

thrice great hermes

#65

by stanley lieber

étienne pulled up to the railroad crossing and applied his brakes. he noticed a truck from the power company in the lane next to him. squinting, he could make out the driver's screen through her driver side window. she was scrolling rapidly through quilt patterns, rejecting them all at a fast clip. the train finally passed and étienne let off of his brakes.

a new problem had emerged: what to do with the old equipment when it broke. replace it, fine, but how to dispose of the broken parts? the answer was not so straightforward as it might seem. frequently, the inventory system contained no record of a device that had been placed in service over a decade before the trouble appeared. the equipment just sat there, anonymously performing its function, even without possessing paperwork to justify its presence. étienne had heard that the aging devices, when they did manage to get returned, were being melted down for their gold content. he knew for a fact that most of this stuff ended up in the trash. but he'd also heard stories of (former) employees caught with large stockpiles of decommissioned defectives stashed in their attics, garages, and sheds, at home. why, he always wondered, would they accumulate stolen property at their homes?

his immediate concern was keeping the clutter in his office under control. trash was collected only twice per week. but some weeks he had a lot of trash. or anyway, a lot of decommissioned parts that did not appear in the inventory.

near his home, on an adjacent lot, stood an old, abandoned house. off and on he'd explored the property, ultimately concluding that he had no interest in buying it. but now a solution to his problem at work had presented itself: he could store all the unknowable junk in this building. after all—it was true—he never knew when a component of some discarded unit might come in handy to repair an unrelated problem with yet another piece of obsolete equipment. and this wasn't his land, wasn't his attic, wasn't his garage, and it wasn't his shed.

over a period of three months étienne cleared out the debris and restored a minimum of weatherproofing to the ramshackle structure next door to his house. it was more of a barn, now, than a home, but the discarded parts would in any case be safe from the elements.

in a flight of fancy he designed and mounted a barn quilt on the side of the old building. covertly, it served double duty as a transmitter for the building's remote surveillance gear.

with the project's completion étienne considered the inventory crisis—at least the one lately manifest within the confines of his responsibilities—solved.

and there wasn't a soul alive he could tell about it.