Since my grandchild is six
he knows he’ll reach China
if he digs deep enough.

Clink! The shovel’s hit metal;
something glints in the sun. He’s
turned up a ring, gold with a whitened stone,
ragged around the edges. Maybe there’s an inscription?

A mad fumble for my glasses in the bottomless beach bag --
Snapple, peach pits, sunscreen #35 -- and the inscription reads
"Southold High School, 1960, J.H.K."

A grandmother is nothing if she isn’t a sleuth,
so Monday I phone up Southold High.
"Who’s J.H.K., 1960, and where is he now?” I ask.

Well I wouldn’t have believed it
but Main Office secretaries sure can scramble.
Everyone loves a good romance.
They track down the dusty yearbooks;
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We meet on the beach --
my grandchild; the tall straight man of middle age; the sleuthing grandma.
And J.H.K. tells how he lost his ring.

Thirty-three years ago, at Southold Beach,
on his first sail,
the ring fell overboard.
He was certain he’d lost it forever.

The three of us are barefoot in the white sand;
the sun still hangs in the apricot sky;

not “lost forever,” I think.
Our beach held his youth for him,
And brought him following seas.

Enid Graf
Both of us understood the concentric circles of tone honked by a flight of nun-collared Canadian geese winging eloquently on the backside of the nimble northwest wind. Fall frost was glazed on tanned grass stems that leaned south pointing the direction to the green in winter. You surveyed the whipped Wyoming plains, the indifferent leader standing on a favorite look-out a mile or so away. What could you know of an eighteen year-old’s cunning, brazen and crouching in furs of fantasy, the lone hunter and provider of dripping fresh meat to a cave, home to shivering babies, a hungry woman and shriveled parents? Who would condemn me as I lifted my .22 in the silence of my anointed purpose, squeezed my finger against the cold of indifferent metal and arched my lead-nosed missile? It was only an idea that could never travel the distance; but somehow the bullet pursued my intention, that killing tool I toyed with, and ravaged your flesh perfected from a thousand generations of soul and light. Shocked first, all insight shattered, then crazed, your vision blinded and controlled by a reddening nightmare, inexperienced terror exploding through your lips. No longer would we contemplate the meaning of unwavering winds that slip the seasons past us like faded pictures we’ve etched on our memories. You charged directly at me, on that, your last run, dropped within feet, asking only for an explanation in exchange for your death.
Love Poem
for Jerome

Late, you ran across the marsh
in tee-shirt, shorts, bare legs
and sneakers, carrying
your clamming pail, growing
smaller, smaller
until like a child again
silhouetted on the horizon
of grasses you joined him
in the inlet knee deep in mud
digging out steamers, oysters

and watching you I thought
it's funny the moments love chooses
to reveal itself. The tide turned then
and against its inevitable force
the two of you worked hard
side by side in the cool afternoon.
THE SURF

A. B. Ferrato

Vibrating underfoot
Crashing, pounding waves
Uniquely, no two are the same.
Awesome, rushing towards the beach
Intimidating rocks and sand alike
Churning white foam coils
Against teal grey hues.

Menacing rip-tides lurk beneath
Its brutal force is fearsome
But, even a roaring wall of water
Ends whispering at a landfall.
Macadam streams swirl and twist among them today - super highways filled with the sounds of fast cars, and singing tires.

Rainbow colored signs promise treasures and joys just ahead.

Vines creep slowly,

Winds slash and strain,

Icy teeth gnaw and scrape.

One by one the chimneys will be ground apart and disappear.
EVENSONG

The cicadas have hummed all day
Now ten-thirty evening
They still sound off
Their sexy siren call.

As we promenade around the point
Worry stalks us...privacy loss,
The beach house’s plummy days gone,
A vicious neighbor’s feud ensues.

A scuffle through fallen gold
Distracts you my lover
Not at all. You worry by
Inflicting a wound on yourself.

Ancient strategem of god
Appeasement internalized.
Ritual repetition comforts
Us as fish crows screech.

Are we really rootless?
Neither here nor there?
In a gypsy condition?
In transition...

Trying to make sense
Of a senseless world?
The cicadas ceaselessly
Sing a serenade.
Shouldn’t we?

c. 1993
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he knows he’ll reach China
if he digs deep enough.

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And brought him following seas.

Enid Graf
CREATION

March 21, 1993

In the pueblo, Kantokan bent to her work.

She decided

For the form, I will use husk

For the hair, corn-silk

For the eyes, dark beans

For cheeks and lips, crushed berries

For clothing, a strip of skin

For ornament, this bright feather

And, so she did.

Singing softly,

swaying gently,

offering doll to east, to west, to north, to south -

to sky, to sun, to air, to Spirit.

She saw that it was good:

Made of the earth

Made of the harvest

Made of the Spirit.

Clapping her hands, Kantokan laughed.
Where the Fishing Boats Come to Rest

This morning I stood
at the end of the dock
and saw my shadow
chiaroscuro on the waves:

they slithered over my feet
and I was careful
how I walked back along
those slippery planks of wood.
FROM TWIGS

Morning's mail brought to our door a slender, peat-lined tube delivering a world of scrawny, bare, sticks. Ten, maybe a dozen --- God alone knows --- Each, totally indistinguishable. Each, tightly wedged inside. And each, wrapped in newsprint showing familiar, living-color illustrations: glorious landscapes where yellow glints signify Forsythia, trumpets of cherry-pink; Weigelia, tiny massed clusters of white; Spirea. All nestle under Silver Maple's shimmering umbrella and Dogwood's delicate, ladylike flutter. Nearby, an Apple Tree is in boisterous bloom. An Apple Tree!

We, with the cockeyed optimism that envisioned sod lawns replacing mud, a patio and circular driveway from bags of Sacrete piled atop rusty wheelbarrow, saw our backyard, our Apple Tree, our children swinging on its lower branches, and everything, the ad said: "...for-only-ten-affordable-dollars...." Little price for a dream. Then, dream-in-a-tube in hand, all we were to do, was the impossible: figure which stick was what plant. We just dug everything in.

What thrived, we identified. An Apple Tree!

Apple blossom's fragrance made us giddy. We fertilized, fungicized, watered, wrapped plastic baggies over tiny apples, hung branches with clattery whirlygig devices for chasing pecky birds away. Then,
miracles:
    applesauce,
    apple-stuffed coffee cake
    and apple pies' with
  cinnamon/brown sugar juices bubbling up
  seeping between crusts, spilling
  across oven's bottom, burning
    scents of Home
  through hearth's every corner.

F.L.H.
1-93/10/93
Mizzle

The sodden weather of an early spring:
loose gravel on the road, the ice-floes melting
in the brook behind a patch of hemlocks.

I could smell the pine-tar, mud and mint,
the stink of fox: a wan slow smell
in winds that gathered from a nearby swamp.

The deadly owl's asleep by rosy dawn,
but one fat raven lifts its wings
and veers into a field and drops from sight.

They say that somewhere in this range of hills
a man still wanders who left home last year,
an old man looking for the end of time.

A thousand stumps that stud the swampland
once were something you might want to climb;
I watch them sink to silt and crumble,

decomposing in the same sure way
that everything we love at last undoes
its laces, sighs at ease, then lays

its head down, nuzzles into loam,
relinquishing the lovely stand of life
to meld, the slow atomic mince and slaughter.
Belonging

I do not belong here
in a summer field at midnight, walking.

It is not my world, however much
I love the brightness falling from the air,
the slur of tires on blackened roads,
freesia in the wind,
the long wet grass around my knees.

A million crickets work their wings:
they multiply, divide, play all the numbers
and survive in noisy August clouds.
One anthill underfoot is Nineveh or Rome,
depending on how close I care to look.
An owl is steady in the hignborn oak
and watching for what moves.
A green eye tilts beneath a log.

In China,
one old man is sitting by a yew;
he's puzzling over what he never said
to one who died.
In hot Zimbabwe, there is someone's mother
by the bloody ditch
without a word of explanation.
In Salvador, a small girl asks for more.

So many stories.
I would hear them all.
Write down each sentence till the pages tore,
till ink was spittle
and the world's last tear returned to ocean
and my flesh was dirt.

Tonight, however, I will speak
but for myself.

The sky snows stars.
I feel the slow, compulsive spinning
of the globe through night,
the axle of the earth
that drives a needle through my heart again.
I hear the high and spectral whine
of unborn spirits wanting more.
I won't pretend to welcome,
wave them down.

It's not my world to give away.
A Love Song
For a Fashion Show

If I had a camel
In Manhattan where I dwell
We'd go hopping, see the sights
I'd really dress her swell

And for those special occasions
When I'd take her to the zoo
I'd shop at Phil the Furriers
Where I'd love to shop for you

I'd ask that charming camel
What she loves the very best
Is it shorty foxy jacket
Or a modest sable vest

She'd lift one leg a little
And with saucy-sexy blink
She'd answer
Oh, my darling
I adore
The full length mink

March 6, 1967
Love Poem
for Jerome

Late, you ran across the marsh
in tee-shirt, shorts, bare legs
and sneakers, carrying
your clamming pail, growing
smaller, smaller
until like a child again
silhouetted on the horizon
of grasses you joined him
in the inlet knee deep in mud
digging out steamers, oysters

and watching you I thought
it's funny the moments love chooses
to reveal itself. The tide turned then
and against its inevitable force
the two of you worked hard
side by side in the cool afternoon.
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he knows he’ll reach China
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A. B. Ferrato

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Crashing, pounding waves
Uniquely, no two are the same.
Awesome, rushing towards the beach
Intimidating rocks and sand alike
Churning white foam coils
Against teal grey hues.
Menacing rip-tides lurk beneath
Its brutal force is fearsome
But, even a roaring wall of water
Ends whispering at a landfall.
Desert

The house on the shore of the desert
Opens its doors to the wind.

Inside I lie on sand-swept floor
that sways with the breathing current.

Outside night stretches, a shadowy cat,
Alert in the dark for sounds.

I am the only water for miles.

My thoughts are the only whisper, except
for the wind that shifts,
the waves that sigh, and the sand
Beating against the walls of my house.
Life Cycle

As the Sun sparkles
on the sand,
the ocean waves
sculpt the beach,
the sound,
the smell,
the feel
of life being created.
With the persuasive forces
of the gentle tides
the shells roll
and grind themselves
into oblivion — OR —

What is that bubble floating by?

Could it be a form of life,
seeking the building blocks
provided by its world,
to someday grow into
a beautiful masterpiece
that brings a smile
to a child's face.

Children
Life Cycle

As the Sun sparkles
on the sand,
the ocean waves
sculpt the beach.

The sound,
the smell,
the feel
of life being created.

With the persuasive force
of the gentle tide
the shells roll
and grind themselves
into oblivion.

What is that bubble floating by?

Could it be a form of life,
seeking the building blocks
provided by its world,
to someday grow into
a beautiful masterpiece
that brings a smile
to a child's face?
Where the Fishing Boats Come to Rest

This morning I stood
at the end of the dock
and saw my shadow
chiaroscuro on the waves:

they slithered over my feet
and I was careful
how I walked back along
those slippery planks of wood.
November 19, 1991

Stone chimneys
are silent sentries
of abandoned farms and lost dreams
in Tennessee.

Friendly rooms
that huddled close to their hearths
lie now in rotted ruins.

Like tombstones,
chimneys give testimony to that which has
passed.

Lonely, grieving hearts decipher their epitaphs:
here - a frail, old man waited for the crop-saving
rain that never came.
here - a woman wept over her still-born infant,
wrapped her tenderly and buried her in a
cardboard box beneath a flowering tree.
here - the pretty boy who grew to love men ended his
shame with a bullet. So they say.
here, here and here - young couples rushed to Detroit
and Granite City,
seeking greenback rewards in cars and steel.

Only the chimneys remain - mute and eloquent reminders of
times when things were different.
Macadem streams swirl and twist among them today - super highways filled with the sounds of fast cars and singing tires.

Rainbow colored signs promise treasures and joys just ahead.

Vines creep slowly,
Winds slash and strain,
Icy teeth gnaw and scrape.

One by one the chimneys will be ground apart and disappear.
In the pueblo, Kantokan bent to her work.
She decided
For the form, I will use husk
   For the hair, corn-silk
   For the eyes, dark beans
   For cheeks and lips, crushed berries
   For clothing, a strip of skin
   For ornament, this bright feather
And, so she did.
Singing softly,
   swaying gently,
   offering doll to east, to west, to north, to south -
   to sky, to sun, to air, to Spirit.
She saw that it was good:
   Made of the earth
   Made of the harvest
   Made of the Spirit.
Clapping her hands, Kantokan laughed.
Do you remember when I was little? You were my comforter, a canopy with wings spread wide, who listened when I couldn't talk to them. You were my refuge from spring rains, summer's scorch and in winter flakes of wet snow. I would stand tight to your rough skin, your thick body blocked me from the iced winds.

They couldn't hear our whisperings and the things we shared.

If I cried you would touch me or do something to make me forget.

When I climbed way up in your arms, I was taller, more powerful than anyone below. I loved you in ways I could never explain, and one day you said my initials were yours.

I grew up, went across the horizon, planted new trees.

Yesterday I watched them cut you down, dump you on that flat-bed hearse, your limbs gaping, graceless, uncoordinated, awkward, sliced into grotesque pieces. I followed as they carted you couched in your embarrassment—uncovered—onto Main Street like a freak show for all to see. But somehow, even after all that you were still alive, juices oozed out your sheared limbs and you lifted a few leaves, waved into a last wind. I turned from your final humiliation, unwilling to witness the very end, after your last gasp, when someone would warm themselves over your burning bones, perhaps laughing by the heat of your heart.

by Donald Everett Axinn
from Against Gravity
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