

thrice great hermes

#47

by stanley lieber

"the best of you is hidden," violet had said, several years later.

"there are... things... i can't say," étienne said.

he placed one foot, and then the other, on the floor. he stood up. midmorning through heavy curtains. in his memory he could place many such mornings, characterizing the system of the world as a brightly lit screen that burned his eyes when he tried to see what was going on, on the other side. he figured that he was too close to the source, and squinted.

it was shopping day, and he wandered through it absently, much as he did on their other shopping days. he made decisions and then he lived with the consequences. for example, if he forgot to buy something at the store, then he would have to wait until the next week to rectify his mistake. the relationship between his actions and the situation he found himself in could not be any clearer.

his wife was violet, who had the same name as his grandmother. being that she was an individual she belonged to herself. she was not the same person at all. étienne could understand this because it was obviously true.

after shopping it was time for work. étienne enjoyed his work about as much as he enjoyed anything else, which was to say, not at all. when pressed he could refrain from thinking about what it was he would rather be doing—the blandness he now put out of his mind was embarrassing. he was grateful for the distraction, and for the money. especially in this economy. he'd been saying that now for going on twenty years. well, he was still bored with himself and the economy was still fucked.

today's orders processed, he began to surf idly between feeds. mom was doing okay. sis was still asleep. dad... who knew? he noticed violet had finished her dinner. grandma's connection was down again. he stood up, stooping so as to avoid the unwanted attention of his manager, and marched his eyes from point to point along the ridge of the cube farm, scanning for skylined backup. he spotted an idle coworker and tasked them to investigate. no tampering with family accounts from his profile.

by the time his coworker got around to his request grandma's connection had righted itself. the intermittent trouble never rose to the threshold that would trigger an automatic truck roll. no black bag for granny, and the trouble would never be fixed. the log was mutable after all.

étienne suffered another dull night. he pulled out his notebook and analyzed the week's progress. notes and fragments, nothing he hadn't set down before. he still wasn't sure what it needed. more words? none of it was happening.

he regretted the thought the moment he noticed it passing through his mind. he didn't want any of this to happen, that was the point of writing it all down. he closed his notebook and put it away, then tossed his dying ink pen in the trash. later for that. leave me alone. go away.

his allergies were flaring and his back hurt. he centered himself and cycled through the eight points of awareness, suddenly certain that his manager was about to tap him on the shoulder. when he turned around she was nowhere to be seen.

he wanted to sleep. sleep, and stop dreaming.