



The Experience of Being a Cathedral

Kerry Carnahan

The Experience of Being a Cathedral

Kerry Carnahan

Advance praise for *The Experience of Being a Cathedral*

"A whirling lusty journey across our mis/anthropocene.. I wanna follow this polymath of the heart thru all the flowers and detritus."

— Caroline Conway

"What if the one you first saw as a veiled woman by the flock of your bros came now however many centuries later to tell what she's seen flying in her house above the post-9/11 desert of the real. Yet this is no *Little Ontology on the Prairie* but what if poetry were now the cathedral converted into a hospital for the collective soul. What more do we need to trust god but "a lone butch disentangling earth from heaven under a naked bulb"? Not much but to be permitted into the wound that never asked to be a sigil in the first place. Kerry Carnahan writes like she knows."

— Ana Božičević, author of *JOMO* and *Rise in the Fall*

"For those who understand shit talk's capacity to hold more complex truths than many other forms of speech, here is the blunt, maximalist, digressive and unrelenting "startled violet [that] wakes / itself up queefing"-- hilarious and oracular, a poetry wholly unpredictable, sucking its own "blood back / out the scrawniest most dishonest trope," running its mouth off against any whiff of amnesia."

— Ari Baniias, author of *Anybody*

Softcover paperback edition available upon inquiry

The Experience of Being a Cathedral

© Kerry Carnahan 2021

© experience.ofbeing.a.cathedral / www.kerrycarnahan.com

ISBN 978-1-7370910-2-8

First Edition 2021

LETTUCE RUN BOOKS

Cover design by Camilo Rojas-Lavado

The Experience of Being a Cathedral

Contents

I

Morning After Halloween 1

II

The Experience of Being a Cathedral 29

Notes 31

Morning After Halloween

*I walked on what remains of the heart,
toward the north . . .*

- Mahmoud Darwish, "Not as a Foreign Tourist Does"

Lit's the wild raspberries I caint shake,
sunlight finishing on our faces,
gasps as I suck his nipples, thorns raking cheeks to
nutsack— even if those bushes were gone
and the Kaw thick with poison oak. At's ghost fruit
haunts me, kind of goofy, some do turn so
luscious when infertile or maybet's that sheen I got
creeping like a day moon the duration of a one
flu season where if I wanted, I crept, and he'd open
to me shivering there, my ovaries a flea circus
built on a toxic dump. We met at Replay,
the Bill of listen to me a rando dressed up in a sandwich board
plastered with a giant photocopy of the US Bill of
Rights motioned him to the patio bar shouting "but now,
this guy" with big youth pastor energy,
Jesus energy, what's next maybe you've seen it—
a freeze, a rustling, a doe wanders out your eyes
into mine, then back into you, sniffs
again to and fro til she nudges into our strange
clearing her fawn. In the dark once
he cradled my face and said Careful, keep sucking it like that
I'll fall in love, so I stopped, I didn't want that abuse, I

say I — ? and brace, but his hands only float
lightern milkweed. Sometimes he'd pull me close
and it wasn't for sex but with a child's delight, a joy
I simply existed, like a stuffed animal or
wave from a passing car. Pussy to him was lasagna,
nobody's straight up, mankind'l have-at you with trowels
and a bucket, plaster your womb til it's loveliest of
mausoleums— go drop a quarter in me
though, see, I got a song yet to sing goes like
lasagna comes: banquet-sized, good portions,
tad freezer burnt but wondrous, wondrous to unfoil such
tenderness. Likesay this one butch
in the Dubya years, she'd sit me down nights,
unlace my site boots or I'd do hers,
ease them off gentle, what a feeling your funky
hot feet coming footloose, unhusked, unhurt
and I was in such miserble pain why'd I first fight her
giving grace to my toes? Did I fear losing
a thing I thought property, or without hurt to gas me
was I scared I'd deflate like Valentine's
balloons in April, mind you. A heart sometimes
wants to take off its own skratdang boots,
says hey, caint I undo a knot, get that grace, truth's
mostly no: a heart's a jacked 6' 5" former cage
fighter like Lasagna Man and can't bend down that far,
or some jumpy type, a baby dyke steeled and numb.
Proibly that butch at a tender age too
got her boots unlaced by older dykes, I bet it all goes back to
a butch, a first patient set of mouth, a beautiful
cared-for pair of hands working to loosen a knot of

some monstrous, pointless grief, sole
remnant of yet another world destroyed by its
own creation story oh go trip balls, leave me alone you
horsemen— vanish! Snatcher dang lances.
I don't know no apocalypse nor no
beginnings, just a lone butch disentangling earth
from heaven under a naked bulb,
spirit pouring out a boombox through a crack in
Billie's voice— how she drags that beat, see,
don't you hurry spirit, don't you rush your moving on the
face of the waters as that butch sits picking darkness
apart from deep, seas from rivers, love she
divides patient out of a heron unfurling its wings
over a drainage ditch, it's so seamless can't
barely feel it how this grief is giving,
the lichens exhaling, a startled violet wakes
itself up queefing and might I can't yet discount how a dewy
sheen blooms on the split lip of the valley where
the morgue nestles. I bent over, hissing rip it
just rip it up as my Hot Cheeto zipper jams and I
feel a grace thud, it's as if we two are
one creature molting a single skin— or
morphed into a rhinoceros frustrated with its own horn.
His cum was a swig of Bud Light from a bottle of
drowned menthols I gagged, such dignity
when he got up naked, I loved watching him prop
the broken sash with a milk bottle, brusquely
inviting the river air, as if changing
money, indoors to lick the sweat off his abs, I adore
the rituals of bad luck guys, I respect the power

of your exhaustion and why you'd opt to go pasture your
demons in an Astrid Amelia type I can't
afford to grudge, I got yellow diamonds in the
light but not in trust, no down payment nor
no debts no what'd that cost ya nor frantic nights
losing at this game Susy calls love and I Amerika, O strap
on your steel toe, heart o mine! Safety first and nevermore
a conscious thought. Meanwhile O you Margots
don't you grudge me my miscarriages
nor trashy abundance, such luscious abortive
unviable living it's not my fault you're deprived of, I
request your neglect, I'll suck my blood back
out the scrawniest most dishonest trope, I
can't even with no vacant soapy white nightgowns of an
austerity opera nor pour out no more empty cups.
I don't want to peddle some cult of desire like
it's actual desire and not the regulation of flesh,
for starters. Boy I tell you wild, crap
some women do say to each other when we go
suicidal, "go work in a Juarez orphanage,
help someone who needs it," "eat ramps, ramps,"
"be other-directed," well to suffer is look here
suffering dont need no job, it needs bathed fed plus
maybe likes onion tops, Mork & Mindy, might
need to hole up read *Miracles at Little No Horse* over and over til
the spirit builds a softer, roomier nest,
spose that's work but aint no job, anyway ladies I am
embarrassed as thissere English language if you
thought I ought pledge any more allegiance to that fal di ra
so rather let me smoke like herb how the butch once

on her futon brought to my lips a nectarine,
a stone fruit so obscene ripe in a hand so ele—
gant jointed that when she'd fuck me I was like getting
fucked by that whole Danish Modern thing,
no. She's a snob, I said then,
now I'd say she had "a few unexamined ideas"
she sought to transcend, sometimes, by loving me,
for some years after 9/11. I can count
times she spoke my name on one stubby finger,
and if I lift one more, the lovers who called me trash
or desperately needed to say "big white trash butt" to me
once, twice, panting a little, as if I were a chew toy
or holding their leash. Spose I was. Both morph
into a sad, corny Pierrot in dreams
from which I wake sober. Smoke's
not always a medicine of tenderness. Who
died in here, a dream will ask you, blinking, stinks
to high heaven, needs aired. But birth stinks too
so don't call it no elegy til you learn to smell the difference,
O my life? It's the
wild raspberries I can't shake, Reagan's three
legged chicken joke, Van Halen, yesterday's news lifting
off my red neck, staining my hands, each paper I withdrew,
expert, out my front-back apron, then threw
—my Dad chanting "I Kant, I Kant," apropos of
nothing I much cared to understand til now:
he was overcorrecting his "I caint" to "I can't," or trying to,
and probably for my ten year-old benefit.
But now even the Swiss ask Y'all have more ketchup. Once
I took my folks to the Biennial, friends in it,

I sat them in a corner saying you-dont-move,
when I return a small crowd's gathered at their feet and
they've flowered into sagebrush. Your parents?
Salt of the Earth. A girl's fingering a leaf,
savoring it. Cayn shake a drunk editor
called me milkweed years ago, what if tumbleweedpoetix®
did become my brand, *Little Ontology on the Prairie*?
I do come from a long line of crooks. Bedrock
as butter, some. Choices in order
for me, a pursed, salt licc Aunty at the windowpane
as eight year-old Leo's shouting it's a thicc boi-I
tell-ya at a speeding ice cream truck with such relish,
such glee in the sound's name— or the name's sound?
I left one eye behind, wandered down
to fields I didn't plant on land I don't own,
out north the limits of my heart, I saw
rows of flutes already snapped off, broken night-
sticks juttet crazily out of hard furrows
but the corn I didn't recognize . . .
now under a wrong bridge I am night air
dying to get tongue kissed
where our shadows jackknife. It's wild raspberries
my embryos sort of resemble as they drop to soft earth
one by one, while I grow hotter in failure
resembling a star. Slip
out this ancient military coat of grief with me
like a child done with dress-up
and that coat falling from your body evaporates into no
coat worn by nobody, but that child's a deer
disappearing into snow falling on branches. It's

an important failure, Dubya H might've wrote,
that I can't shake, shivering as we are, half a million
before the UN at noon February 15 2003,
zip tied on a curb unwipeable sweat stinging our eyes
on August 31 2004, smashing out Military Science
windows on May 6 1969 in a college town, last
Monday rinsing nerve agent off a stranger's mucus membranes, I
don't presume to live happily,
nobody I know does, people are dying, brother's
marriage a shambles, friends made refugees
and who with credulity could blame any soul thieving a
fentanyl vial for a few drops of absolute peace,
poets got nothing on pharma. Oh
I don't know anything. Rudy Giuliani's
been busy, likes of sure wasn't farting around
in my brain, boy I tell you place
looks like cattle feedlots what with it manned
and barricaded any which way you turn,
sometimes a dream comes unketled it's a miracle, then there's
dreams fought their way in, by now place seems— differnt,
but differnt like Leo first learning that word: "diff-rent" well
guess that's not differnt, in-laws taught him, maybe's
embarrassed how we talk already but
it's like sun's coming up in his voice and baby that's a
definition for you, and oh sweetheart maybe too
you'd like to behold livestreaming heaven in somebody's face
tad bit more often, I knowt's hard to
get a signal, I feel the reception very poor
right now. Sad how Dorothy Gale
when she feels trapped heads straight for the corral,

now tell me— if I really want to get free do I go
pissyass singing about rainbows n corraling my own damn self?
Oh now there I go shitposting my own lyric
anyway what's the take on Dorothy,
conjure of Gilded Age genocidaire L Frank Baum
who as a boy at Rose Lawn each night prayed to Jesus
his soul to keep, closed his eyes and was
strangled by cracked ragged hay settler childern in fields
smoking with shell casings and corn husk guts,
wonder if they thought about the Wizard of Oz my grandfathers,
probably never even saw it, probly wish
they never saw no Kansas field too. I ponder
what histories we ghost and still we think ourselves alive
and from a Catholic cemetery by the stubble
at the crux of a cardboard cutout of some 48 states
a grave grassily instructs me, Child,
it says Child bury two words, one to cover each our ears,
we who set fire to our own houses to quit the wind's shrieking
but save the middle finger for the railroad, save
opinion for another culture, what you
cant do without fold into a damp tea cloth
and fetch to the harvest without asked,
walk your elegizing, our elegizing, six miles to the neighbor's for
calomel,
dont sow identity in the landlord's fields, dont
forsake remains of a peasant constitution
and I wanted to shout What are you still dying for?
Cash grain? A share in the wars? Man amounts to something
tell you you sivilized?
But I didn't, run your mouth at a gravet's

liable to swallow you whole. This one it kept talking,
drunk, chawing some fruit country hype
while eyes no more lifted than custom I didn't shout
What you bartered away memory for, this patch of dirty snow?
and the grave isn't screaming Plenty starvation
death and madness to go round help self!
Instead some verses it quoted then halfhearted forgot
as I did me a yoga of cleansing breaths til my
breath got up disgusted, crossed the gravel and lay
down heavily in the shade of a historic marker I couldn't
scan because my gaze went blank. No
not our normal nonperformative look I mean real blankness—
by then I was just horsehair tangled,
uncoalesced freckles stuffed with alfalfa,
and the grave now a recorded message said Should
you meet your straw effigy in a poet's eye
don't waste you a lucifer . . .
I'm sick of this dust. What I'll return to's probly wind—
already I whistle, sshit shrieks in my teeth like panpipes, couldn't
I gust strewing sand and green nut boughs, gold foil con-
dom wrappers, various grits raining upwards
into dark clouds I've seen kind of woman?
No, I wouldn't want that. To
be legible from the moon. Sorrow,
ego, grief, and fire, already legible from the moon,
not for cause of love. Only ancient poems forget that
with conviction, tho this some night be
ancient too. It's wild raspberries how the herpes erupt
after Lasagna gave me oral with a cold sore,
the last time. The first was a bitter cold Halloween.

By April you were afraid as I was, faking sleep
as I slip out only to pull over around the corner stunned
at the blossoms ripping out of my guts,
you'd took root in me, and I into you whose
doe crashed through my slanting light,
on whose bed up sprang firefly emojis, in dented air
I stared as rail cars slid past carrying gypsum board, isopentane,
beef blood meal only and my hand on
the gearshift like it was a fistful of dog rose. I
dont know anything, not a thing. Judy
Garland had a beast mode see, she'd drag a beat
clear out south of sentimentality to its sick roaring edge
and still bring you back to violet,
to the judge's perimeter lilacs' voluptuous thrashing,
to whatever blows on the last precious coal of
your wonder, smoldering one. Be
you so kept in this raven of separation, let
its garment lay upon you as a second snow. Paradise
is afraid of us, if I led you there and told you: come in,
six cottonwoods tattooed on our deadlines
what might uncoil in our basket of grapes?
Soft limestone block cool against a face
pleases me, in Kansas they dug up whole seas run dry
to resurrect houses for Jesus, see now Jesus he
requires oh never mind— but ever wonder why Julys passing
by the 9th St Church you catch an ocean breeze?
Never did go inside but I know that rock's
intimate salt, carpet red and soft to a
foot as forest paths, plush as your birth mother's
able endometrium. See mine she

hauled almost-me past in her healthy rig,
on down to youth theater too I
walked by summer we did Brecht and the burghers of
Lawrence Kansas walked out during "Ballad of
Sexual Dependency," Peachum's mom school board,
Macheath's federal appeals, Ric he taught us Brecht's
"alienation effect," do your lines like they're
in quotes, unplug emotional jacuzzis, be real
fake, likesay the 9th St
Church I'd also pass turning off Ohio going— home?
turning 38 I was staying with my folks see
so to my childhood bed in 3 am wedding snow floating
from Lasagna's I didn't know that it was Langston
Hughes' childhood church I'd been passing all my life
even before it was mine, as a fetus,
a theater kid, a convalescing
you-know-what now I'm back on Ohio, a sublet, mask up,
carry beern groceries up 9th to my folks, turn
home say night to Jesus I mean Hughes' Jesus who
idn ashamed of me nor my stunted glorias but
boy I tell you Judy what a shock to feel your life's proper
entrails tug at somebody else's, kind of
umbilical, fetal maybe like astronauts tethering for a space-
walk felt your gut tugging just now?
Strikes me birth's a denim concept, sturdy
but restrictive, whereas my delivery
each hour into the wind's hands I midwife too
slick thick and ultraviolet to parse into babies. Might
need be infertile to bear such realities as
we're never quite born, none ever per

se are fulfilled by the mist realm as completed shipments,
parts always coming in— I mean, sometimes we're born
but mostly born again, to ourselves.

Likesay, who suffers the first time you're born?

Your mother. Subsequent times?

you do. Am no false

prophet gone live, just infertile,

ratioed. All flesh is the grass

says Isaiah lawn specialist, surely the people

is grass, I don't know a thing else,

nothing at all let's see earlier it was I saw a clip of

a man left prison after 30 years on Death Row,

inside he'd got older, cancer four times,

said his first wish was to feel grass underfoot once more.

Unused to softness he was, to that ease, so when

he stepped off the blacktop he stumbled a bit,

just a bit, way a body does when

after a long while someone at last embraces you,

Paul was his name, just Paul and Cousin

Grass, wild raspberries

to roses, barefoot so probly tickled also

honey today I read about how Hughes loved books as

a kid because "if people suffered, they

suffered in beautiful language, not in monosyllables,

as we did in Kansas," well I silently also

silently we suffered,

silence in the sense of a 4' 33" type silence

of dying fluorescents, Pall Malls jostling

in green glass ashtrays us shouting and cussing with

all the focus originality and grim technique of a Picasso

shot though with bone silence,
bottom-of-cistern silence, silence of grasshoppers
and barn-fall-down, strange type silence,
ancient drove-into-the-windbreak-and-abandoned trucks-
visible-still-on-satellite-imagery-through-foliage-of-
no-time-for-empty-words silence
under a big sky is a feeling, a vast listening
trained into me ago by the prairie who mothers my senses
generations. Make of her salt my heart's
hesitancy to begin a fresh myth without demapping
reality's status quos: dissolving dishonorable
cloisonnés made of Giuliani and Jesus
I seek skills acquired from women "talk too much."
Same as each town has its cake lady, every last everloving
family has a people's historian, Cousin
Judy I mean Judy my mom's forty-seventh first cousin—
swaddle her memry like a celebrated baby same
soft way she dressed me in facts,
modeling trust and exquisite discretion, see
some do practice a mouthy flair, survival's linguistic,
greeting each grudging mug of Folger's
like it was a newborn handed up to them with
good faith in custom if not the grim
faced reception at the door, this kind keeps a Christmas
tree by the toilet year round, aggravates you sore
then quick will tell you who just dont have a way with kids,
who's a beater, how so an so got like that,
stuff you need to know, Judy.
She put her Mandy in a powder blue satin jacket,
gave her a name means, "loved," spoke it with reverence,

drawing out the sounds slow as a glass filling
at the tap. It's all I can to observe your
expertise remembering to me words might've
wasted me in their absence,
I could've given you Long Soldier's first book, you'd've got it,
wondering at her question What is it to wish for the
absence of nothing? Well
now, we'd say. Constitutive narratives long
signed away at Port of Galveston or the Land Office
I myself born in town didn't have to fetch cobs
nor carry out ash, never worked the fields,
running water piano lessons all that but still speaking
seems like a thing other people do,
you dont much need a way with words if you're
mostly in dialogue with cattle or milo or
horizons vastly unsuitable for whichever faint gods cling
nonchalant to the last of your old world hungers
drowned in wind or whiskey or
swirling light as a slick of iridescent grease coats
rainwater loafing in a rut,
anonymous— nowt's plain wrong
but tell me, where'd you hide familiarity's kiss,
chalk tongue? Once our prayers only
needed whispered to be heard,
we were that close, didn't have to julienne a pink-
petaled larynx screaming, hey turn you, you turn
round get back here tend us your lost flock,
as for that butch I've been saying "the butch" but she had a
name, it was Rebel Touch. She was a six-toed aristocrat
and I loved her. I'd go share Lasagna's name with you too if

I was tad more certain of it,
each time we'd get comfortable he'd go changing it,
ask me to call him by some other name. Stupid
he wasn't, strange though, I mean how many strangers
I met in you, forest? Beautiful ones, some not human,
eyes too soft, catacombs of light kneading
honeysuckle into flutes, the scent of wild grapes
in the dark. Storm last night,
crossed the bridge, walked the levee,
see lightning takes on the shape of whatever it desires
to split open and burn away— down it forks
as a bur oak, a rotted out hickory
decayed in a field, I caution you, I'm dancing
around the history of my rage,
see accuracy's liable to bring us to grief. Once
I was a painter, very good, a few quick strokes
and you'd be observed, things like
your beauty, but also your mild hatreds,
moral failures, almost always at least a couple doves
sang yet undisappointed in a face, mine too:
dangit. She did not lie,
this hand of mine, let's see. Once
a dirty towel chanced to fall in love with a solitary
mirror tormented by two half-broken guitars,
as it flung itself over the mirror's dinged shoulders
verily the fire trap wept to see mirror
get a little respite from mirroring, meanwhile
the chaotic towel rediscovered a kind of classical dignity
in its own abandon and your two guitars I
will gladly repair their busted duet in another myth but

now I've got to fix this doe. One
whose antlers are budding, who's rising
on human feet— my feet,
who's kneeling on knees, both yours, shivering
into arms belonging to I don't know who taken.
Doe, have you lost your fawn?
I am that fawn, ladybug.
Power's out, April firefly so horny she
cruised a lit menthol, you think
Frankenstein dresses up Halloween? Or just orders in Shuttle.
Or does he go out? I said the creature
not the scientist. Somebody else for a night, shots at the bar,
gather up his ripped dress in the predawn,
wearing a stranger's giant silky track pants slip
out back into the first order simulation.
Think he feels less dead? Less undead?
Jay Bee now he says Halloween's childish sorcery.
Look I tell him, we do get it, ghouls do walk in June,
structural demons every morning tailgate our
lifebreath but see baby, that night it's tad bit easier to
part the leaves, give a gentle mist spirit
access to the flesh realm through the crumbling
archway of our bodies, five beautiful bucks
in a saxophonist's hat. I don't
adequately inquire into the significance of that,
if I did I'd have a theory why it was The Bill of Rights
—of Rights! introduced Lasagna to me,
and as an exit strategy. I wasn't hitting on The Bill.
I was reading him. I was trying to make out
the words *redrefs of grievances*, drunk. I know I was engrossed by

his story:

that The Bill of Rights had a secret sister,
a contract nobody knows about whose guarantees
make liberty look cheap. He swore it was real— passionate.
I think he made it all up. Proibly wasn't
even Lasagna Man's friend. We played chess, rules
were to surrender our queens immediately,
lose both kings, abandon bishops and castles forever,
defund the knights, release their horses,
and liberate the pawns. He stole one from my travel set,
slipping out one more last time I found it,
it was tucked in an open sock drawer wadded in two pair of my
dirty thongs. I thought he was asleep. Take the panties
and leave the pawn he said softly. Nobody
will ever almost-love me like that grandmaster.
Sometimes from a Humboldt trim camp
out of range or on a demo job, drywall splintering
in his throat, he calls me, I pick up hello.
Seet's better he be with her, a wealthy Danesa.
Won't find his info in my phone because
honey I drink. If you're
heading down to Johnny's, bring me back Johnny's
in an ashtray, and the wind in a solo cup,
and in a cargo pants pocket bring back the night
he and I walked back from Johnny's over the bridge,
same bridge a woman threw herself off week
before, year before and before same
bridge, same story, differnt women, occasionally
men and that year me too— only in my head,
but it was agony. Bring

it to me not as gratuitous imagery
but as a promise, a promise to you and me,
to the both of us, a firm statement,
a firmament! That a person
can feel so bad, bad as that or almost,
and in two month's time be drinking wine out of a flowerpot
with a gentle cage fighter, high as a kite.
Or just resting, as the evening takes up its clover.
I won't lie about this. Trick is to suffer less.
Certain things were in place. I had a home to go to
and once I finally got on Obamacare
a displaced New Yorker by name of Debbie Goldberg
put me on generic Wellbutrin, a dose
the pharmacist said was like pissing in the ocean,
meaning me. I sat up
my blood sparkling like the same river
that woman had crawled out of sheepishly onto a rock
saying she'd slipped, was happy to be alive,
thanking police even though she swum out herself.
Part of me belongs to her now, same
as part of her belongs to the fact Kansas is flat
with low bridges. We met at Replay,
The Bill bought another round, apologizes
for his marriage and shouts "but now, this guy—" as if on cue
outside Approach segues deep house Prince "I'm
not a human I'm a dove" over and over
into Back That Azz Up while inside a Dead Kennedys
cover band Brownbackistan is screaming
Kill the Poor, Topeka was gutting us like crappie.
It was 2014 in Kansas, what's next maybe

you seen capitalism? Supply side economics?
A self-styled "prairie libertarian"
out of Wichita wanders out your eyes
into mine building refineries for the Third Reich
and Soviets while twin robot deer
"communism" and "abortion" stagger
to and fro between the mangy fuck mouths of
a Brownback, Kobach, Pompeo, Wagle—
seen that? How they like us humble and ignorant?
Seen the horsemen of spiritual collapse?
A mood board for social death?
Man, never felt so close to my maker as that year.
Sick and sure my life wasn't worth a good ladybug's lol,
wish I could say it was about pure loss
or a noble reckon with principled existential questions,
honestly it was I was disabled, lost my health care,
didn't think I'd work again. Got me fucked-up.
Shit goes deep. Get you certain you don't deserve your life,
your one wild and precious tragedy, given the absence
of meritorious economic criteria,
waste of a crisis. Salvation was basic too,
neither love nor poetry got me over,
taught me yes but what healed me was rest
and aminos. And that Balrog's
tail Wellbutrin. Oh
believe we got bodied on Ohio,
demon, I dont know a thing. If you're going to the bar
bring back three shots of pissing in the ocean,
nestle me in a rocks glass a couple
wedges of real talk, on a clean surface sprinkle a

tiny pile of vengeance and cut it up for
the woman who jumped. One for her one for me one
for bloated bambi snarled in a boat ramp. Go
get you yours too, you know the name on the card.
Cheers to you river however you flow
—though if you're driving out to Wakarusa don't you disrupt
yours true sank laughing into the grass and is
grass and diesel fumes, dew distilling into one night I
flung myself off Lasagna, hurled off the blankets and saw a length
of blue silk so
dark it was black, enough to tie a dozen apples
or bind back your hair, it was hovering over us,
it was dreaming silver and woven out of pine needles, who
knew you could be this delicate you dog,
dark water flowing, doe at the edge
of the shadows of this poem I'm crossing over,
Lasagna's arm around my shoulders,
mine circling his hips. I'm not short
but we disagree, I stand on the bed. We're
passing spider after spider, webs glittering in the spring winds
walking back from Johnny's, over the bridge,
take what you need. The spiders,
orb weavers, have woven their webs inside the railings
where they're protected from the winds,
the wasps, one spider per steel post, their webs
a feast of midges. Give me the grace.
Look how intelligent they are Lasagna's saying,
hugging me close, close in his delight,
even closer the memory pissing around my
oceanic cache, no real chill to speak of.

See the moon makes its water out of light and wind.
What remains? Got me
spose everthing— delight, spiders, generic
Wellbutrin mixed with vodka, pissing,
gypsum board, milk bottles, the broken sash, savory
bottoms air and Billie Holiday crackling over
AM radio, Johnny's, herpes, Replay,
cosplay, copays, that spooky
Cisco hold music Louise Erdrich Obamacare I
hope for now and a freight train every seven minutes but
not the raspberries, my pawn, nor entropy,
nor my mother's forty-seventh cousin our Judy
whose wisdoming wasn't cheap. More a way
than a bale of aphorism, Judy.
Also not the spiders because they aren't spiders,
in a nightmare of brights I see it now, they aren't
spiders at all but egg sacs, trembling
on webs just beginning to fray. The mothers are gone.
Lasagna's mom— she died young. It's his birthday,
I'll suck his dick in an alley, what else
are the alleys of Lawrence Kansas for,
for the time being though I keep my mouth shut.
The egg sacs dangle in webs studded with gnats.
I think this is what a mother does. She crawls
to a windy place over dark water and begins to spin,
weaving a silk scaffold for
the next pulse— web
that bends like grass, holds tight her wild distinct visions
and if they hatch, provides nutrients.
Kind of funny, web, dont belong to neither,

not this world nor the coming one
unless the web's in tatters, then you know's gametime.
People with no problem having kids don't understand,
I'm tired— each knot must tie off flawlessly,
we're a fragile process, handfuls of survivors roaming
atop a mist scape of almos before we even gulp
our first breath. Most don't get that,
dnt mean abortion but that's okay too I said you
got damn right it's okay, I mean losses
are fine, part of it, even folks not knowing
anything about any of it is in itself a knot knotting them
fast to this metal support. As for
moi I'm doing exquisite, no symptoms,
chip away at nothing until another shape emerges
in my gut also boy-I-tell-you did you see today,
can you fathom, in the New York paper,
St. John the Divine, it's converting into a field hospital.
Should be lit with lilies. Strange times.
Man name of Daniel though, now he said something:
see in the plague they used cathedrals as hospitals,
so this is not outside the experience of being a cathedral,
he said, Daniel, it is just new to us.
—the experience of being a cathedral.
Isn't that subtle? Funny, tad bit. So this is not
outside the experience of being a cathedral,
it is just new to us. Why should these words be so calming?
Who could use a patient, experienced cathedral in this life?
A cathedral should have a leather jacket.
Maybe a vegan leather jacket, principled.
What *is* actually outside the experience of being

a cathedral. Anything?
Maybe not. A cathedral has seen some shit.
It's just new to us, the non-cathedrals. Or—?
A cathedral doesn't feel shame does it?
No fear lighting up the night in a strange bed.
Or could that also be the experience of being a cathedral?
I've mortgaged all my castles in the air
sings Billie Holiday in Everything Happens to Me,
go through life catchin colds and missin trains.
Something I still want to say so badly,
strange. You can feel so far afield the experience of being:
being a cathedral, mouse turds, nobody cares
you figure, frankly not a one of them gives a rat's
sweetness and maybe you ain 100% wrong
except that sometimes this in itself, feeling abandoned
by God— I mean, like, even gods you had no
idea don't exist— that especially's not outside the experience
of being: being a cathedral, being wrong, debilitated,
raw dog whatever hon, it's just new to us, then its regular,
as much as pads around in soft socks
feeding itself hot spaghetti with raw garlic,
whatever it's got, regular. It
was Lasagna's idea to depose the sovereigns,
our bishops' experience of being cathedrals was
to lose their cathedrals haha to the pawns
who waltzed in, dragged aside the pews, spread out a
picnic then drifted into each other for a nap.
They began calling the cathedral "the picnic house,"
all but the one. Judy'd have said Lasagna's a nice boy,
a good kid— must be hair shy of fifty now

and he'd have respected her too, see he had this
genuine reverence for honest people
and that woman was honest as this poem is long.
Except to cut it short dont make her a liar. I'm
a terrible liar. I could go on forever,
whatever forever means now, doe. We figure this
out together, Leo. Likesay you whispering Look
at that booty as we passed notably splendid Christmas lights:
yes. See you ever felt like a broke down appliance
with garbled instructions? I smelt a frying
in my brain, I unplugged and rolled into a corner.
Life rips off a mask. Sshit, who's
you? I called my mom. In event of unmasking
do not vacuum. Between my shreds there,
and me having shed a cabin's-worth of this coarse dark
oath, our best feature, I'd snarled a gearshaft.
Seven seconds and a sharp knife was all she needed.
Two to say You must go towards the warmth,
five to pause, then the words You
must not become bitter, fixing me in her knifepoints
til I cut the gaze. This is our people's way of signaling
life and death, used sparingly. We pause.

11

“But traditionally, in earlier centuries, cathedrals were always used this way, like during the plague. So this is not outside the experience of being a cathedral, it is just new to us.”

- Rt. Rev. Clifton Daniel III, "Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Including Crypt, Will Become a Hospital," *New York Times*, April 4, 2020

The Experience of Being a Cathedral

is rain streaming off your gargoyles
are your walls thicker than earth moving
who breathed a lily
and came into you claiming sanctuary
do you adjust your vaulted groin against the damp
are your ribs elegant as you arch back at times
a fire is racing through you
do you trickle with perspiration do
weep holes allow your weeping
is it the coming and going, the touch of many hands
songs you know by heart, do these wonders
and signs tingle
the air of your heights is peaceful, clear
down your spiral stairs, a pool of goldfish and coins
was your father a ring of stones
your condition is it delicate, just nauseous with life
have you felt a journeyman put his tools down
inside you and weep for you
is there a crypt in you, a dripping place
did your healing water bless someone, anyone's brow
with a good-bye, not knowing
and a small cry met you
do lonely people wait for your doors to open
are you lit inside by candles for the dead

Notes

In "Morning After Halloween" the epigraph by Mahmoud Darwish is translated from Arabic by Fady Joudah. "Yellow diamonds in the / light" is after "We Found Love" performed by Rihanna and written by Calvin Harris. "What is it to wish for the absence of nothing?" is from Layli Long Soldier's "(1) Whereas Statements." "Dubya H" refers to W.H. Auden and "Jay Bee" to Jean Baudrillard, who in *America* disapprovingly calls Halloween "an infernal demand for revenge by children on the adult world." Mentioned in association with the Kochs (see Jane Mayer's *Dark Money*), who go unnamed, are right-wing extremist Christian supremacist Kansas politicians Sam Brownback, Kris Kobach, Mike Pompeo, and Susan Wagle, whose means of subjection have included the gutting of social programs and education, obstruction of functional Medicaid, and the perfection of generally unlivable conditions for poor and low-income people. Portraits of the human cost of former Governor Brownback's "Kansas Experiment" appear in Ana Swanson and Max Ehrenfreund's article "[These are the people who suffered when Kansas's conservative experiment failed.](#)" published in the *Washington Post*, June 14, 2017. "Meritorious economic criteria" is a Kansas tax policy indicator.

This poem also quotes the Rt. Rev. Clifton Daniel III from "Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Including Crypt, Will Become a Hospital," *New York Times*, April 4, 2020: "But traditionally, in earlier centuries, cathedrals were always used this way, like during the plague. So this is not outside the experience of being a cathedral, it is just new to us." The same quote by Daniel gives "The Experience of Being a Cathedral" its title.

Love to Ari, Ana, and Camilo. This book is dedicated to Debbie Goldberg.

The writer is written by her language, of course.

- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

"For those who understand shit talk's capacity to hold more complex truths than many other forms of speech, here is the blunt, maximalist, digressive and unrelenting "startled violet [that] wakes / itself up queefing"- hilarious and oracular, a poetry wholly unpredictable, sucking its own "blood back / out the scrawniest most dishonest trope," running its mouth off against any whiff of amnesia."

— Ari Banias, author of *Anybody*

"What if the one you first saw as a veiled woman by the flock of your bros came now however many centuries later to tell what she's seen flying in her house above the post-9/11 desert of the real. Yet this is no *Little Ontology on the Prairie* but what if poetry were now the cathedral converted into a hospital for the collective soul. What more do we need to trust god but "a lone butch disentangling earth from heaven under a naked bulb"? Not much but to be permitted into the wound that never asked to be a sigil in the first place. Kerry Carnahan writes like she knows."

— Ana Božičević, author of *JOMO*