

Afternoon Discoveries: October 14, 2026

Mystery, Thriller, Crime, Horror, & Dark Fiction



AMONG THE LETTERS

OCT 14, 2026  PAID



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A beadworker with nothing to show for the label takes a free residency in a Berkshires mansion that harvests what it claims to celebrate, while a Columbus private eye is hired a year after a young woman is killed in an ice cream line.

Today's mystery, thriller, crime, horror, and dark fiction keeps finding the uncanny inside inheritance, rumour, and the houses people think will keep

them safe: a coastal pregnancy that ends with a horseshoe crab, a journalist watching a fake roof photograph become a local religion, and a daughter asked to ferry her father through the underworld. Some of these stories are built from stolen talent, New England vampire custom, and a cruise ship that chews memories; others from a gated community whose resident never quite left, a Bluebeard house of ghosts, and a second-person undead shift. Around them are a fiftieth look at Marathon Man, a tour of gangster horror from Scarface to Sinners, and a craft essay on terror versus horror. The back shelf holds three older cases: a kitchen jury of two women on a cold March morning, a Dorsetshire ghost you only recognize afterward, and a Thinking Machine locked in a death cell for a week. Taken together, they suggest that the dark is rarely elsewhere, because it so often turns out to be a closer look at what people already know and refuse to say.

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

Featured Discovery

The Work of Smith House - P.C. Verrone

P.C. Verrone's story follows Lora Crow, a freelance graphic designer whose rent-controlled apartment has been bought out by developers and who answers a call for free residencies at Smith House, a pristine Berkshires mansion for "Indigenous Cultural Bearers," by listing beadwork as her discipline even though she has none. Inside she finds Hopi pottery, Choctaw flutes, a Diné blanket, and walls of masks, while the assistant Miss Fairewell credits every piece to Rob Smith, whose indigo eyes make Lora uneasy. Xochi Hernandez, a choreographer

researching the Indigenous roots of Mexican folklorico, warns her about a sucking sound at night that Fairewell dismisses as the pipes, and soon Xochi can no longer dance. Lora carries her late mother Jeannie Crow's turquoise and white sweetgrass earrings and remembers the master beadworker who made them, until the house takes what it came for. Verrone, an Afro-Native writer of Kiowa and Osage descent, turns a residency into a theft of living culture with a final image that refuses comfort. The piece carries content notes for suicide and violence, and it earns both.

[Read "The Work of Smith House" at PseudoPod](#)

The Discovery Desk

What I Wanted - Andrew Welsh-Huggins

Andrew Welsh-Huggins returns to Columbus private eye Andy Hayes about a year after Olivia Cassell, twenty-two and an Ohio State graduate, is killed by a bullet while waiting in line at Jeni's in the Short North. Her mother, Ivy, hires Andy because the case has gone cold, and an anonymous female tip to the media soon points at Jordan, the new wife of Olivia's ex-husband Mike, a man who turned conspiracy-minded and stockpiled guns after the pandemic. Andy calls in an old debt with Jamal Martinez, a scarred East Side gangster, and works the neighbourhood the official investigation never quite reached. The trail leads to a burglary at Mike's own house that was never reported, and to a gun that should never have been on the street. Welsh-Huggins, who

edited Columbus Noir and writes the Andy Hayes series, keeps the procedural clean and the city specific. The ending lands with the quiet force of something that was always in plain sight.

[Read "What I Wanted" at Mystery Tribune](#)

Skittering Within - Kelsea Yu

Kelsea Yu opens on the day Lina Cheng goes into labour, which is also the day the last horseshoe crab harvest begins along the coast where her family has moved. Her daughter Hai has lived with severe eczema since childhood, hospitalized in second grade and later asked by a dermatologist to sit for photographs for a medical paper, while her mother's two rules remain do not make things difficult and be normal. In the ocean Hai feels, impossibly, a humpback, a wolf eel, and a blue-ringed octopus, and on an aquarium field trip she runs away to the horseshoe crab tank. Her father Wei is having an affair, the family's patience is thin, and the body Hai inhabits will not keep the bargain she was asked to keep. Yu, a Shirley Jackson Award nominee, writes transformation as both escape and belonging. The closing return to the sea is earned, strange, and exact.

[Read "Skittering Within" at Apparition Literary Magazine](#)

The Last Honest Man - Kirst D'Raven

Kirst D'Raven's journalist Perry Martin, twenty-three years in newspapers and fourteen at the Mercury, receives an email at 2:13 a.m. with a photograph of a woman on the roof of Bellweather House, a former children's home, and nothing else in the message. His editor Ruth runs it anyway; the image goes viral, TikTok invents a satanic history, and people leave flowers for Elsie Crane, who in fact died in Spain in

2018. Callum Price, who works at Kwik Fit, confesses that the photograph was a dare-made fake, yet almost no one believes him, and soon his friend Gaz goes missing inside the building. Perry goes in after him and finds Gaz with LIAR cut into his chest and a naked thin man on the ceiling. When Perry's own photograph of what he saw is dismissed as AI, the last image arrives of his bedroom, with something under the bed breathing three short, one long. The story is sharp about rumour economies and graphic about what waits when the rumour turns out to be true.

[Read "The Last Honest Man" at Mysterious Times](#)

Vessel, Skin, Daughter, Stranger - Claire Jia-Wen

Claire Jia-Wen's Jessica is studying at the UCLA library before finals when her mother calls from Arcadia to say that Dad woke up, except it is not Dad: it is the eldest Shen son from Alhambra, and her mother, an occultist of the 626, has charged the Shens for the borrowed body. Christopher the family cat carries five scars for five returns from the underworld, and Jessica is next in line to go down with silver and gold borrowed from a Yeo ancestor to throw at brigand ghosts. Her ex Isaiah Chen, once recruited as a vessel for a tenth-grade book boyfriend, is pulled back into the orbit of poison, Daiso aisles, and brothless ramen. The mother doses her daughter for the crossing, yet the ending chooses a Yin Ha movie over the descent. Jia-Wen writes diasporic occult comedy that never quite lets the danger become a joke. Content notes include suicidal ideation and poison, and the piece holds both lightly and carefully.

[Read "Vessel, Skin, Daughter, Stranger" at The Deadlands](#)

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 film, genre history, and 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

Matters of the Heart - Eric Schaller

Eric Schaller's reprint from *All the Haunts Be Ours* opens in Concord a dozen years after Thoreau's death, on the leaving day of Calvin Greene, a Thoreau admirer from Michigan who has pressed letters into Channing's biography and into *Walden*. Ellery Channing listens as Greene speaks of Constance, a farm girl dead of consumption whose Rhode Island family followed an old custom: exhumation, and a heart burned on a granite boulder. The story incorporates language from Channing's biography, Greene's journals, and Thoreau's own writings, and it sits squarely inside the New England vampire panic. What Greene wants from Channing is not scholarship but participation. The closing toast, with Thoreau's heart ash drunk from a cup Henry molded from local clay and water dipped from *Walden*, is as tender as it is appalling. Schaller makes folk horror feel like an intimate conversation that went one sentence too far.

[Read "Matters of the Heart" at The Dark](#)

Where's Paul - Jen Conley

Jen Conley's Ryan stands at their father Joseph Granger's viewing and keeps noticing who is missing: brother Paul, who took the worst of the old man's violence and who works for the State of New Jersey in Toms River. Sister Laurie is clean from drugs, wife Melissa keeps the room moving, and youngest daughter Izzy watches the adult negotiations she only half understands. Paul suggested burying their father with his favourite watch, a detail that sits oddly until the story's last turn. Conley, an Anthony Award winner, former Shotgun Honey editor, and author of the collection *Cannibals*, writes family crime with economy and without sentiment. The final image is a photograph of Paul toasting under a palm tree at a Sarasota café. The verdict Ryan reaches is two words and exactly enough.

[Read "Where's Paul" at Shotgun Honey](#)

Really and Truly Dead - Emma Burnett

Emma Burnett's second-person flash, from Flash Fiction Online's paranormal noir issue, sorts the newly arrived into dead, deadish, and very dead, then seats you in a moulded plastic chair with a stake and a bag of dirty laundry from a pogrom sixteen miles away. Jobs are assigned to newcomers; yours include the docks, where a collapsed building has left bodies to clear, a hand to tuck back, and a baby to move. Staff-room rumours about refugees circulate while you keep showing up for shifts that never quite end. The story's quiet twist is that the narrator is deadish, which reorders every earlier instruction. Burnett writes undead labour as bureaucracy and as survival. It is short, cold, and hard to shake.

[Read "Really and Truly Dead" at Flash Fiction Online](#)

The Starling - Dana Jaye Cadman

Dana Jaye Cadman's examiner has had a dull New Hampshire summer of pharmacy burglaries when Wicks of the Bloom Acres gated community vanishes while still logging into his accounts, a tidy rock-climbing hobbyist and jogger whose absence refuses to behave like one. Jane, a wheeled steel algorithm whose eyes shift red, violet, and amber, notes that starlings take three weeks to fledge and that tinsel has appeared in a neighbour's gutter nest. The office manager Victoria reports that rent keeps being paid through the app, and a farmer's market honeyman adds another small wrongness to the file. Cadman, a poet and Director of Creative Writing at Pace University-Pleasantville, writes weird noir in which the investigation is already being rewritten from inside. The ending reveals who has been posting as Wicks, and what the starlings were for.

[Read "The Starling" at Mystery Tribune](#)

Your Name Goes Here - Rich Larson

Rich Larson's second-person story puts you in a cruise ship boarding queue among women brushing broken glass from their hair and a sea the colour of reddish-pink chum. Memories drop through a gap in the deck; crew in flower-patterned rompers usher you toward a carousel of impaled dead horses; a phone turns to jelly flesh; midnight bingo calling becomes a public shame. Ex Melvin is a murderer, and the ship insists you keep playing. You chew your card, leap, and swim to a grey beach where masked people fish memories from the water until you can read your own name. Larson, who is based in Canada, writes cruise horror as memory theft and as escape. Content notes include murder and abuse, and the story never looks away from either.

[Read "Your Name Goes Here" at The Deadlands](#)

This House of Hopes, This House of Bones - Cynthia Zhang

Cynthia Zhang's PseudoPod original follows a painter with an MFA who works at a bar and accepts an invitation from a man in a navy suit with blue eyes and a burn scar on his wrist to an old Victorian house that will not let her leave. Bedridden and poisoned, she meets the house's ghosts: the youngest with ribbons and a knife gash around her throat, an LA actress with one eye, a drowned girl, and others who know the pattern. It is a Bluebeard retelling in which the previous wives refuse to stay silent, and their help turns the ending into arson with the husband still inside. Zhang, whose novel *After the Dragons* was shortlisted for the 2022 Ursula K. Le Guin Award in Fiction, writes the trap and the solidarity with equal clarity. Content notes include domestic violence and murder. The fire at the close feels like the first free choice in the piece.

[Read "This House of Hopes, This House of Bones" at PseudoPod](#)

Beyond the First Shelf

Still Not Safe: The 50th Anniversary of Marathon Man - Glen Erik Hamilton

Glen Erik Hamilton marks fifty years of John Schlesinger's 1976 *Marathon Man*, adapted by William Goldman from his own novel, with

Laurence Olivier as Christian Szell (Oscar-nominated, Golden Globe-winning) and Dustin Hoffman as Babe, a Columbia doctoral candidate pulled into a diamond-district nightmare. Hamilton revisits the film's most famous set piece, the "Is it safe?" torture scene, noting how little gore it needs, and the half-apocryphal "try acting" jibe that still trails Hoffman and Olivier. He places the film among early Steadicam releases, notes Pauline Kael's dislike, and touches the Scylla and Janeway relationship the adaptation only hints at. Hamilton, who has won the Anthony, Macavity, and Strand awards for his Van Shaw novels, writes as a crime novelist reading a crime classic. The essay is a clear, affectionate reminder of why the question still lands.

[Read "Still Not Safe: The 50th Anniversary of Marathon Man" at CrimeReads](#)

Plumbing the Depths: Beasts in the City, Horror Meets the Gangster - Matthew Sorrento

Matthew Sorrento's Nightmare Magazine essay traces the long conversation between gangster cinema and horror, from Hawks's Scarface (1932) and Paul Muni's Tony Camonte through The Petrified Forest, Key Largo, and Black Friday's gangster-brain transplant, on to Creature with the Atom Brain, J.D.'s Revenge, From Dusk Till Dawn, Ichi the Killer, and Ryan Coogler's Sinners. Along the way he invokes Robin Wood's return of the repressed and recommends novels that keep the same pressure: Nazel's The Black Exorcist, Hjortsberg's Falling Angel, and Cosby's All the Sinners Bleed. Sorrento, who teaches at Rutgers-Camden and edits The Journal of NoirCon, writes with a programmer's memory and a critic's patience. The piece is useful both as a watchlist and as an argument about why the city keeps breeding monsters who already know how to dress. It is a strong companion to anyone reading crime and horror in the same week.

Read “Plumbing the Depths: Beasts in the City, Horror Meets the Gangster” at Nightmare Magazine

Writing Terror into Your Horror - Lincoln Michel

Lincoln Michel’s Counter Craft essay returns to Ann Radcliffe’s distinction between terror and horror: terror expands the soul through uncertainty and obscurity, while horror contracts and freezes it. He draws on Varma and Saint Armand, then on Stephen King’s familiar three types, to argue that prose’s advantage is point of view and controlled obscurity, and that confusion (rapid montages, unexplained noise) is not the same as dread. Michel describes a “terror zone” writers can build and sustain, with examples from *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Fever Dream*. The essay is free on his Substack and practical without becoming a formula. It is a clear craft map for anyone trying to keep a reader afraid of what has not yet been shown.

Read “Writing Terror into Your Horror” at Counter Craft (Lincoln Michel’s Substack)

Special Recommendations

A Jury of Her Peers - Susan Glaspell

Susan Glaspell’s *A Jury of Her Peers*, reprinted in *The Best Short Stories of 1917* from *Every Week* and drawn from a murder trial she covered as

a young reporter, opens on a cold March morning as Martha Hale and the sheriff's wife enter the Wright kitchen in Dickson County while the men search upstairs. County attorney Henderson wants evidence, and Martha's husband recounts finding John Wright dead of a rope round his neck while Minnie Foster Wright sat pleating her apron. The women notice the burst jars of preserves, the uneven stitching in a log-cabin quilt, and the question of whether she meant to quilt it or just knot it. In a pretty box they find a dead canary, and with it the story the men keep missing. Glaspell, associated with the Provincetown Players and the author of the related play *Trifles*, writes domestic detail as moral argument. The ending, with the evidence in Martha Hale's coat pocket and the quiet answer "knot it," remains one of American crime fiction's sharpest turns.

[Read "A Jury of Her Peers" free through Project Gutenberg](#)

Afterward - Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton's *Afterward*, collected in *Tales of Men and Ghosts*, follows Mary and Ned Boyne, newly rich from the Blue Star Mine, as they take Lyng in Dorsetshire because it is uncomfortable enough to feel authentic, and because their friend Alida Stair promises a ghost they will never know until afterward. In the December dusk of the library Mary remembers that riddle; later a stranger in greyish clothes walks the lime-avenue, a *Waukesha Sentinel* clipping names a man called Elwell and a suit over the mine, and Ned leaves with a gentleman the parlour-maid Trimmle cannot quite describe. Parvis arrives with news that reorders every earlier sighting, and Mary understands that she sent the visitor to the room where Ned waited. Wharton writes the supernatural as a delay in recognition rather than a spectacle. The last line returns Alida's warning with the force of something that was true the whole time.

[Read "Afterward" free on Wikisource](#)

The Problem of Cell 13 - Jacques Futrelle

Jacques Futrelle's *The Problem of Cell 13* introduces Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, the Thinking Machine, a petulant logician of perpetual squint and honorary initials who wagers Charles Ransome and Alfred Fielding that nothing is impossible. Locked in Chisholm Prison's death cell for one week with shoes, stockings, trousers, and a shirt, he asks only for tooth powder, twenty-five dollars in small bills, and a shoe polish, then promises to join them in the warden's office at half-past eight seven nights later. What follows involves linen notes dropped to the yard, nitric acid worked on the bars, a terrified neighbour who hears "Acid" through the wall, and Hutchinson Hatch waiting at the gate. Futrelle, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, builds a locked-room puzzle that is also a comedy of scientific arrogance. The Thinking Machine keeps the appointment, of course, and the explanation is as neat as the claim that two and two are four.

[Read "The Problem of Cell 13" free through Wikisource](#)

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

Many of today's pieces return to people who have been told what their evidence is worth: a residency that steals talent, a kitchen the law treats as trifles, a photograph the crowd prefers to the correction, a house that will not let its wives leave. Mystery, crime, and horror give those pressures a shape large enough to see, whether that shape is a Berkshires mansion, a Dorsetshire library, or a death cell that opens on schedule. Some of these stories find a small solidarity at the end, around a fire or a coat pocket, and others leave their characters alone with a name they have only just recovered. The essays and the older works on the back shelf are reminders that asking what is safe,

and who decides, has always been one of the genre's quieter powers. Wherever today's reading takes you, may it send you back to your own corner of the world with sharper eyes.

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

Take care!