

## Norm Sibum / SIXTEEN POEMS

### a daydream from the park

a rose fills with wind in the afternoon.  
wine bottles flash, ascending fish in the sun.  
the sky becomes longer, our days blue.  
you begin to appear, a vision again.  
loose blossoms swirl across our streets,  
plum-colored and white. as flesh.  
every need, a matter for a bureau  
of one kind or another, as if  
the wind sews my face against intentions  
of all laws, clean and unclean,  
already registered or being sworn to now.  
a child wanders from his mother to go  
among the drinkers. the mother holds her breath.  
i think of us presenting our mouths,  
as if they were suitcases  
packed with smug triumphs over deaths, isolations.  
a wind grabs hold of a tree and lifts the leaves,  
the hair of a woman in this park.  
birds snarl at insects, worms, dull grubs, the  
grass where dandelions once  
performed their quiet, uncelebrated dance.

the courtyard  
648 Victoria Drive

when wind blows across the ford ranch wagon  
    parked forever,  
    holds a single morning-glory,  
impervious cat,  
lost dog,

and a gull rises  
    and i cannot do without this bird,  
    ever,

and i am not the wind who can count leaves,

and as the police cruiser passes  
    with headlights flooding the air,

beneath clouds more deft than i can bear,

then love,  
    i have nothing to say for you

    when the wind  
    blows like this.

## in pleasure

a curled cat lifts its paw in pleasure  
to a wind blown leaf.  
odds and ends move by us like that,  
the mouths of all love i know.  
leaves are heartache, gathering at doors.  
wind and loose things,  
scattering and buoyant things obeying the season.

## from 648 Victoria Drive

so a dream barely disappears  
and morning blows through the window.  
with white roses, a dead bee, a kitten mewing  
and wandering.  
the first letter i have ever received  
from my father  
lays out his many ailments, his blood pressure,

his sneaking of the cooking sherry.  
from the old lead smell  
of the Victoria Apartments,  
from swollen painted garden rocks,  
the bleached domestic lingerie  
on lines the wind knowingly fingers,  
i know now

like my father knew,  
others will join me  
as rueful,  
get drunk this day and fall  
from pale colors of the sky  
like these petals of white  
roses falling from desire.

## the palpable peach

waiting to become an old man  
is not as hideous as it may seem,  
when in my envisioned suit  
and on the street  
i will come to the bits of smell and color  
living might have for me

still living, forgotten, rid of  
loyalties and truths suffered  
long enough, the palpable peach, its  
soft and heartstopping juice, the  
inevitable conclusion held in  
some corner of my mouth.

## a slow dance

these flowers have been too long  
purple against the white house,  
packed like meat in clear ice.  
they will rot when the air  
changes again,  
melts in slow dances.  
the car will be full  
of the death of these flowers,  
and the eyes will register  
for a moment the memory  
of spring, and then return  
to fragile carcasses, color  
mauled, run on and without form,  
a quiet undreamed of mockery  
melting in a slow dance.  
as when a lover's smile  
turns from a familiar warmth  
into remembered shapes  
and will be claimed no longer  
and the calling back is a winter.

## as a matter of course

the old man,  
    bony pipe set on his grey lip,  
    watches evening traffic pass.  
he knows something about this life —  
glamorous,  
    patient  
    frail as a choir of sunflowers bending  
        to the street

my own landlord is a younger man who  
    for lack of family  
        hangs  
knotted bunches of garlic that crinkle in the sun,  
shakes roots,  
polishes flowers  
    on a laborer's knees,  
    resilient.

how the two of them together, trundle off  
    with hipboots and an armful of faded nets,  
    put a move on the smelt off the seawall,  
soak up brine in their rumpled hats, fine eyes,  
    get a little drunk.

    later, warm a mouthful of the slender  
fish taken like splinters from the sea.

## two women, two kids

hydrangea, a blue sunset in their front yard.  
the fisherman who built the house  
let the colors of salmon pass from his planting  
hand. oh, he is a wild one,  
these women say, happy now to have a wooden  
floor, live on a hill, have a  
playmate for the kids. the house humbly painted  
white with red window trim.

it has been this way, too.  
she saying, you wild, you silly boy.  
in a night when rain thickens the lawn  
and sends flowers spinning,  
pulling on her pale hose, grinning,  
in the house where the screams and  
milky kisses of women and children  
are a nervy drunkenness  
fierce with leaping nipples.

when the men come to visit  
shedding their clothes, they listen.

## winter

the chill gnaws at roses breaking  
vein by vein in criss-crossed shadows,  
the flower's bowl marbled  
and petals decayed —  
even if once pink, white or yellow —  
or any other full-throated color,  
humanly blooded, warm  
or full marks of love hovering  
like birds in gardens,  
or strayed against a rooming house —  
from which — say last night,  
yells and bottles were pitched into the street,

into the structure of the night —  
bodies piled on the barricades  
of intolerance, want, indifference.  
this is how dreams speak  
late in the night  
and how someone roused  
might hear it,  
and how the sky turns cold among us  
and how roses fade  
from the fading eyes of beholders.  
dreams bound to nature  
can only make such sense of it.

## from the unabashed flower of existence

so many times i find the world  
find its sweetness  
a mood that can be moved  
side to side in the mouth, sociable  
tongue,  
a lover bowed to food, desire  
bowed and singing  
to image,  
entrenched longing,  
the cafe full of its sounds

the ear — coiled,  
the ear snailshaped, its  
grand bone, slender  
oracle a purpose more steadfast  
than any silicon chip  
or awry economy.  
the window, an ear  
on the loneliness, winter downpour.

## dragged through the streets

i have seen human eyes like these.  
the deer, lashed to the camper,  
the hunters walking, conspirators stretching  
the west into the supermarket on Commercial Drive.  
the brown creamy hides, a beautiful liquid,  
stiff snouts bootblackened.  
the delicate dancers laid low beneath  
the weekend's unmoved sun,  
among hangovers procured and gnawed as bones,  
bright giblets of failure,  
even as our concern for each other  
does not cease  
and the world consummates disaster after disaster.  
dead, these deer are brutes on the street of roses.

## remembrance day

men from other places convene and dine  
on these streets and uphold home-grown glories —  
down from the bush cracking gold in the cabs  
at eight dollars a case off-sale.  
lest they not enjoy the expense,  
they are driven. imaginations livid.  
old woman's face made-up for the Legion  
glows like an early christmas card.  
november the eleventh. trumpets.  
the old stumble and remember.  
green-clad and abreast, the eleventh hour  
in simple passion marches on veteran streets, veteran hunger.

## such devils

something in our bellies glistens more than hunger —  
listening is as sudden.  
a gull struts — white in my ear.  
denuded and ash gray,  
or ash bright in the sun, trees stand humbly  
on so hard a ground the moon cannot soften.  
new lovers will stretch the laws.  
nothing so unusual with us — climbing  
each other's bellies, peeking  
into each other's eyes.  
strange cats have been offered food.  
all in an ear —  
(when the heart claims it), listening  
to the quick body and the slow heart itself,  
a natural line of resistance  
to all our devils —  
our eyes  
muscular as loping animals.

## bullets

some nights thin out words.

and now my friend will go home, sleep,  
complain of a million things  
or nothing.

he said

'it is not what a bullet is made of,  
that kills you.'

tomorrow may improve.

bullets in our lives  
wormlike

not even houses of love can keep out.

women in the rain, Georgia Street

umbrellas twirled with gloved hands.

they glide beside the rainbowed cars.

men in cowboy hats

walk and talk with them.

the street, rainbowed; speech, rainbowed;

a kiss is just a kiss.

there is a kiss the color of pearl

that marries the early morning sky.

my friend when he spoke of bullets  
did not smile slickly  
like most people do  
men and women, doll-like.  
he touched my shoulder  
stripped himself of speech  
got out of the car.  
driving away,  
i could not appeal his despair.  
some nights sans speech  
passing men and women in the rain  
houses of love  
made of umbrellas, perfumed hands.  
this afternoon,  
i watched a heron, pale light;  
the sea curved like a breast.  
still i am the same man.

## Mendelssohn and i

the fourteen year old Mendelssohn and i  
drive through the grey city  
with violins sweet and ludicrous.  
Mendelssohn plays and darling, i imagine for you  
a flower absolutely wild and yellow.  
Mendelssohn plays and the butcher scrapes  
fat from the foaming ribs. blood  
drips from his apron, intimately, coarsely.  
Mendelssohn plays and the bus driver quits  
a busload of snoring, malevolent breath  
and desires to go a-tango-ing.  
Mendelssohn plays, a cat whines.  
Mendelssohn plays. guilt rises, expectant  
and virginal above the city. at play, blushes  
white across the sky.  
Mendelssohn plays and another cabbie  
hails me from his car, says, 'hey,'  
friendly-like says,  
'you won't squeeze money from this city  
parked in the shadows like that,' drives off  
proud of his advice.

Mendelssohn plays.

Dave and family come to open the cafe  
and stamp their feet at the door in the new cold  
like miniature horses.

Mendelssohn and i are hungry.

perhaps darling, you might feed us.

you smile and somewhere in your sleep you  
are a blush upon your pillow.

Mendelssohn plays, tired.

as the light lifts now. the light leaves us with its spirit.

Mendelssohn plays on and Dave

lilts with hands of coffeecups, turning  
this way and that.

like a musician peering over his violin, he too  
looks to be fed.

and darling,

flower,

see how this hour passes,

and passes quickly.

## the enthusiasm

somehow, even the gentlest of talk assassinates.  
who could have warned Catullus  
in the fast lane  
that his heart would flop like a fish?  
that one hour, the heart is an accountant.  
and the next hour, a bugle boy.  
and the next hour, invites children to dance.  
haze and yellow leaves  
surround the city  
and it is still so damn warm  
and desire waits  
for a second  
wind, shy beyond belief.