



BIG CRAPPY & REAL

Big, Crappy, or Real
[poems]

by Biscuits Calhoun

I'll say / That ye may love in spite of beaver hats.
- *John Keats*

WHICH ORIFICE

Your throat packs the machinery to vibrate, to declare, *big, crappy, or real.*
To say, *hallelujah*, or *make me banana pancakes*. This is how a brain
Intercedes, though it does depend on who you ask, who you do dare.

It takes all kinds. For some people, when it rains, it is porn.
The outlets mist as the gauge throbs, as it fills among the coneflowers.
For others, when it rains, it is over—the fun, such as dancing

At the ludicrous wedding. You love fun. You love weddings, mostly the people
Or at least, this one guy. There, someone is bound to tickle another.
To coo like a cartoon mouse & homeward bound, a red tarp might

Fly off a blue truck to reveal unmarked white boxes of dildos, someone's
Latest lob towards early retirement & the oldest person attending remembers each she
Made love to—the son of the preacher man, the dentist, his hygienist.

Later too, three or four younger after the husband fell over dead in
The bowling alley with an unexpected-but-not-tragic heart attack. We obsess
Over distinctions—yes, somewhere is the foggiest. Somewhere the person with the most

Toes pulls on socks. Somewhere the most shocking fetish even a poem cannot
Possibly name. To my dog, this poem is edible. To this road, everything
Exists either behind or ahead.

WALKING THE PROPERTY AT SUNSET

It is true

It is hard

To dig a hole

With only a shovel

But it was much

Harder to dig a hole

Before the shovel

Became a thing at all.

AESTHETIC ADJUSTMENT

When you sleep at night, your mother digs in
& she repaints all the dogs & all the sunsets & all the retired
School teachers in cardigan sweaters

You have fucked up that day.

Her standards over your attempts, basically.
In quiet, she drags her brushes over the contour-less
Chins, across the clean skies you exploit

To umbrella the cats
Chronically with their tails tucked between their legs.
She replaces it with same-sex couples canoeing & dogs

Reading Surrealist poems, that
Type of rain that whistles
Through some trees. Alive she feels washing the brushes

In the basement, wiping her hands on your eighth-grade
Soccer jersey you keep bunched in the corner
To keep the critters out.

She hides the paintings in a closet marked "Done"
Till one morning, you wake with a full-body, tingling
Urge to revisit your older work

& it is then you discover
The textures & the turns your mother inserted
Into the work of your life. She wants to trick you, plays dumb

But yeah, you know you never pattern
Something like a steeple
Over a parade of upscale knock-off purses.

Never would you fill the landscape with *Participant* ribbons.
Cry, you do not. You begin again
Starting with a dog's eyes

Dotted with a fleck of indigo, more life-
Like you think, a reflection of the local lake.
Yes, this is how it appears to you.

LIKE BONES IN THE WOODCHIPPER

The experiment that becomes a mistake
Has been made & now the boys dare even

To call themselves real, their accounts. One will grow
Old & try but still mistakenly, he buys his wife

Turnips instead of tulips, the breeze containing
An error message, but he still dared to win.

He said a prayer in between heartbeats, wiped
Sweat off his bulbous nose with an orange hanky.

The worst part: the turnips cost a good bit more
Than the tulips she had daringly desired.

NO FOGHORN

1.

It is not even a thing anymore.
I learned that when you left in
That teeny boat. It was so early
& the fog man was mid-spray—
The streets, the pier, the port half-
Lacquered with fog. Another man on ladder.
He unhooks the stars. He slept in
That day & he tosses them in
A bucket strapped to his sweaty back.
You sailed away, but with the lack
Of light & the fog man's excess
I could not find you anywhere waving
& the world around failed my ears.
No foghorn dared to keep me company.

2.

You did it. You finally got married.
You wedded that odd gal from downtown.
You shared a bed before you shared
A ring, but if this last year
Alone taught me a thing, it's that
Morality is nothing but a silly phenomenon.
A mind-boggling spark. A bit fleeting, too.

3.

The summer crowds pass in & out
Of view. Liquor hides under their tongue.
A slice of ham tucked in starched
Pockets. I remember you caught a blow
From your harder brother & your mouth
Erupted right quick in apology, not to
Mention blood & later the smile rose.
You knew something I am only beginning
To feel. I will tell you what
Did you in—the moment your wails
Yelped, synced, & created a fourth sound
You had not expected, nor ever had
You blurted such a note before. Always
You always had some such particular ears.

4.

It is why you could never support

My piano playing. That was a long
Long time ago. Yup, this is now
The part of my life where I
Dump your urn overhead, behind, & roll
The empty away. Yup, this is now
The part where I lay back in
Your ashes & make angels, light fades.

BIG RECKLESS HAIR

Before you were born, dragonflies are
The size of seagulls. They tangle in the wild
Locks of your mother, these curls you have
Inherited. You had to come
Face-to-face with the fact you were a minor
Character in your own life, so young
Hidden in the shadow of this
Live oak tree. Time discovers what one must know.
Just get out of the way, so these strands
Will stretch, straighten, & be, amen.
No one behind a curtain pulls a lever
Though I gallop behind a coyote
& stop only when I reach barbed
Wire. I return, ideas bouncing off myself.
It's true—no one has complete control
Of what unfurls from their skin, the head.
Therefore, it is an illusion.
You once asked, *Do you know the look I'm after?*
I did, but I told you no. I did
Not want another thought, better
Thought. I want a beer, the coyote to
Return, slay me, devour me till ants come
& take it over...

VARIATIONS ON A RECENT EPIPHANY

1.

A hunk of coal halves.

We gaze at its dual threat of burning.

2.

A train screams across a wobbly bridge.

Theoretical risk with a limited view.

3.

I smile during the washing.

Beyond these grapes, I am not certain.

4.

He tosses the unrisen dough into the trashcan.

The raccoon kneads its lost baby's shape.

5.

Spooky feeling on a natural path.

She recites a hymn both menacing & lax.

6.

A series of fireworks lights up the darkness.

You are revealed eating an enormous snack.

HUNTING FOR GOLD

For a role as a cowboy with HIV, Matthew
McConaughey, he drops down to one hundred
& thirty-five pounds. A few years later, a new
Director requires him to pack on pounds, to shave
His head, only partially, a hairline predicting what one
Day I will sport & a belly mocking my own. *That dear*
She says, *it is the cottage cheese you gobble late*
At night, the chicken tenders I witness devoured
On a layover. I say it is the Salisbury steak
Seconds of my childhood rising finally for revenge.
In 1861, Dr. James Henry Salisbury invented this
Style of meat as a tonic for his Civil War soldiers' mad
Diarrhea. How peculiar the world is, has been!
The blind barber in China! The cocktail in Vegas!
The only ingredient is pine needles! There is a hat
To regrow my hair, I must wear it thirty minutes each day.
Once, I began each morning with thirty minutes
Of ab workouts. Now, I take the dog for a casual stroll.
She shits & I wave to a neighbor whose name is forgotten
Or perhaps, I never knew. Her dog's name is Floyd.
We head home together, my dog & I, to eat from plastic bowls.

DISREGARD MY VOICE IN THE RECORDING

American flag twenty-four cent stamp
Inside a three-buck copy of *Solar Throat Slashed* by Césaire.
What else is there? A sentence soared this way

Years ago, & now, it reaches over
The trance of the sound of the worms scaling each other to live.
I'm not any better, or younger, though

I persist, like the blind mouse mid-journey
To the door, led only by the chirp of his friend, the cardinal
Bowing graciously in the blue spruce.

My mother decorated each Christmas
& often forgot till April or May, white flowers. Feelings are unimportant.
My words are, too. Bells, on the other hand.

UTOPIAN CLANG

For you, I tore from my coat
& my jacket, my layers stacked, limp against the window.

It is not like me to drag
Opportunity through tedious days. Crazy how odd

& unruly can operate
In one's house. Rosy dew slinging its own moisture towards

Damascus, rosy witch of
The kneeling grace. I am feeling cradled, so I sing aches

Accordingly. I'm daily
With loss, time smearing & claiming money obstructively.

Also, I'm a jealous bear
Snatching pies. The echoes lament & the wildflowers glow.

I hide for three days in tow
With timidity. O you, practitioner of polish.

O you, lover of bold signs.
O you, law-abiding jewel so gleefully precious.

I won't die underwater
& pickle. I lick the wick you lent me. My gorgeous

Genitals are not for sale.
We crash our rubicund hearts together & literally

My mother hangs around, giggling
A new generation into existence, window

Dropped to make the sleet stop. Sweet
Utterance of moral chords. I joke with goodbye to tell

You *stay*. I bow to your fears.
You no longer need to project because I hear you fine.

SOME RACCOONS

One asks, *How far is it to Indiana?*

& the second raccoon replies, *1,140 miles if you're traveling on a road on a map*

A sentiment quickly sliced, *But of course, no roads for us*

As said by a third raccoon who just waltzed up.

Like, who invited him.

I invited him, said a fourth raccoon off to the side

Known but unacknowledged since the beginning of time

Which happens to be the first word of this poem.

The first raccoon says, *Well if we count every bump, every rock, every change in elevation, what then?*

The second raccoon says, *We better get a move on.*

The third raccoon has already started.

The fourth raccoon says, *Why would I ever go to Indiana?*

Just then, a nut falls from a tree where it lived

Its entire life without thinking once.

TONGUE MANAGEMENT

I must not cry, even if
Tristan comes to our supper
Tonight, though might I tremble
In insecurity, yes.
Your tongue trembles, Tristan says.

Tristan never says *achoo*
If an invitee sustains
An allergic reaction to
Sardines. So I feel antsy
Boiled. So he is confident

& you & I will survive
& babble partnered like
This. My tongue traces history
Through the circus—one trembles
If on the highwire, the

Aftermath of living at such
Rhetorical heights, messy
& you know what they say—thirst
Fires the light of the chest
For one more glimpse of the lion.

CLAW-FOOTED FUTURES

I.

Pinky, Pebbles, & Kenya—these three sisters.

The first two have lovers, the third a bathtub.

II.

All are sad, which hiccups from the first lesson—

The opposite of dirtiest, of course, is the least dirt.

III.

Dusty mat, show me my future.

A dung beetle rolling a ball of shit over the grass.

IV.

It is time for you to leave.

Your hand is about to love on the knob.

V.

Your hand is about to love on the knob.

It twists, suddenly powered by the other side.

HIGH STAKES LUNCH

I think he thinks I do not care what he thinks, but like a sphinx

He transforms from something dusty to an imposing image
& turns me something fragile, of a crystal butt. He writes on
The napkin, the same napkin he wiped tea out of his mustache.

I fear I had missed all the lessons my father, teachers, priest

Taught about dealing with cold, hunkish men. His stare bores heavy
Down like my summer at the scrapyard, working a warm lever
Singular but important. It is now I feel level

Is not the table, the poor craftsmanship of the bar. He spends

Every cent I had while I am criticizing the tig
Welding, the spatula fashioned as support. A call comes in
& one waiter summons another, sparring with a roast duck.

Hot soup panic in my manifold, I begin to stall, ask

About his cuff links, if he's experimented with cocaine.
Whether the dusk lately had suited him. I know nothing but
I know I must sever this deal in the making, the long-term

Waterworks. Should I be frank? Should I be Jim, the manager

At the Dairy Queen, my first job? If it wasn't going how
He assumed with a sale, with an employee—this is severe—
He'd break a broom handle, thank God, & chase the motherfucker.

The spaghetti comes, & I stay, anxious to see how I crumble.

IN THIS BACKYARD

Gray fluff of the sky manufactures a hole like a bearded god
(great abs included)

Soon might lean out. *Heeeeeeeeeeeeee.*

Have seen this hung in a dozen museums.

Am well-traveled & Might have grown in a small town.

Did not eat an avocado till twenty-six

But I know at least two things

About art—valuable artifacts & gods.

Look in my backyard!

The antiques & the children with hair

Grown down to eyes.

Wait, what is that?

The oldest has her teeth clamped to the neck

Of the baddest rooster of all.

Wait, what again is that?

Her lips begin to move—

Didn't see your name on this.

THE SKELETON YOU KNOW THERE IS

You harbor this impossible impulse to view
The skeleton you know is there.
No, not an x-ray, an MRI, it won't do.
You need to hold it like a bent

Tree branch, but you know you cannot, like I cannot
Construct an honest pro/con list.
Your frustration is your discovery with this—
Keeping your skeleton in, upright, cased in flesh

You protect it from its own orange oblivion.
Matthew claims his father died once
His people left the room, once the whole family
Left him with her, the hospice nurse.

But you see clearly—that hospice nurse re-entered
The empty room, him dying but
Not dead, she clicked, clicked, clicked the morphine button till
He did it, Matthew's father left

This world & ended in this poem, but only
After she came out, the lovely assistant done
Stepped out of the box & voila
She is whole, which isn't to say you haven't tried.

THE BEAM

Never felt like I knew
You even when beside you
At the opening of *Titanic*.
Well, a historical reenactment yearly
Down at the catfish pond.

We don't got no movie
Theater no more & I
Don't think we ever might.
I've never seen *Star Wars*.
A cucumber without a salad.

It's so obvious in family
Photos, my eyes barely open
My mouth a poor green.
My mother in poodle skirt.
My father like an outsider

Orange crossing guard vest &
Velcro shoes. My sister appears
So fed up with sexism
& she has the right
To be anything she desires.

Canada goose migration researcher or
Carrot enthusiast. I sing for
The day she eats jelly
Beans till she nearly pukes.
We benefit from an extra

Dose of fooling around, distraction.
Yes, I spent all afternoon.
Despite what I'm feeling this
Instant, I'm infinite, you too.
We're good luck & proven

To lead to massive discoveries.
What is a forest giraffe?
What does the pope do
Now that God is dead?
Who is Mitch McConnell? Who

Cares! Thank goodness you were

Born not one of these
Other creatures. Am I right?
I'm wrong about most things.
I'd no idea the glacier

Stopped. I've never seen *Pocahontas*.
I've never finished my degree.
I am a starfish gazing
At the night sky realizing
God should've hired a decorator.

I could've invented a potato
Better than this, the art
Critic mumbles to herself watching
A potato inhabit the microwave.
I have never felt like

I truly knew you, though
We are both from Indiana.
I am a starfish inching
My way towards a parrot
Or what is my next meal.

REALISM 102

Hey now, a boat needs an oar
The dart needs a good blow or
A hard throw. Likewise, a hog
It needs its butcher, how my mouth

Needs its Snickers. My first marriage proved
I was gifted a fuzzy father, persistent
Mother, just as your first marriage revealed
Your disgusting grandparents. My second marriage taught

Me I would be a father pretty
Crappy & your next marriage demonstrated you
Will be a wonderful grandmother. Finally we
Learned to read, then the instructions consumed

The mailbox—how to properly cuddle / coddle
A newborn, how best the turkey gets
Broiled. I'm learning to repair the pipe
The one that haunts the attic. I

Am on the porch, one cow over
There rubbing its snout up the other's
Haunches to cure some hidden noble itch.

DOUBLY INDICATED

Crutches sprout around the stupid city.
Just yesterday, you spotted a donkey

At the petting zoo pull one apart with
Its teeth, those forty-two repurposed moons

Acquiring something like pleasure, nourishment.
Then today, I discovered a hedge plant

Tiny crutches dangling in the hundreds
From its greenest tips. A family frolicked

Towards the bush & I shifted my vision
Towards the sunset. The prophet who lives

Under the Lamar Street bridge says we will
Find a pair of pairs—two crutches for you

& two for me, poked out of the sidewalk
Like feed corn—recognized & grand & in

The end, inadequate. If careful we
Are not, we might convince ourselves, saddle

Up & balance here forever. I must
Get back to the country, my mystic drum.

Be done with these synthetic habitats.
Urban clams, vibrating overpasses.

I hear the autumn's first snap of an ear
A signal my family continues, is.

AFTER SOMEONE PICKS UP A MAMMOTH BONE

I once dreamt to live
Seven-hundred fifty-three lives inside

This one, but now hope

To draw this single out for some fifty
Odd years, a handprint

Of mud swiped across the white sheets of time.

Nothing more. What would you
Declare the number one prerequisite

To be a person?

We can't certainly say it is being
Good or ten toes having.

Some form of stretching as preference

Or talking good, or
Holding another's head. A head is alive!

Aha! There mine goes

& now I move on a little lighter.
Like the fire burning

Outside this tent, I am so stoked to be

Alive. Energy
Translates beyond my palms & into this

Femur that traveled

Many millennia to reach us, but
Also to make me

Filthy & stinking freaking rich, buddy.

SOMEBODY'S DREAM

You asked Albert, *What's your passion*
Albert? He said, *forklifts*. Specifically repairing

Them when they go limp. The word *why*
Flung at him like spoiled potatoes chucked into the far trees
Disappearing across the balcony of your childhood

Vacation home. Albert never
Has vacationed, thus he answers widely, conflictingly.

One day, it is his one response
To Lake Elsinore's old adage to "Dream Extreme." Next day
Albert says, *It is the old family business*. Later

He says forklifts are his one passion
Because an angel came to him in a dream & declared

It to be so. In reality
Albert, he hates the day-to-day, the grease under his nails.
Broken wrench he can't afford to replace, uncomfortable

Seats. I wonder does he feel odd
Or differently now that he has gone to outer space.

FORMER SENATOR

My whole life is a Caroline, like
The spot in the tree where a limb once

Be, it has the eye of Godzilla.
The fire truck of no noise reversing.

Oh the lights continue fluorescing.
Last night the sky tilted to a pink

Not found in the crayon box of child-
Hood. I once made art & now I turn

Circles in the morning as the trashman
Waves to the kiddos in the playground.

I witness them turn dirt into mud.
Their hands plastered like mine. I once had
A purpose & now I march along

With whatever bug passes me by.

BRAINCASE

The skull proves it
Whatever wicked wand welded
Us loved us even
If love for real
It resembles some knot
On the tree's side
The lumberjack says *TIMBER*
For you & me.
This is a symbol
Like a yellow kite
Twenty-two separate bones
Join forces to protect
My split-tired brain
& Ryan's dumb brain
& Adrienne's scared brain
& Ron's scarred brain
Except one or two
Of his pieces might
Be missing that accident
When he went fishing
& he leapt out
Of the boat for
The book about koalas
The first in two
Decades he did swipe
From the husk of
This town's public library.
He chose to leap
Right when a loose
Log did putter by
I feel chosen to
Hold onto this story
My own decade later.
His brother my best
Friend hugging a history
Book tight as we both
Leaned one ass cheek
Against the cold bumper
The night we escaped
High school & oh ain't
No freaking poetic way
To say a surface /
A secret / a story

It finds itself shared
In the least together
We separate & only one-twentieth
Of one percent of
The entire animal kingdom
Gets such protection though
We all dare dive
Head first if pressured