Afternoon Discoveries: October 24, 2026

Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

AMONG THE LETTERS
OCT 24, 2026 PAID



Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

A daughter brings her dead mother home in a bucket. Two schoolgirls fold their wants into paper planes, and a siren makes her pitch from a flat rock. Today's stories come mostly from small magazines, where flash fiction and the strange keep finding new shapes. A craft essay, a review, and a close reading of a weird tale from British Columbia fill the back shelf. The classics bring a runaway

nose, a husband who hides one street away, and a story that famously refuses to end.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 22, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Every Day I Feed Mother - Imogen Ma

A few weeks after her estranged mother dies in Thailand, a young woman named Eight finds a small, breathing lump of flesh on her New York stoop. She knows at once that it is her mother. She carries it upstairs, keeps it in a bucket in the kitchen closet, and feeds it whatever she can find, from dumpster bread to rats from glue traps. Imogen Ma's story is grotesque, funny, and painfully honest about grief that arrives unfinished. It is a strange and memorable portrait of a daughter still trying to be enough.

Read "Every Day I Feed Mother" at Strange Horizons

The Discovery Desk

Paper Planes - Jane Wageman

Two girls sit in the back corner of a history class, both in love with the same boy named Jonah. They build paper planes that rarely fly and write their notes deep inside the wings. When they run out of courage, they stick Post-it stars on his back so softly he never feels it. Jane Wageman tells the whole story in the first-person plural, so the girls move and want as one. It is a tender piece of flash fiction about the things we fold up instead of saying.

Read “Paper Planes” at Fractured Lit

Song of Chloe P., a Siren - Kim Magowan

Kim Magowan’s siren does not sing about the sea. She invites a tired, ageing office worker to sit beside her on a rock and tell her everything, from his thinning hair to the younger project manager who calls him a geezer. Her offer comes in one long, breathless, beautifully paced sentence of sympathy. Every worry is legitimate, she promises, and every complaint deserves her full attention. The joke darkens as you remember what sirens do, which makes this sly flash fiction both funny and chilling.

Read “Song of Chloe P., a Siren” at Fractured Lit

The Talking Dog - Jamie Mullins

There is a dog at the end of the lane that can talk, a brother insists, and he has the videos to prove it. The family gathers around his phone while the television plays news of another air strike overseas. A mother in pin curlers asks whether the dog is real, and a father forgets the fundraiser she has mentioned all week. Jamie Mullins, a Glasgow writer, builds this

microfiction from small distractions that slowly add up. It asks what we miss when we only half listen.

Read “The Talking Dog” at CRAFT

Your Magic School Admittance Letter Never Arrives - Maya Prasad

Every friend gets into a magical university, but your letter never arrives. Maya Prasad tells this young adult fantasy in the second person and in seasons, beginning with parents who are Very Disappointed. Over the summer, an uncle hires you at his garage, where you grease clock gears with enchanted milkweed and teach a blender to sing. Then a boy from an elite school brings in his carriage for repairs. It is a warm and witty story about practical magic and finding your own kind of talent.

Read “Your Magic School Admittance Letter Never Arrives” at Cast of Wonders

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

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Changeling Girl - Sarah Nell

The girl in Sarah Nell's story has known for a long time that she is not real. Other girls do not practise their smiles in a mirror or feel the tingle of fluorescent lights. She wonders whether she was shaped from mud and moonlight, or left behind as a cruel trick. Nell lets folklore carry a familiar feeling of being made wrong for the world. The ending finds her among other people who wear masks of their own, and the story turns quietly hopeful.

Read "Changeling Girl" at Fractured Lit

Nice Things to Leave at A Grave - Liz Vaughan

A mother watches her teenage daughter paint her face white for a friend's funeral, the way the two girls once practised together. At the graveside, the family has buried a daughter named Kylie, though her friend insists her name was Lilith. Liz Vaughan writes from inside the mother's helplessness as the forest looms beyond the chapel. The grief turns stranger as dusk falls. This quiet horror story, first published in a horror zine, honours the friendships adults never fully see.

Read "Nice Things to Leave at A Grave" at Fractured Lit

Eulogy for Fa, the Dreamer - Elissa Field

Elissa Field's eulogy is written in the future tense, for a father who will not want to die. He is curious, though, and his children will watch him find seams in the world and slip through. A trauma helicopter scrapes him from a road, and in his mind he flies over wide Canadian forests. Again and again he is brought back. This lyrical flash fiction turns repeated near-deaths into a portrait of a restless, unforgettable man.

Read “Eulogy for Fa, the Dreamer” at Fractured Lit

Butterfly Effect - Angela Liu

Angela Liu’s poem imagines a door at the end of a subway tunnel where everything we have ever lost is waiting. From there it moves through fireflies, a grandmother’s favourite flowers, and snow that outlines a memory before the spring melt takes it away. Liu has been a finalist for the Nebula and Astounding awards, and she writes about inheritance and grief with a light touch. This short speculative poem trusts small images to carry large feelings. It rewards a slow second reading.

Read “Butterfly Effect” at Uncanny Magazine

If He Fell - Kathryn Kulpa

Once there was a boy who fell off a mountain, and once he sang a song the narrator believed he wrote just for her. Kathryn Kulpa’s flash fiction remembers bus rides to the city, cappuccino, Patti Smith and Sam Shepard, and a Bogart double feature in an empty front row. A short newspaper headline breaks the spell. Kulpa then lets time run backwards like an old classroom filmstrip. It is an elegy for first love and for the question that never gets answered.

Read “If He Fell” at New Flash Fiction Review

Kolorete - Alfred Luarca

On a Sunday morning, a child watches his grandmother prepare for church with the care of a ritual. Two candles burn near the altar, and the Holy Child wears red and gold. Alfred Luarca writes in short, exact

sentences that slow the morning down. His narrator keeps correcting himself, unsure whether he was six, seven, or eight. The result is a vivid short story about how a memory changes each time we tell it.

Read “Kolorete” at CRAFT

Beyond the First Shelf

Framing Catastrophe in the First Two Paragraphs - Darryl J. Benjamin

While reading contest submissions, Darryl J. Benjamin noticed that many strong stories open with what he calls the mountaintop move. The first paragraph surveys time, place, and tone from a height, and the second drops us straight into scene. Benjamin traces the pattern through stories by T. C. Boyle, Louise Erdrich, and William Gay. He shows how that opening quietly sets up the ending a story must reach. Short fiction writers will find a useful tool here.

Read “Framing Catastrophe in the First Two Paragraphs” at CRAFT

Review: Claudia Monpere’s The Periodic Family: Stories - Gillian O’Shaughnessy

Claudia Monpere’s new flash collection holds sixty stories about the rituals and tensions that keep families together. In this review, Gillian

O'Shaughnessy begins with a pregnant woman fixated on the sun's indifferent violence. She compares the book to the James Webb Space Telescope, zooming between the domestic and the cosmic. The review shows how flash fiction can expand far beyond a single moment. It is a generous introduction to a small press collection.

Read "Review: Claudia Monpere's The Periodic Family" at SmokeLong Quarterly

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The Things We Do For Tenure, Redux: Rebecca Campbell's "A Hole Cut in the Wall of the World" - Ruthanna Emrys and Anne M. Pillsworth

In this instalment of their long-running Reading the Weird column, Ruthanna Emrys and Anne M. Pillsworth take on a story by the Canadian writer Rebecca Campbell. It follows an assistant professor who travels to an island near British Columbia in 1976 to interview a reclusive poet. His tenure hopes rest on the book he plans to write. The two critics trade close readings, favourite lines, and wry asides. Their conversation is a lively guide to how weird fiction builds its unease.

Read "The Things We Do For Tenure, Redux" at Reactor

Special Recommendations

The Nose - Nikolai Gogol

One morning in St. Petersburg, a barber cuts open his breakfast bread and finds a nose inside. Across town, Collegiate Assessor Kovalev wakes to discover a smooth, flat space where his own nose used to be. Worse still, he later spots his nose riding around the city in a carriage, dressed in the uniform of a State Councillor. Gogol never explains any of it, and the absurdity only grows funnier. This classic remains one of the great strange stories of Russian literature.

Read “The Nose” at Wikisource

Wakefield - Nathaniel Hawthorne

Hawthorne begins with a story he once read in a newspaper about a London man who left his wife without warning. He took lodgings in the very next street and stayed away for twenty years. Then one evening he simply walked back through his own front door. Hawthorne imagines how such a whim could harden into a lifetime. This short, unsettling tale feels surprisingly modern in its interest in absence and drift.

Read “Wakefield” at Wikisource

The Lady, or the Tiger? - Frank R. Stockton

In a kingdom ruled by a semi-barbaric king, accused men face justice in a public arena with two identical doors. Behind one waits a hungry tiger, and behind the other waits a lady the man must marry on the spot. When a young courtier dares to love the princess, he is sent into the arena, and she alone learns which door is which. She signals him to choose the right-hand door. Stockton’s famous 1882 story then refuses to tell us what he finds.

Read “The Lady, or the Tiger?” at Wikisource

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

Today's stories keep finding doors in ordinary places. A bucket in a closet, a paper wing, a flat rock, and a garage full of singing appliances all turn out to hold more than they first seem to. Flash fiction does that kind of work quickly, and speculative fiction lets the strange say what plain words cannot. We hope a few of these pieces stay with you through the weekend.

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

Take care!