

thrice great hermes

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by stanley lieber

the next day vidya learned that if mom declined to withdraw him from school, the administration intended to initiate due process. complaints had been filed by the parents of female students alleging that vidya had been snooping around the back stage of drama club rehearsals, staring at girls as they changed. the complaints were serious, with the implied threat of legal action against the school.

vidya considered the charges farcical, and replied to the school administration, and to anyone else who would listen, that none of this made any sense. surveillance of the nature all his fellow students had been subjected to on a daily basis accomplished the same thing he was now being accused of. to state the obvious: there were cameras in the dressing room. how do you know that, if you've never been in there, came the braindead response.

vidya had countered that he never said he had never been in the dressing room. in fact, he often ate his lunch there when he didn't feel like dealing with the cafeteria. anyway, what was the difference between him eating his lunch, when the place was deserted, and the administration recording video of teenage girls changing their clothes? the difference, the administration had said, as if he should need to be told, was the question of consent.

mom had offered no resistance that he could see. vidya was pulled immediately out of school.

"and don't think you're going to just sit around here all day," she had said. "if you're not in school then you're going to get a job."

vidya wondered if the surveillance vendor was hiring.

it turned out they were.

the application had to be filled out in the vendor's office. vidya got up early on his first day off from school and walked into town. when he found the office, he realized that it occupied the building where his mom used to pay the phone bill. the old phone company logo was still visible, a ghost image fading on the side of the building, its surroundings bleached by decades of bright sunlight. vidya thought, "it could be worse," and entered the office.

beyond the green door he was greeted by his cousin brandon's mom. not his aunt, exactly. they were cousins in some nominal sense he would never understand. she smiled, sincere enough, and extended to him a clipboard with his application already attached. she seemed to know why he was there.

the hiring process proceeded smoothly, and soon vidya found himself back at the school, this time wearing a uniform. today's otjt included the installation of a new external camera over the front entrance of the building.

vidya knew just where to look.