

**thrice great hermes**

#18

by stanley lieber

whatever happened to just wearing the mask.

it's not clear at all what the woman wants me to do. her teenage son exhibits some kind of behavioral problem. she posits there must be a root cause. i know, right? not my usual gig. but the money's right and the fringe benefits (again, the mother) are sufficient.

alice cleared my schedule for the foreseeable. i drive all the way out to this tiny, shit town (there is no airport) and find a place to stay. then the mother tells me about the father.

this part i'll elide owing to space considerations. suffice to say, it's no surprise the kid has problems.

five hundred a day, plus expenses.

you'd think no one in town had ever seen a mercedes.

local diner. i pretend to enjoy the meal and the waitress slips me her number. i pull out my phone to make a call and the place comes to a halt, dead silent. what did i say? as if in response, the toothpick snaps in my mouth.

the mother is financing this charade, somehow, but i still don't know what she hopes i'll uncover that she doesn't already know.

"ma'am, your son is acting out because you're a total bitch."

that'll go over well.

i've jotted down some preliminary notes but really this is an open and shut case.

the boy needs to grow up, as soon as possible.