

Timothy Wojcik

Drumming

I spent the afternoon in a battle of wits against a vagabond in the park. He had stopped me on my usual, pleasant-autumn-day walk. *I can tell you when you'll die, and where you'll go after* he said. He was sitting on a bench, and he had some sort of large can in a small, paper bag hanging loosely from his hand. He was wearing a sloppy sign on his chest that read *THE END*. I wasn't sure whether to be offended, or interested. *Listen here, you're disrupting an essential part of my autumn days* I said. *I know that* he said. *These walks are the last thing that are keeping me sane, I swear* I said. *Just give me a moment of your time, and I'll tell you everything* he said. *No, I won't humor you, and your insanity* I said, and began to walk away. He followed me, and began pestering me with puzzles and riddles, which he claimed would be very telling as to my impending death. I started running, and took paths that I had never before taken, in an effort to lose this maniac. The further into the park I went, the more knobby and gnarled the trees became. I looked behind me, and the vagabond was looking wild, feral, with sharp teeth, and tufts of fur growing in patches all over his skin. I was afraid for my life. I immediately regretted not just stopping, doing those puzzles and riddles. The vagabond tried to tell me this, how this was going to happen.

Cloud

I go to the doctor because I'm afraid about my abdominal pains. The doctor presses her palms into my abdomen in different areas, saying things like *hmm*, and *ah*, and *interesting*, and *aha*. The doctor then sends me to a dark room, where they x-ray my midsection, first standing, then laying, from every angle possible. I'm led back to the original room of stomach-pressing, and am told to sit, and not panic, whatever I do. Each squeak and growl my stomach makes sends a chill through my veins and nerves. The doctor enters the room, and I jump in my seat. *You won't want to do that anymore* she says. *Your stomach seems to now be made entirely of eraser, and the more you move, the more things outside of your stomach disappear*. I pause for a few counts. *What exactly do you mean by that* I say. *I mean that eventually you'll be only a stomach, a stomach made of eraser, and we won't know where the rest of you has gone*. I get up from my seat and feel a sharp pain near my navel. *Will you keep me on your mantle, and tell my story to your grandchildren one day* I say. *I'd be honored* she says. She bends down. *You're a very brave stomach* she says.

Wheel

I encounter a tiger in the forest, and I immediately pounce, before it can notice. Landing on its coarse hair, I feel a few ribs snap like twigs under my feet. In blind panic, I begin scratching and biting the tiger for dear life. The tiger never moves. It just breathes heavily, and lets out an occasional longer breath, like a sigh. I kick, and grab its tail, and stomp, and scratch, and bite until I'm tearing pieces of flesh off of its heaving body. A bloody mess, I take a few steps back and look at what I've done. The tiger and I make eye contact for a moment, and all of a sudden I notice a deafening silence. The tiger isn't breathing anymore. I'm not breathing anymore. We aren't even in the forest anymore. We were in a large, empty, vacuous space, the two of us in complete darkness. I feel small and alone, so I curl up next to its broken body, like a mother I never knew.

Impossible

My friends all went to get the hit new surgery today. I sit down in my living room, and pick up the novel that I hadn't been able to sit to in months. I can't focus on it, though. It's been so long, and I'm nervous to see them, these dear friends of mine, to hear how things went. I'm not even sure what type of surgery they're actually getting, other than it's all the rage, apparently. My front door swings open, and a figure, brightly lit from behind, walks in. Another follows, and then another. The light seems to be following each of them, somehow, so that I can't quite make them out, other than their shape. *Hey, Brent* one of the figures says, sounding remarkably like Parker, one of my friends. I suddenly feel a strange sort of fear. *Parker* I say. *What do you think* he says. *Yeah, what do you think* another of the figures says, this one sounding like Betty. The fear grows in me, as the figures draw nearer, spreading themselves out, as if to surround me. *What is this* I say. *How do you like what we've done* the third figure says. This one sounds like Jack. They are all around me now, the light hurting my eyes, like looking directly into an eclipse. *What have you done* I say, shrinking into my chair. *Silhouettoplasty* they all say in unison. *We are only silhouettes, now, and nothing more.* I look from one to the other to the other, slowly blinding myself. *It hurts* they all say.

Spare

I wake up in the middle of the night to a loud thump, seemingly coming from the room down the hall, and, for some reason, I just know it's the monster. I hear the door open and close, and my throat swells and closes completely in fear. Unable to breath, I listen as the heavy steps walk down the hall, closer and closer, towards my room. My heart hits the inside of my ribs over and over. My diaphragm spasms, making my breathing sporadic. My door knob jiggles slightly, as if the monster doesn't know how to work one of those things. After a few shaky moments, the door knob turns, and the door slowly opens. Ice fills my body, starting from my head down to my feet, and I'm paralyzed, as I watch the tall, overly slender figure crouch to get through the doorway. It has one eye, and is covered in hair thick as worms. *Are you frightened* the monster asks me, quietly. I move my mouth, but only produce some groaning sounds. *Well, I am, I'm not embarrassed to say it* the monster says. He sits next to me in my bed. The monster is trembling. *Something is coming for us* the monster says. *Something big.* The monster's voice is wavering. It puts its oblong head on my shoulder. I put my arm around it. We'll wait the night out together.

Frost

All trees are fake trees you say. *They are really people disguised as trees* you say. We are walking along a forest. *You may hear them speak* you say. I am silent. It's all silent. The only noise is your voice. *They're all people who didn't want to be bothered anymore* you say. *But listen, listen to them speak* you say. We stop walking. We are completely silent. The world is silent. You smile and close your eyes. *They're singing* you say. I walk away and leave you there, your head cocked back slightly, eyes shut tight, holding your breath, but still smiling that forced smile. I wouldn't bother you anymore. I knew you always wanted to be a tree, although you hadn't the faintest idea how.