

thrice great hermes

#36

by stanley lieber

vidya lost his job. he was back in school, as if nothing had ever happened. he even returned to eating his lunch in the drama club dressing room. no one ever mentioned the previous trouble. no one seemed to care. vidya didn't understand.

in dreams, he had talked to himself. discussed his own confusion about the way no one around him seemed sentient. about how he could have used the money from his job to replace some of the books that had been lost in the fire. what to do about sl. no firm conclusions had ever been reached by the time he woke up.

sl had breezed back into town, dragging in his wake signs and portents of life beyond the forest. yeah, yeah, and the attitude as well. no sooner than he showed up he was gone again, never answering his phone or bothering to call. vidya was growing weary of the sham his friendship had turned out to be. how could anyone live like that?

he couldn't seem to gain any traction. events tractored along, mechanically flattening obstacles, but the stalks slowly popped back up again, mocking all his attempts to alter the landscape. and he was reduced to farm analogies.

james had offered to hide some of vidya's remaining books in his locker. on the face of it this seemed like a bad idea. james was a default target—his locker was at least as prone to tampering as his own. but vidya appreciated the gesture. he selected a few relatively unimportant volumes and handed them over.

students were not allowed to receive deliveries at school. vidya frequently flouted this rule, with raymond's tacit assistance. if he included instructions to have a drone place the package on an obscure windowsill, no one ever seemed to notice.

today's delivery was running late. vidya paced the second floor hallway, anticipating the tardy delivery notification.

"hall pass," james demanded in jest.

vidya was impatient, but he didn't want to seem rude. james was his friend. "what are you doing in the hallway during class?" he asked.

"drain the main vein," james said, jerking his hips back and forth, rustling his baggy jeans.

vidya stared. james proceeded to the restroom.

vidya unlatched one of the windows facing the outer wall of the campus, and was greeted with a blast of winter from outside. he slumped down against the wall beneath the window and waited to hear from raymond.

five or six minutes later a drone approached.