Afternoon Discoveries: November 14, 2026

Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

AMONG THE LETTERS
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Speculative, Hybrid, Experimental, Short, & Flash Fiction

Ice sprites move into a cursed kingdom, a fae courtier raises a stolen boy, and a wolf swallows the brightest star in the sky. Today's speculative and flash fiction comes from a Substack writer's daily practice, Kaleidotrope, Every Day Fiction, Flash Fiction Online, and SmokeLong Quarterly. In the paid section, small gods answer a frightened child, a family returns after a wildfire, and a

town's teenagers wade into a singing sea. The back shelves bring a poetry form built on repetition, a hopeful reading list, a new novel review, and tales from Dunsany, Wells, and Wilde.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on November 14, 2026.

Featured Discovery

A Spritely Kingdom Of Eternal Winter - Leeron Heywood

Nobody from Thurrockbron can explain why their unremarkable kingdom was cursed with endless winter, so everyone simply leaves. Years later, ice gatherers find ghostly blue lights, chiming music, and a crowd of delighted ice sprites who think the empty houses are perfect. The two peoples settle into a happy trade of ice blocks for glass trinkets, with snow roads leading to old homes and family graves. Leeron Heywood wrote this charming fable from a daily prompt on a personal Substack. Its final discovery, buried in a snowdrift, lands with a sly wink.

Read "A Spritely Kingdom Of Eternal Winter" at Leeron Heywood's Substack

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The Discovery Desk

The Bargain - Mari Ness

A fae woman asks a king for his firstborn, certain he will refuse, and suddenly finds an angry five-year-old in her arms. She carries the boy to the Court of the Twelve Emerald Songs, where he hates the shifting walls, the gossamer bed, and every attempt to feed him starlight. A small dog, a juggling jester, and a patient musician help raise him for three times seven years. Mari Ness, a Hugo and Nebula finalist, tells the fairy tale from the side that usually keeps the child. Its last image is quietly heartbreaking.

Read “The Bargain” at Kaleidotrope

All the Pigeons - Addison Trev

Professor Von Fountain de Marc, a title he gave himself, invents a device that reads the exact age of anything he points it at. His workbench, his chicken Henrietta, and the fountain in the town square all check out perfectly. Every pigeon in town, however, is precisely two years, two months, and two days old. Addison Trev, a UK writer who brings stories back from his travels, builds the comedy with brisk confidence. Wait for the dog, Dr. Tail-wag, whose reading changes everything.

Read “All the Pigeons” at Every Day Fiction

The Wolf Who Swallowed a Star - Em Harriett

Grotto runs with the Pack of Narrow Valleys, and he resents the bright star that their one-eyed matriarch, Squall, follows through the mountain passes. One night he leaps from a plateau fringed with gentian and swallows it whole. The star that guided elk, mule deer, and wolves alike begins to burn inside him. Em Harriett tells it in the cadence of an old fable, with sharp details of fur, frost, and sagebrush. First published in The Orange and Bee, it opens the November issue of Flash Fiction Online.

Read “The Wolf Who Swallowed a Star” at Flash Fiction Online

The Eulogy - Jules Foshee

The narrator never wrote a real eulogy for her aunt Debbie. Instead, she posted a late-eighties home video of Debbie teaching her mother to dance in the kitchen, faces shining over a colander. Every year it returns as a Facebook memory, with Soul II Soul on the speaker and the two women bouncing through the pony. Jules Foshee, founder of the medical humanities initiative NarrativeRx, turns a single clip into one long, joyful closing sentence. It is a flash about grief that somehow feels like dancing.

Read “The Eulogy” at SmokeLong Quarterly

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon’s edition. Below this point are six more stories of small gods, wildfire, felled trees, and a summoning sea, three pieces on poetry craft, hopeful reading, and a new novel, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

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

More From the Discovery Desk

Welcome, Welcome. - Daniel Roop

At six, a girl realizes she will one day die, and her tired mother's warning about choking on a moth only makes it worse. She prays to the God of Moths, who appears at sunrise as a fluttering cloud and promises her safety. Soon she is praying to the Goddess of Small Stones, the God of Cows, and dozens more. Daniel Roop follows her prayers from fear to welcome across a whole lifetime. It opened the Tiny Gods issue of Flash Fiction Online, and its ending glows.

Read "Welcome, Welcome." at Flash Fiction Online

Guardian of the Thresholds - Elijah J. Mears

A tiny guardian, small enough to fit in a giant's palm, is sent by its god to protect a temple full of giants and keep evil from the threshold. On its first frightening day, it hides behind the quiet one, a gentle soul who also knows fear. Over the years it watches that friend bleach their hair, dye it crimson, and slowly grow bright while the others learn to set their anger aside. Elijah J. Mears tells it entirely from the guardian's small, devoted point of view. It is tender and deeply moving.

Read "Guardian of the Thresholds" at Flash Fiction Online

Spared - W. Glewicz

At two in the morning, the narrator, Beth, and three-year-old Emma flee a wildfire on foot after traffic stalls. What stays with the narrator is the noise, a roar of cedars exploding into flame that sounds like a dozen trains. After days in a crowded community centre, the narrator returns alone to find the neighbourhood obliterated. In the ashes of the living room lies a late mother's porcelain robin, the one she called her lyrebird. W. Glewicz, a writer and composer near Mount Rainier, ends on a note of fragile hope.

Read "Spared" at Every Day Fiction

Emerald Ash Borers - Kate Champagne

Dahlia and her twin kindergarteners watch from the porch as arborists take down the family's ash tree, one bough at a time. Mateo hides his face while Javier cheers each falling branch. The beetles had tunnelled too deep for injections, sprays, or soil drenches to save it. Kate Champagne, a Spanish teacher in the Twin Cities, lets the tree carry the weight of a marriage hollowed out by deception. When the ash finally falls, the yard is bare but free, and the family goes inside together.

Read "Emerald Ash Borers" at Every Day Fiction

The Sea Calls - Jennifer Skogen

One summer night, a song draws the town's young people, ages twelve to seventeen, out of bed and down to the shore. Sixteen-year-old Cassie, restless in her small town, wades in with the others among strange lights moving under the waves. The sea asks that one of them stay, and Cassie offers herself. Jennifer Skogen, a Pacific Northwest writer of speculative fiction and poetry, gives the night a dreamlike pull. The ending turns, unexpectedly, toward a mother waiting on the porch.

Read “The Sea Calls” at Kaleidotrope

The Picket Line Labradoodle - Robert Jeschonek

Desi Stewart and her fellow teachers are on strike when a butterscotch labradoodle with no collar starts visiting the picket line every day. He greets everyone but lingers longest with Desi. When a whistle calls him back across the street, his owner turns out to be Matt Gauge, the assistant principal she once nearly dated. Gail McKenzie, a snarky sixtysomething librarian, cannot resist playing matchmaker. Robert Jeschonek settles both the strike and the romance with a satisfying, good-natured twist.

Read “The Picket Line Labradoodle” at Every Day Fiction

Beyond the First Shelf

How to… Write a Valanga - Alice Willitts

Alice Willitts, co-editor of Bending The Arc, introduces the valanga, a poetry form whose name means avalanche in Italian. Invented by Mike Smith, also known as Brindley Hallam Dennis, it opens with three lines that return three more times as new lines build between them. Willitts explains why that abundance suits thrutopian writing about better futures. A clear numbered template makes it easy to try at home. Hilary

Watson's poem Step Through The Door to 2030 serves as a worked example.

Read "How to... Write a Valanga" at Bending The Arc Magazine

Book Review: Chimera Skin by Johnny Compton - Melissa A Watkins

Melissa A Watkins reviews Johnny Compton's new novel, in which a silver-skinned alien arrives in rural North Carolina promising humanity an elevated state of life. Scientist Logan Swanson, Jr. must learn the truth about the visitor and save humanity from extinction. Watkins praises the book's classic feel and how Swanson draws strength from his Black and Choctaw community rather than lone heroics. She also notes some stomach-turning body horror. Her comparison points, I Am Legend and Slaughterhouse-Five, make the pitch clear.

Read "Book Review: Chimera Skin by Johnny Compton" at Lightspeed Magazine

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Which Thrutopian Books Should I Read? - Bending The Arc Magazine

Bending The Arc, a Substack magazine devoted to thrutopia, shares the books its editors are reading and why each one points toward a better world. The list runs from The Last Plastic Fork and Other Green Epiphanies, a collection of short stories and flash fiction, to Laura Baggaley's YA novel Nourish. Kim Stanley Robinson's The Ministry for the Future earns a candid note about its challenging opening. Isabel Losada and adrienne maree brown round out the shelf. Readers are invited to add their own picks in the comments.

Read “Which Thrutopian Books Should I Read?” at Bending The Arc Magazine

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Special Recommendations

The Kith of the Elf Folk - Lord Dunsany

A little Wild Thing dances over the marshes by night, treading on the reflections of stars, until the cathedral’s evensong fills it with longing. It begs the kith of the Elf-folk for a soul so it can worship and understand music. They weave one from gossamer, dew, marsh mist, and the song of the golden plover. Pressed above its heart, the soul turns the Wild Thing into a young woman who must learn human life. Lord Dunsany writes it with luminous, melancholy grace.

Read “The Kith of the Elf Folk” at Wikisource

The Magic Shop - H. G. Wells

A father lets his small son, Gip, tug him into a modest magic shop on Regent Street that always seemed slightly out of reach. The shopman pulls glass balls from his elbow and the back of his neck and declares Gip the Right Sort of Boy. Each trick grows stranger, and the father’s polite unease grows with it. H. G. Wells balances wonder and comic anxiety with perfect timing. It remains a delight for anyone who has ever trusted a child’s instincts.

Read “The Magic Shop” at Wikisource

The Selfish Giant - Oscar Wilde

Children play in the Giant’s lovely garden every afternoon until he returns home and builds a high wall to keep them out. Spring refuses to visit, and the Snow, the Frost, the North Wind, and the Hail settle in for good. One morning a linnet’s song signals that the children have crept back through a hole in the wall. Oscar Wilde follows a heart that slowly opens, ending with the Giant old and gentle beneath a blossoming tree. It is short, tender, and timeless.

Read “The Selfish Giant” at Wikisource

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

Many of today’s stories turn on small kindnesses in strange places. Ice sprites guard a buried wish, a fae courtier learns pity, and tiny gods gather around a frightened child. Others hold grief close, from a home video of two women dancing to a porcelain robin found in the ashes. Flash fiction can carry a whole life in a few hundred words. 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!