to be the wrong side or the narrator covers an exposed breast with dead leaves for privacy. The comedy never cancels the violence; it makes the reader feel how thoroughly someone tried to erase this woman and how stubbornly she refuses to stay erased. At around eleven hundred words, it is a crime story told from the one perspective the crime was meant to silence.

[Read "My Parts, Collected" at Nightmare Magazine](#)

Turn Right for Terror - James Cooper

While visiting their mother in a care home, James Cooper's narrator recognizes a ninety-three-year-old resident as Rose Ward, who once played Bird Dog on a 1960s television anthology called Turn Right for Terror. Each episode sent new characters down a nameless road to take the same ominous right turn, which always led somewhere different, and Bird Dog was the strange sentinel waiting at the threshold every week.

The narrator hopes for nostalgia, and Rose offers profanity, a grudge against someone named Walter Nearing, and the claim that the show nearly killed her. Cooper opens with a confession from inside the production, that by the end nearly everyone involved wanted out and the show had a reputation as cursed. The care home's muzak, pressure-relieving cushions, and half-speed afternoons make a dry contrast with the story Rose reluctantly begins to tell. It is a novelette about television, memory, and the people who stand at the edge of other people's nightmares for a living.

[Read "Turn Right for Terror" at Reactor](#)

Sorry, Teddy, But This is Goodbye - Laura Cody

Laura Cody begins with a body: nobody is surprised to find Teddy dead in the hot tub that Sunday morning, only that he has sunk rather than floated. Six colleagues came to Teddy's private island cabin, somewhere between upstate New York and the Canadian border, for their annual retreat, and five of them knew only five would be going back. The narrator, Benji Asher, was Teddy's closest friend and chief financial officer, which is to say the man with the reins to the cash, and he explains the embezzlement, the coming investigation, and the folded slips of paper passed around in a hat with an untroubled frankness. The plan depends on nobody knowing who drew the marked slip, and much of the pleasure lies in watching Benji size up each co-conspirator the way a detective might. Cody gives the confession a brisk, conversational surface, with asides about the double z in embezzlement and the habits of the very wealthy, which makes the coldness underneath more striking. It reads like a country-house mystery turned inside out, where everyone already knows the crime and the only secret is who carried it out.

[Read "Sorry, Teddy, But This is Goodbye" at Mystery Tribune](#)

Beyond the First Shelf

The H Word: The Revolution Will Be HorrORIZED - Kurt Fawver

Kurt Fawver begins with the suspicion that horror might be a frivolous thing to read or watch in politically combustible times, then sets out to argue the opposite. His central claim is structural: horror finds a problem in the world, gives it extra teeth in fiction, and sets characters against it, which makes the genre a form of protest almost by design. *Frankenstein* and *The Call of Cthulhu* serve as his first examples, one magnifying scientific overreach and the other the dangers of exploration. The Friday the 13th films get a more interesting treatment, since Fawver shows how the same slasher series has been read as a condemnation of teenage behaviour and can just as easily cut in other directions. The column is short and direct, written for readers who already love the genre and want language for why it matters. Read beside today's fiction, it offers a useful lens for the monsters, curses, and bodies elsewhere on the shelf.

Read "The H Word: The Revolution Will Be HorrORIZED" at [Nightmare Magazine](#)

Who Owns Women Detectives? - Ellen O'Connell Whittet

Ellen O'Connell Whittet starts with herself as a fifth grader, reading a Nancy Drew mystery a day by flashlight on a camping trip, then moves

to the moment when the first Nancy Drew books and the first Miss Marple novel entered the US public domain. Both detectives first appeared in novels in 1930, when American women's right to vote was only ten years old, and Whittet reads their opening pages against each other. Nancy enters questioning her father about a missing will and driving off in her blue roadster, while Miss Marple is introduced as an item on a list of tea guests and the worst cat in the village. From there the essay turns to the women behind them: Mildred Benson, who wrote 23 of the first 30 Nancy Drew books under the Carolyn Keene name and went publicly unacknowledged for half a century, and Agatha Christie, who worked to control what became of her characters. Whittet is as interested in the cost of that authorship as in the freedom now attached to the characters. For readers who grew up with either detective, it is a thoughtful look at what being underestimated has meant on and off the page.

Read "Who Owns Women Detectives?" at the Los Angeles Review of Books

Searching for a Unified Theory of Chandler versus Macdonald - Frank Ladd

Frank Ladd's first education in detective fiction came from his father's den, a small dark room packed with crime paperbacks, where the lurid Ballantine covers of Raymond Chandler sat beside the austere Bantam editions of Ross Macdonald. Those covers become his way into two theories of plot. Chandler, in Ladd's reading, strings scenes like beads on a necklace, each one polished to be felt, which is why it hardly mattered that he could not tell Howard Hawks who killed the chauffeur in *The Big Sleep*. Macdonald weaves a tapestry instead, with threads that accumulate meaning slowly and only through their relation to one another. Ladd moves easily between memory, biography, and craft, offering the Sternwood hothouse as an example of a scene that solves

nothing and still does essential work. Writers of any kind of mystery will find a clear and usable distinction here, and readers may find themselves reaching for one of the two shelves.

Read “Searching for a Unified Theory of Chandler versus Macdonald” at [CrimeReads](#)

Special Recommendations

The Gutting of Couffignal - Dashiell Hammett

Dashiell Hammett opens with a portrait of Couffignal, a wedge-shaped island in San Pablo Bay where wealthy old men have retired to nurse their livers, improve their golf, and admit only as many storekeepers and working people as they need. His Continental Op, the agency’s unnamed detective, has drawn the job of guarding the wedding presents at the island’s largest house because the colleague slated for it was given a black eye by a pickpocket. The reception brings an admiral, an earl or two, a Russian princess, and a jovial black-bearded general who talks prize fights for a solid hour. By the time a storm blows in and the guests have gone, the Op is alone upstairs with sandwiches, a couple of books, and gifts worth between fifty and a hundred thousand dollars under grey-white sheeting. Hammett’s flat, observant narration makes the island’s careful order feel like something waiting to be tested. It is an early Continental Op story from *Black Mask* and a good place to meet the hard-boiled voice before it hardened into a style.

Read “The Gutting of Couffignal” free at [Library of America’s Story of the Week](#)

The Signal-Man - Charles Dickens

A traveller stands at the top of a steep railway cutting and calls down, "Halloa! Below there!" to a signalman beside the mouth of a tunnel. The man below does not look up toward the voice but turns, strangely, to look down the line, as if the words meant something else to him. Charles Dickens sets the story in a damp trench of rock with a red light at the tunnel's black entrance, a place where the signalman keeps his solitary watch over his instruments, his telegraph, and his bell. The narrator climbs down and finds a careful, conscientious man who regards him with a fear he does not immediately explain. Here the new technology of the railway becomes the setting for a very old kind of ghost story, one about warnings that come without explanation. The tension lies in the signalman's sense that something keeps trying to tell him what is coming.

Read "The Signal-Man" in Three Ghost Stories free through Project Gutenberg

Stone Animals - Kelly Link

Henry and Catherine move with their two children, Carleton and Tilly, to a house in the suburbs with a third child on the way, and Henry begins commuting to the city. A pair of stone animals sits on either side of the front door, and nobody in the family can agree whether they are dogs, lions, or rabbits, though there are plenty of real rabbits on the lawn. Catherine dreams in paint colours, Henry stays late at work, and the children run wild through a home where ordinary objects, a dishwasher, a hairbrush, an old pair of tennis shoes, begin one by one to feel haunted. Kelly Link never produces a ghost or names the trouble, which is precisely why the story unsettles; the domestic realism slides slightly out of true and never slides back. Lincoln Michel's introduction at

Electric Literature calls it a ghost story without any ghosts, and the description holds. Link's sentences stay light and funny even as the house closes in, and that lightness is part of the unease.

Read "Stone Animals" at Electric Literature

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

Many of today's stories turn on an agreement. Children agree to a game, a family agrees to feed something in the next room, a group of colleagues agrees not to ask which of them did it, and a whole valley agrees not to look too closely at a grieving couple's changing eyes. Crime and horror are often described as genres of the unexpected, yet so much of their power comes from what everyone already knows and has decided not to say aloud. The detective, the ghost, and the monster each turn up to make that silence harder to keep. Some of these pieces bring the truth out into the open, and others leave it standing just outside the door with the porch light on.

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

Take care!