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AN ANGEL IN THE EMPTY CHAIR

By

Daniel DeFrank

B.A., University of Montana, 1983

Presented in partial fulfillment for the degree of


Master of Fine Arts

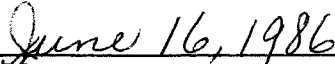
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1986

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AN ANGEL IN THE EMPTY CHAIR

POEMS BY

DANIEL DEFRANK

FOR MY FAMILY AND MY FRIENDS

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I. THE GLORY OF FAITH



TIED TO THE EARTH  
BUT SAILING

When you hold onto her hand

She knows who you are.

The technician wheels

The death room equipment

Into the truck.

Trees and sparrows

Know she is alive

And now she hears them,

They are ecstatic.

In the back yard,

A raven with a broken wing

Caws and caws at a cat.

## BEING BORN

We should have taken  
Sniggerfritz and Jake  
They would have led us  
Around where you stood  
When you stopped  
On the narrow ledge  
Above the shallow quarry

You smiled     facing me  
Faked rocking motions  
Forced me  
To adjust my balance

(stanza break)

I pressed against the bluffs  
Pushed myself away from them  
Watching you  
Watch me fall  
Into the stagnant wash

I put my drenched corduroy coat  
On an ancient boulder

In the sunshine breeze  
I dried as we laughed  
Walking in dinosaur tracks

## THE GLORY OF FAITH

(for mom)

I regard you as America

Your touch      tough

Transcendent energy

Steadfast dripping

Antibiotic bloodstream

But the nurses wore masks

And gowns      other employees

Were      a chain of human gaiety

Singing carols

(no stanza break)

Dancing

In the hospital hall  
Where I was signing you in  
They took you away  
The nurses wore masks  
And gowns        the doctor  
Family wanted you to know

Our prayers howled  
Like truckloads  
Of perishable goods  
In holiday traffic.



## DEAD FEVER

This collision course  
Has been on forever.  
The voice, the depth of anger  
Disguised as ignorance,  
Suggests your reaction.  
Shimmering doubts  
Between frustration and anger  
Guilty, rush through the floor  
Await new stairs. Cringing at  
My former self  
Behind the New Orleans face  
It's Christmas and all the crumbs  
Remind me of home. Ranging where  
The anger subsides I try to budge  
But the rail at the edge of the bed

(no stanza break)

Is old. The trellis is connected  
To the porch.  
Home is the only nuance.  
Doctor Lockett  
Presses against my chest,  
Tells me to rest.

## CHRISTMAS PAIN

The interest is working  
In your favor, I said  
To mother under the last full moon  
And tears filled her eyes,  
She went into the bathroom  
And cried. On Christmas night  
The tick of the holiday drones.  
I drive cold roads home. The skyline  
Strains but keeps up with  
The cancer of growth: oak trees  
Spared, taken and replanted  
At the whim of engineers  
Who planned and designed  
Offices where friends, dentists work,  
And doctors wreck their marriages.

(no stanza break)

In the streetlight spot, the place  
On the concrete where the bleeding dog  
Died for a week I was afraid to drive by.  
At the corner I turn and park on the street  
Look to the moon as shadows call me  
To sleep. Even when all the special  
Holiday fun is absorbed into the walls  
No one can read, the poinsetta glows  
In the candle flicker  
Where the tablecloth  
Has been graced  
With forgotten poppy seeds.

## POEM FOR GLORIA

Submerged in the mountain pool  
A whistle calls from the trees  
And I hear a black rabbit  
Jumping where the nest  
Joins dark forest.  
She appears with a towel  
Holds it out of reach  
Urges me to reach for it.  
I pull it dry from the water  
And dry my eyes. She dropped  
From sight, but my only sister  
Evaporated in a miscarriage,  
Flooded away without a cry,  
Showed me she was.  
The ripples call her name  
I never knew. How she became  
An angel: I could never tell.

## NOT FAR AWAY

Arrive

No one shares it with you.

Recollections squawk

Like a wheelchair,

Dissolve in an airy,

Long-lost odor.

Find yourself

In the room

With the presence

Of someone you miss.

Sculpt them how they are.

They are there.

Behind the trial

Which is the intent

As spiraling shapes

Masquerade past

And it is tomorrow

Overflowing.

## WOMAN IN THE SEASHORE BREEZE

I always wonder  
What would have happened  
If I hadn't been assertive  
Charted this course  
The way I have Awaited  
The downward spiral  
Which is imagination  
Where the unimagined ultimate spirit  
The world you have created and known  
Surfaces it is your own

Parts of it reel inward  
A strand or two of her dark  
Seashore-lightened hair  
Blows away with dead souls  
Who are drawn inward

(no stanza break)

As reverse air  
And undertow wave  
Gives  
Takes at the same time

Velocity swirls the spray  
Into patterns of violent momentary  
Motionlessness, focused  
In less than a second,  
Filtered lovingly  
By my eye.



## AN ANGEL IN THE EMPTY CHAIR

In the not so distant past  
When the layers of ice were frozen  
Indistinguishable the river here  
Ran quieter. On some big boulders  
In the shade tiny glaciers  
Reveal the structure of their make-up,  
The structure of their destruction.  
I break one in half and shove,  
Trying to speed it into doom. It catches  
On another rock. I watch it,  
Push it again until it floats  
Slowly and then it positions itself  
In the slight rush of the creek.  
On a huge boulder a small bird  
Sings an early spring song.

(no stanza break)

I imagine my friend's dead father  
And my uncle  
In the image of the man in the suspension  
On the bridge  
In the sun.  
Another man, the dead poet  
Appears on the empty bench.  
A Gray Jay washes its wings  
In granular splashes  
Of the watery passage.  
A disturbance appears  
Above the surface.  
Waves swirl and separate  
Light filtered by moss and trees.  
A column of sun  
Whitens passing whitecaps  
How fresh and new  
Even dead gray looks  
Basking in early spring.

I HERDED THE NIGHT INTO ITS NEST  
AND RESTED

Even the trees mourn your passing away.  
And I am dazed, how you escaped the world  
Not what we see on the camera today.

As she splashes ashore the angel waves  
Dives beneath sandy shoreline's strained swirls.  
Even the trees mourn your passing away.

A whole new place is howling: it is made.  
Onward: with your parents your soul hurled,  
Not what we see on the camera today.

But who were your parents who were they?  
A fusion of love in the eye a pearl,  
Even the trees mourn your passing away.

(stanza break)

Raindrops spill listen to what they say  
The call suspended snapped to no avail  
Not what we see on the camera today.

An angel waves as she splashes away.  
The walls are floors where the newborn wail  
Even the trees mourn your passing away  
Not what we see on the camera today.

## II. VISITATION MYTH

## FOR THE WIND

Traces of sugar were found in the fuel.  
Far from home a hound  
Moans to a bitch in heat. Helicopters  
Corral stallions that will never  
Be missed. The world is on sale.  
Engines tune the clouds; ready  
I jump and the plane  
Falls from the sky. Flags marked  
Pieces of flesh and wreckage.  
In a warehouse, investigators piece  
The accident back, loved ones file suit.  
Everyone is required to pay.

## TWO DAY TREK

The rail stops here. Women  
Pull silver grocery carts  
Across an abandoned track bed.  
Boxes of ginger snaps jump  
And the cookies crumble.

The women walk toward the smoke,  
Short cut across the dry river  
Carry groceries up to the crossing  
Where men on horses help them.

## VISITATION MYTH

On a thread of a web  
It descended from nowhere  
Above the abyss.

Dropping to about a foot  
Above the tub it caught  
My eye, stopped and began

A great recoil to where it dropped from.  
Quickly it returns to the top of the rail  
Where it hangs

Pulling itself past the plastic  
Curtain, (which must seem  
Like great bluffs).

(stanza break)



Its form defined  
Behind plastic,  
It begins to descend,

Comes half way down, stepping  
Attaching  
A new web, it drops and ascends again.

## ABC POEM

Everything is always just so good.  
The window or the doorway  
Always remains closed until a day,  
Or a moment in a day, when fall  
Unveils a flashing of diamonds.  
A fully-defined rainbow drops  
Into the valley. At day's end  
A whistle will call and the dog  
Will not understand. Airmail  
Arrives and: American bullets  
Conceive disaster-ending freedom.  
Grieving halos, I justify kitchens.  
Leaves must now open. Petals quake.  
River stems toward undeveloped vapors.  
Withered extreme young zinnias freeze  
In the splendor of October.

THE POETRY HOUSE  
WAS TORN DOWN TODAY

The poetry house was torn down today.  
From across the street I watched it fall.  
They did it to make the poets go away.

The crowd that had gathered slowly faded.  
Two strangers looked back to see what I saw.  
The poetry house was torn down today.

In the rubble I could make out a cave  
But out hopped a heart from nowhere at all;  
They did it to make the poets go away.

Just after it fell it began to rain:  
Wet dripped between bricks of the broken walls.  
The poetry house was torn down today.

(stanza break)

They brought big trucks and hauled it away.  
They scraped the soil clean, it awaits fresh sod  
They did it to make the poets go away.

But the poets, they arrived in droves  
They climbed the trees, they began to caw.  
The poetry house was torn down today.  
They did it to make the poets go away.

TO BE READ ALOUD  
SOFTLY

The butterfly pounds  
Battering against the window:  
While I wake up attack  
Days I have grown accustomed to,  
A cabin in the wood beckons.  
The pencil I found broken  
In the trash bin on campus  
Obliges  
Purging the anger  
It was sharpened broken for.  
I tell myself  
I intend to do the work  
I will cut out garbage  
And cable tv and reverse  
This process of settling  
And pursue change  
For the sake  
Of pure illumination.

## LUNAR ESCAPE

Frozen    spring blooms crack  
Like white glitter  
Falling  
To an unfriendly award    ground.  
Birds    pick up the pieces,  
Fly to their nest and sing  
The third movement  
Lunar escape  
Fluid behind trees.

Blooms open    to morning sun  
Only to be frozen late tonight  
And carried away    tomorrow  
By birds.

(no stanza break)

What matters flies in  
To the mental block  
That was just like  
Crossing your fingers.

I am transferring it to you  
Frozen spring blooms crack  
Taking the escape chute  
Slamming wild ocean.

### III. THE FIRE ITSELF



## ONE RANGER

The whistle of the truck ripples off  
In the air. The hill ahead is steep  
Illumination in sunset brilliance.  
Looking for some thing, some ghost, loose,  
Close, I pick up the road, reflectors shine  
White and the canyon, mountains and moonlight  
Restrict no wheel that ever rolled. General  
Custer flashes before my black mirage,  
A nightmare, nothing  
On a horse leaping the highway,  
Flying through fields  
Following wind, bending branches,  
Crossing the river on a light wave  
That never ends.

## LATE WINTER

Seemingly unseen    frozen    loosened  
By the sunlight    one small rock  
Catches my attention  
As it falls    each bounce  
Rattling rage    and anger  
Displacing    a pleasant whiff  
Momentum    from the forests  
In the breeze    tandem ghosts  
Track    under the humming

High-voltage lines, spot-placed pines  
Spared by the last wind-swept fire.  
On the hillside in the flourish  
A muscled shape speeds toward town  
Lands near an ugly green complex,  
Perches in a tree. I stop  
Walking and watch the eagle watch town.

(stanza break)

From upstream, patches of ice pass

Melting, frenzied. Majestic

The eagle rustles its feathers

Drops dung and flies east

Swooping a red Subaru.

Patches of ice

Flow past the falls approach

The inevitable processing plant.

## DRIVING TO MONTANA

Deer are attracted  
By the garbage thrown  
By passing motorists.  
On the long drive, one by one,  
They are hit, placed at the side  
Of the highway, become stiff.  
In Texas, the first one  
Is a cow. The second one crushed  
Flat as pavement.  
In Wyoming, on the second day,  
The third has maggots.  
Driving from dawn into Montana,  
Signs shine: NO TURNS.  
In the passing headlamp edge,  
Three young deer graze....

## OUT OF PLACE

The queen visits the studs regularly  
Doles out sugar, gives trainer's advice  
Smiles what could be any woman's smile.

Eliminate doubt:

This one is grace with pearls.  
She is adorned in gold remorse,

Rides in a priceless carriage  
Pulled by noble animals role-playing.  
"A horse has to be trained to cope

With her majesty." The royal muse  
Smiles what is a wry smile and molecules  
Fall like glitter and cheese.

## UPON THE CONTEMPLATION OF CHANGE

Waves lap at trash  
Along the lake shore.  
An empty Coors wrapper  
Extends trashy holiday wishes.  
Christmas, 1985, Arlington, Sarah's dad  
Had a heart attack, drove Catherine's  
New Oldsmobile to the hospital where  
She volunteers.

A gold Nova, three black men  
I took to be hoodlums blocking me  
Cast lines in a lake no person  
Is allowed to swim in. One boat  
Motors December waves.  
Its wake splashes the beach.

(stanza break)

Two of the men strain not to be seen,  
Piss against the chain link fence.  
A VW microbus sputters around, stops  
Before moving on. One of the men  
Rolls a snow tire to the Nova,  
Opens the trunk and draws a rifle.

FROM THE PARKING LOT  
OF THE PALOMINO MOTEL

A red lawn dart  
Has found a home  
On the roof of unit 21.  
I catch a little boy's eyes  
From the front window  
Of a passing Malibu wagon.  
Noises waiting to be slaughtered  
Call from the stock trailer  
And I hear them  
When the kill man  
Gets that look in his eyes.  
Sounds that fade as the little boy  
Chomps on his hamburger. Tropical  
Palms plastic in the breeze,  
Their limbs rustle noise  
As the Malibu passes back.



## LAUGH YOUR WAY THROUGH

Days are laced with dog-eared laughter

And madness.

Bushes rustle

With frozen leaves.

The fence goes up tomorrow;

Television buried somewhere

In the basement: the aerial

Receives this broadcast. The thud

Of the car door: football

Players rush to the window

And look into the street

Where a clown stands frowning.

## YAKIMA IN PASSING

The dachshund waddles  
Across the street  
Her teats sagging.  
Punk sunglasses walks by  
Gives the dog a pat on the head  
And keeps walking. The maid  
Waits outside my room for me  
To stop drinking and remove  
The "Do Not Disturb" sign.  
I hear doors open and close,  
The maid pacing in the hallway.  
I pop another top: Her desperate face  
Glow like the hooker-red carpet  
And bedspread.

## THE EDEN OF CHEMICALS

We who have known only days  
Know only air:  
Clear awareness.  
No steps...language  
Without letters  
Void utter tones  
Blurred stark.

Radiation.  
Senses warm,  
The garden is new.  
Animals appear.  
Jungles. Branches. Rivers.

(stanza break)

Beyond the plastic atmosphere  
Breath after chemical breath  
A glorious spawning  
In an oxygen-rich  
Sealed room. All feelings  
Are lost.

Step again.

## THE RIVER IS BOILING

Anvil clouds shower veils  
Of precipitation

Onto a semi-circle  
Of retired vehicles, waiting

Unable to refuel  
At the only gas station in sight.

Regular cows graze on the grass  
Grow in the wind.

Near the wire fence, one pair  
Clean each other's ears.

Farmers and tractors  
Edge the horizon. Canyonland crevices

Reflect fall red and the wide, fertile  
Canyon ledges shadow a hawk dropping:

NO RECEIPT WILL BE GIVEN:

Turn in your soul.

## TURN THE OTHER CHEEK

As long as you can make it work for you  
That is the name of the game in this town:  
Prey on them until they fade into hues.

Use those who don't know you, never call truce.  
In the self-destruct mode, good people drown.  
As long as you can make it work for you

Look through their eyes, make yourself cunning, shrewd.  
You don't get rich giving sounds to the ground;  
Prey on them until they fade into hues.

Faces deleted from the computer  
I would like to reassemble them now  
As long as you can make it work for you:

(stanza break)

When you are ripping at them, love them too.  
Swaddle them in certainty and when you drown  
Prey on them until they fade into hues.

Even if all they do is prey on you  
You don't get rich giving sounds to the ground.  
As long as you can make it work for you  
Prey on them until they fade into hues.

## THE FIRE ITSELF

I.

Know what they are doing  
When they look you in the eye  
And lie.  
I want them behind me.  
Looking into one world  
The world that lets me see  
A speeding ambulance  
On the deck of an aircraft carrier,  
Carrying ashes  
And a few  
Unatomized  
Pieces of flesh.  
What downed the craft?  
He who framed  
And finished the eye of god knows

(no stanza break)



That nothing satisfies  
The cool, worthless dollar.  
A tree placed lovingly in the music  
In silence  
Its bare golden branches  
Are traces of greed  
That join the world  
Where light we cannot perceive  
Across the fence  
Undoes the place.  
It takes its own reflection,  
Mt. Sentinel, Main Hall:  
Full moon, the clock like a needle.  
A sweeping edge  
Peeling the quiet neighborhood.  
Should we be happy,  
When they are lying? Am I slamming  
At sickness with a broken hammer;  
Need someone  
Sprinkle nuclear salt?

(no stanza break)

We climb underground  
Into the explosion, where we forget  
We are children in the dark  
Who say  
Repeating in the silence,  
Find the footsteps  
Of an honest man.

II.

Filling socks  
He was put here to fill;  
He can make anyone laugh.  
Seeing him, I can think  
When people I thought were friends lie,  
I like to laugh;

(no stanza break)

I pretend I don't know who it is I am.  
Lying when I say, look across at the light  
Wait for it to make sense  
Remember looking through a kaleidoscope  
On the piano,  
That came across the ocean  
In a dusty covered wagon.  
Wash my feet, enter the room  
With a quick quiet thud;  
Tired of being played with.  
My designs and dreams woven,  
Interwoven by angry children  
Trying to imagine without television.  
When the looking glass begs you to walk,  
Question the quiet man  
Who is waiting,  
Mixing softened butter with sugar:  
Easter cookies  
Warm from the oven.

(no stanza break)

I look across pages of days  
At a sharpened edge  
I didn't sharpen. The lion  
Surrounded by Africa  
Is a world I am missing.  
The point where the tooth  
Impales the heart and  
The whale is harpooned,  
The night sharpened  
And the world with cashmere  
Sails:  
The boat  
Blurrs  
As it pulls away.  
Say  
Friends are on that boat,  
It follows no course, changes  
Silence into void  
Shred it like gum wrappers.

(stanza break)

III.

In wine-colored sky  
Three lemons change  
Into a bagel that can feed  
The world. Easter preachers  
Are selling talking Bibles  
That interpret themselves.  
I am told to feel guilty for  
The stake I drive through  
The heart of the savior every day.  
If he were here  
I would tell him  
I am sorry I wasn't there.  
The dirty moon severed the haze.

(no stanza break)

The choir is screaming  
Isn't it enough  
Somehow to know that he never knew  
We are not monsters  
Wrapped in the drudgery of skin.  
In the figment of night  
They have told us  
With a flying command  
The looking glass failed paradise.  
"Jungle trees bleed poisonous sap"  
I juggle the world  
In the missile  
That wraps itself  
In the target.