

# STARDUST AND THE MUNDANE

## **Fly, Fight, or Surrender**

Magda pumped HIV into her veins  
willingly, unknowingly; which fuck or  
dealer gave it to her, she'd never know.

Which fuck or dealer she gave it to,  
she would never know.

Low care, no care healthcare  
wouldn't care, why should she?

Skipping pills for the needle, courting death  
seemed a safer gamble than pharmawhoring.

Whether she flew a white flag or went down  
fighting is anybody's guess.

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### Country Mouse

He stepped with the authority of  
a timid child, walking uphill along  
the gravel. When a car sped by, he'd step  
aside, wait, then begin his trek again  
once the scattered dust forgot about him.  
I wonder if he got hungry when he  
came to the cows; I wonder if he dreamt  
of riding when he passed the horses; and  
the corn that grows in seas, unharvested  
and rotting on the stalk, did it anger  
him as it rustled, deaf ears left for field  
mice as he starved, walking unwatched, unheeded?  
The man on the side of the road—how soon  
does she forget him after she swerves; how  
soon does he forget she failed to stop?

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## And Eggs

The second thought that hit me as I watched  
was that I was seeing their lives fall apart  
and they probably didn't even know it yet.

The first was that I really needed to remember  
to buy milk on the way home.

Violent words flew overhead, seeking  
beating targets, accusations lobbed back  
and forth, no one winning points.  
They laid their secrets around them  
like a flea market junk sale,  
a history spelled out in trinkets,  
now rusted and scattered on the lawn—

I knew I was going to forget the milk.

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### Grocery Store Fox Trot

She continued her jilted two-step as  
she waited for her groceries to be bagged—

look over at my sons, look forward,  
look over at my sons, look forward,  
look over at my sons, look forward.

Tears slowed her dance and her face reddened, but  
she couldn't stop. The kids kept talking and  
my husband continued to chat up the  
clerk while I hurriedly wrangled our bags  
into the cart, trying to block the boys'  
view—for once actively trying to stifle  
their curiosity about the world  
around them while I wondered who or what  
this woman held together by fraying  
strings might have lost that would leave her bawling  
at the supermarket.

Steering the cart through the parking lot,  
I mentioned the woman to my husband—  
he hadn't seen anything.

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## Her

In college, she hated going to sleep alone, knowing that on the other side of the wall was a breathing soul who might be feeling the same. Once, when she was twelve, she snuck into an abandoned building to feed three hungry kittens mewling for their absent mother. Later, she recognized the sound as the one she often swallowed when life seemed to slip between her fingers and she was left holding an empty glass and yesterday's worries. The giant pink clock hung over her bed instilled an anxiety she'd recognize sprinting to the doctor's office, her heart a metronome set to someone else's rhythm. Sitting in an ER with a client's kid, waiting to see if she'd been abused or just trained to sell hate against a woman who'd raised her when her mother was too busy shooting stars into her veins in search of brighter galaxies, she counted her disappointments on the wallpaper, like the posters of failed dreams with yellowing tape she'd hastily torn down. A clean slice will reveal the stratification of her becoming, each layer a necessary ingredient to the colossal Her. Sedimentary emotions settle in her toes, sprinkled throughout tying together dispersed moments and disappointments that always seem to share roots.