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Young Daredevils

Steps

On the long
handcarved
winding staircase
There were four
creaking treads
held up by four
splintering risers
covered by four
sections of grey-
green threadbare
rug, and there
were four small
jumping kids
dressed in pale and
worn-out clothes,
boys that spent
four years each
in their over-
lapping youths,
four siblings that
made play into
mock attacks,
And these
small boys
softened the boards
of the regal stair
into the best
springboards to life
as young adults
that four small boys
could ever
have done.

Brass

It took awhile,
but never mind,
He moved
from rude
on to refined;
What started as
a horse-laugh noise
Or snort, softened
and gained
some poise,
And gradually
what amused
And mortified
became infused
With tunefulness,
with phrasing, ease,
Intelligible
melodies,
And now
when he
picks up
the horn,
We think
a music star
is born.

No Talking in Class

Am I a showy character? It may be that I am...
A bold display of color makes me happy as a clam—
The splash of waves or fireworks delights me deep within
Enough to make me run and leap and wear a silly grin—
An anthem sung; a symphony or jazz or drumline played
Or children's playground chanting—yes, by all of these I'm swayed
To passion and delirium, to ecstasy and dance,
But mostly, from the audience, where I can hide, perchance...
I have to tell you honestly, I'd rather you're the star
And I the meekly happy fan who worships from afar,
For though I love the big and grand, extravagant and wild,
I'll gladly leave that up to you and stay a quiet child.

Sapient Sources

What Mother said carried no weight—
Dad said the same? Then it was great!
What Dad pronounced we'd all reject—

Then Mother said it? Yay! Correct!
It's funny, no? But true, of course—
Belief depends more on the source
Than on the facts and evidence—
If only trust were based on *sense*—
In my own heart and in my head
I'd just accept what Mother said—
Except, of course, when in the frame
Of asking if Dad said the same—

At Granny's House

That impish twinkle in her eyes
might lead you to hypothesize
that Granny's up to something good,
and you'd be right, oh, yes you would—
There's something in the oven now,
sweeter than Mama's rules allow,
and some wild playtime to be had
surpassing anything that Dad
prefers, as well, and there's a tree
you'll climb, you and your sisters three—
Before your parents spoil the romp,
she'll make her funny false teeth chomp,
make goofy faces, mad as yours,
all five will then get on all fours
and roll around the living room—
Eight-thirty! chimes the clock, and boom!—
Just as their car pulls up the drive,
you all head for the couch and dive
into a tidy line, as calm
and placid as a Dad and Mom
could hope to see, and Granny's eyes are
twinkling. Parents?
None the wiser.

Children Gardening

Radish, rhubarb, rutabaga,
Kale, kohlrabi, kumquat's kiss—
Pomegranate, plum, persimmon,
Garden dreams are made of this—
Collards, cucumbers, casabas,
Tasty turnips, tangerines—
Artichokes, arugula,
Bounteous buckets brimming beans—

Let us grow and eat and flourish,
Full of fruit and farmers' joys—
Such delights both feed and nourish
Vegetating girls and boys.

Umbilical

Behold the magnificent umbilical:
It tethers Baby to a world that's simply idyllical
Full of food and comfort and soothing sounds and warmth,
A universe where happiness and pleasure are the normth
And security and delight are piped in constantly as if through a garden hose;
Pray tell, where can I get me a grown-up version of one of those?

Friendly Advice to a Feckless Youth

The true Reckless Endangerment
is seldom what you'd guess:
not often quite so obvious
as acting under stress,
thus putting others in harm's way
for physical duress;
more likely, it's just saying things
much better left unsaid
about your girlfriend's hairstyle, or
about great-uncle Fred,
who is your mother's richest
relative and, shortly, dead.
It's bad enough your note on Fred
will cut Mom from his will,
and likely keep you from her own
good graces longer still,
but there's your girlfriend left to calm.
Let's hope the bitter pill
of your ill-thought hairstyle remark
won't make *her* wish you ill.

Hyde and Seek

In my youth my friends and I,
When we were of a mind,
Played little games, amused ourselves,
Were seekers of a kind,
But then grew old and cynical,
Unable to unwind
The fright of not just how or when,
But *whom*, we feared to find.

Things of which one ought to be scairt

The fretful Porpentine, I hear,
Grows scarier from year to year,
No less than Jabberwocks and ghouls
That frighten us and make us fools,
And like Godzilla and his ilk,
Make desperate for hugs, warm milk
And night-lights, all us children who
Are scaredy-cats, like me. And you?

An Understanding

Jacob Johnson Underhill,
Our long-gone friend, we miss him still,
For there's none left to pester now
That he is dead; the old hay mow
Has no more mousetraps set to catch
Him with an unexpected snatch;
His cows remain un-tipped; the well
Where his hat "accidentally" fell
Is boarded up; the outhouse stays
Untroubled now for days and days
Where it was once (we're sorry, Mom)
Deposit for a cherry bomb
And too, quite often (sorry, Dad)
Pushover to a farmer's lad
And lass who hunted for a thrill,
Thanks to old farmer Underhill.
Now his old tractor has not seen
Us sugar up his gasoline
Or stuff a tater in its pipe
For ages, things that used to gripe
Old Jacob some, but he plowed on
With chuckling brown-toothed grin; he's gone
And how we miss him now, old coot,
Who never bent to our pursuit
But took it all in patient stride,
The way we liked to chap his hide.
The fact is, he loved us until
He was no more, old Underhill.
It's dull down on the farm these days,
Except when a peculiar haze
Will sometimes gather in the field
And there his shade may be revealed

To grin, complicit with us still,
Old Jacob Johnson Underhill.

Sun & Shadow

My shadow and I are the best of friends—
I measure her height as the sunlight ends,
And the clouds that billowed from dawn to dusk
Float into the night on the roses' musk—
My shadow will wait for me under a lamp
Through night, 'til the morning is dewed and damp—
For we play together yet all alone
Because my shadow and I are one—
So I will awake and sing and play
With my shadow companion the next fine day

A Particular Kind of Homesickness

The road we ride is an old back road, a highway that goes nowhere fast,
and as we drive and drift and dream, we see the present meet the past,
the way that it has always done from cities to the countryside,
the way we know that history recycles us, and far and wide,
we all return to what we've known and circle back to home and hearth
whether together or alone, to best-loved places on the earth.
Is it just crazy, that we long to find ourselves in Mama's arms,
in childhood's safety, in our fondest corner of our homes, our farms,
our gardens, houses, classrooms, fields? Is this insanity, or just
finding our life and hope and heart in best-loved places, as we must?
Return to rooted, distant loves, become simplicity and grace,
and find the fields of gold we seek in each his own familiar place.

Young Daredevils

When we clambered
over the guardrails
and dashed recklessly
across the lawless lanes
as cars tore past en route
to dicier deeds than ours
we laughed, gasping for breath
at our own audacity,
congratulating ourselves
for not having died
all for the sake
of a whim we had
to get to the so-misnamed
Convenience store

