

# Trouble

“Anstett is a jackass.”  
—Hilda Crump



**Aaron Anstett**

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## HOMELESSNESS

A long way the blood runs, utterly dark inside the body.  
Under no moonlight, field mice scurry on snow,  
script of their paw prints unscrolled.

A plane's black box awaits what  
disaster befalls. How many voices now  
trembling on payphones?

Such violets and umbers at sunset, vanishing.  
In Wisconsin, a snapped television cable  
must still slap the house's siding in wind.

The day-laborer's wrist bones ache  
to the elbows. Physics or no, shovels grow  
no lighter with lifting.

Imagine your dainties  
rinsed in the convenience store sink.  
And then you wring.

I drank in that town's good bar many nights.  
The one library held one copy  
of the book of antique photographs and accounts.

## TROUBLE

“The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed.”  
–Whitman

If we trouble each sleeper, house to house and room by  
room,  
ditches to hotel beds, propping our lit lamps  
to their sudden, jack-o-lanterned expressions, and ask  
who burnt insects with sun and a magnifying glass,  
how many glasses of water in that fast-moving cloud,  
what is it sloshes inside us like iced drinks on the boat’s  
deck  
as some intermittent music, wind chimes or sirens,  
drifts from the floating casino ablaze as the candelabrum  
of nerve ends in the wakened sleeper’s fist, if we ask  
what of it if it got wet instead of dark at night, not damp,  
but gallons, and it’s happening, in Fiji and Nebraska, quiz  
which they’d be then: millionaire or tugboat captain,  
gracious bingo champ or rope company rep, please clarify  
your answers, we should nearly whisper so as not to rouse  
them.

## UNDRESSED

for N.

We get undressed, uncivilize ourselves,  
and while the television programming  
and sicknesses of animals do not cease,  
we reach such a pitch we’re purely body,  
beyond its umpteen miseries,  
enduring uproar in our skins so keen  
it cannot be rendered, what we *a capella* say  
all vowel and glottal stop. Is that your face  
and these I grasp your only feet?  
This dizzy, how can I wear a tie,  
looking serious in shoes to feed a parking meter?  
How is it we’re citizens, some day die,  
and ape that ache and release here, eyes jittering  
blunt and slit? Geometry claims an infinity  
of instances, or nearly, cook up a surface.  
Example: yours, bewildering my nerve ends,  
putting the nuance into nuisance,  
apple to apocalypse, in this brief kingdom  
where God and the devil call truce, lie down  
like dogs who fight each other but are exhausted.

## OUT OF BODY

After the usual traffic  
of ground, then guy-wires,  
power-lines  
and skillet-fried clouds  
was me, looking distant  
as suspended Houdini  
baffling crowds,  
visible only by the trajectory  
of necks craned *en masse*  
How small I was  
and wrong  
like the letter  
in one word  
misspelled

## SEEING FAR

Watch the scrambled  
pornographic channel  
enough, which mouth  
doing what where's  
zigzagged like an  
electrical disturbance's  
interference's (black-and-  
white cows instantly  
slaughterhouse skeletal  
on Polaroided, sheet-ice  
fields) interrupted the signal  
so that nipples are radar  
blips, and pelvises,  
fingers, lips blur quicker,  
flicker, grow abstract  
expressionist, oil  
nudes in emergency  
sprinkler downpour  
of paint thinner. Don't sleep  
all night, watching what's  
what in tornadoing pixels,  
longing for each smeary  
zoom-in to stick, fix,  
make its meaning clear  
in hiss and insistences, *Yes's*,  
etc.'s. Suddenly a face,  
two faces, three,  
a palm-lined patio

with drinks. One's  
the producer. One's  
the director. The third,  
they'll make her a star.

## QUESTIONING

Maybe now interrogate the atom, its ellipses,  
ovals of whatnot and etc.

Ask the paper-  
covered globe,  
place names now antique  
but still stretched spherical.

Birds know nothing  
but return.

What bright light  
and heavy phonebook,  
car battery and minuscule clamps  
to make that fucker talk?

## LAREDO ORDEAL

for Matt Schumacher

X-rays of Texas reveal plenty  
of sausage frying, to assuage  
all hunger, breakfasts  
tremulous in hands.

Say I wrote a book in which each word  
and letter erased itself, but backwards,  
Omega to Alpha, Hebrew, tower

disassembling fast, as now oval of flashlight  
light sheds on attic pine boards,  
sings along shingle nails' sharp ends.  
We will know them by these signs,

bats who perambulate, stab  
blindly, sending signals.

## PARKING

For J.G.

Or sunlight unfastening from branches, I mean it  
when I say my curse about the hospital of tender

longing, footprints on rain-wet asphalt  
vanishing ellipses. What pulsing ruby crises,

constant in persistent blood, and detritus:  
food wrappers, cigarette foil shivering,

wind emptying all of Wyoming, so we gasp  
for errors in Accounting, listener. Listen.

## GRILL

for Joel Brouwer

Nerves misjudge, are not to be trusted.  
Hands grab plate glass.

And pupils, those tiny puppets,  
far-fetched and amateurish,

let the brain convince them evening  
grows exquisiter, especially

past wrecking yards, in grilled  
windows, narcotizing, lush,

stiff and pricey drink  
each drink of leaves fewer stabs

at recompense. Night, strict,  
extinguishes detail until,

ink-spill-on-a-blotterly,  
crushed and intact autos,

the press of them, mesh,  
get mixed, like I meant about the senses.

## SIMPLE

The gunman hovers on closed-circuit camera,  
x-number of ones and zeroes,  
face flushed pinker, if this were color.

Signs boast bargains in liquor.  
He says something quickly, the visible  
part of his mouth growing smaller and bigger.

The weapon's spectral, glints  
where he holds it far from him  
like a rare and dangerous mineral.

The time and date blink.  
Behind the clerk,  
little, illegible bottles burst.



## FLIGHT

Swallowed condoms plump with cocaine rupture,  
split like too-ripe fruit and spill their cargo,  
washing ferrying passengers' stomachs,

followed down with little whiskey bottles,  
lit by windowed sunset, emptied into  
splashing plastic tumblers. Shades drawn, each eye's

iris widens. Nerve ends hallelujah  
over checker-boarded fields. People  
go to sleep or listen to their neighbors  
sigh. Some others, accidentally sickened,

die before the EMTs arrive, or,  
no, before the planes descend to asphalt,  
slow, and rest at last like sleepers breathing  
quietly, quietly, quietly, hushed.

## BURGLARS

Cameras small as aspirin capsules,  
smaller, each lens a grain of medicine,  
injected, ride illuminated veins,

slam-bang along then through those passages'  
walls, orbiting rockets abruptly un-  
hinged, photographing what-all a body

hides, as now a stubbed-toed burglar whispers  
curses, hissing, though nobody's home.  
Her see-through negligee drapes a chair. He's  
tried it on, over his work clothes: wrong size.

Lied. I lied. No such cameras  
whir through bloodstreams yet, and the burglar stripped  
first, pale, scared, lingerie a perfect fit,  
cried until his mirrored image blurred.

## ANOTHER

The body *is* a template, but who can read the blurprints

[*sic*]

where we misspell *misspell* or use these footprints as  
sextants

as you were saying so recently famously in shrieky

electrostatic facsimile transmission frequencies,  
intermittence

disappearance broadcast on taxicab tickers, pixilated  
messages

trafficked far from the suspect junkyard cordoned and  
glittering,

detectives' faces on laminated badges below the actual,  
illuminated under a full moon gaudier and nearer in  
puddle water,  
easier smithereens among the skeletal wrecks.

## XYZ

The world is all that is on our case:  
power line downed in clairvoyant water,  
moonlight on the burglar's crow bar.

Zoo animals rouse under facsimile foliage.  
The little planets of our own eyes widen,  
watching.

Or Houdini exposing hokum,  
splinter from the true crucifix  
needling a wound.

Blood drops  
brown on unwashed  
emergency room floors

seem real enough.  
Better to be clever  
or kind is the question

no one asks the authors  
of signatures everywhere,  
evidence of hands under brains.

## EACH DAY

for Steve Schroeder

When my soul escapes from my body, I chase it, looking  
foolish  
as a man running after his hat with no head on his torso,  
or  
a small boy at the carnival pursuing released balloons  
when his arms  
sheared off in the tilt-a-whirl's gears, blood festooning all  
over.

A headline rises from its story, floats like skyline fractions  
of something  
above horizon, no matter the continent or people  
afflicted.

Classifieds advertise all manner of bargains.  
*Wedding dress, unworn. Child's crib, never used.*

But I catch my soul, in fingertips, each hand, like a leaf  
shivering  
down in wind, tip-toe on window ledge so many stories  
up  
birds dizzy. No helping any thread or grain of wood.  
Sorry, friends. It flutters. Shining. Symbolic.

## APPETITE

for Greg Kosmicki

Resurrected, resuscitated zombie Elvis Presley  
karate-chops through Graceland's solid-core doors,

insane for car keys, then brains, then sandwiches,  
but cannot drive fast enough to bask in each gleam

of vanishing sunlight, purple and black and pink  
as lingerie each number of miles, so unbolts the Lisa  
Marie,

anchored in asphalt, hot-wires, siphons jet fuel,  
and flies, humming the early tunes, acoustic,

from the 1968 comeback special, thinned down  
and joking with all the back-up singers,

The Blossoms this time,  
*not* The Jordanaires.