

## thrice great hermes

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by stanley lieber

"if you have the opportunity, do it," he said.

vidya closed the moldy old book and scanned the room. he was alone. outside it had grown dark. from whence, then, the voice?

vidya packed up his gear and left. the walk home seemed to take longer than usual. much longer. in fact, he had made no progress. he went ahead and sat down.

when he woke up it took several long moments to remember where he was. the sensation disagreed with him.

"i don't like being out of control," he said.

vidya somehow made it the rest of the way home. his mom was just climbing into bed. "don't leave your clothes on the floor," she reminded him. he laid down on his bed without even bothering to take off his shoes. when sleep eluded him, he remembered the book. continued to read. by morning he had finished the last chapter.

mom was going nowhere. vidya decided to check in on critter. at the border of the trailer court he paused to consult his watch. not sure what difference the time would make, he went ahead and knocked on critter's door.

"go the fuck away." critter's nose barely penetrated the morning air. when vidya failed to respond he shut the door without elaborating further. cowed, vidya turned and walked away.

onward, he guessed, to school. they had replaced the external cameras. so soon? he wondered if the contract had gone to a new vendor. he made a deliberate face at the camera as he passed beneath its gaze. controlling the narrative.

inside the building he faced the usual dilemma: motion or stasis. mental motion incurred immediate penalties, while mental stasis most often yielded plaudits. the dichotomy was false and he never cared for awards anyway.

on the second floor he stopped in his tracks.

the detective had followed him to school. long scraggily hair, unshaven jowl, sports glasses. a man out of time. vidya ducked into the restroom and locked himself in a stall.

predictably, the detective had followed. he could hear the man speaking aloud to himself as he peeked into each stall, seemingly confident he was about to spot his quarry.

"the kid thinks i don't know."