

Songs for Parents

John Farrar

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Songs for Parents

by John Farrar

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This Etext was prepared by Stewart A. Levin of Englewood CO with additional biographical information provided by Curtis Farrar of Washington, D.C.

Songs for Parents

By John Farrar

Dedication

Here's a rhyme for Barbara,
Laughing white and pink,
Here's a rhyme for smiling Ted,
And one for Wink.

Now Dick's not much at reading rhymes,
He'd rather sit and fish.
Well here's a couple of verses, Dick,
Read them if you wish!

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SONGS OF DESIRE

Summer Explorer

I'd like to be a gypsy

With gold rings in my ears,
Along the road to sit and sing,
And not do another thing
For years and years;

A road to dream upon by day,
A fire for dreams at night,
Free to wander far away,
Free to shout and free to play,
Quite impolite.

I'd pitch my tent beside a wall,
All apple trees within,
And if the apples didn't fall,
I wouldn't hesitate at all.
I'd climb--and sin!

But if the weather wasn't fine,
If all the world were rain,
If there weren't anywhere to dine
And goose-flesh quivered up my spine--
I _might_ come home again!

Spring Wish

A frog's a very happy thing,
Cool and green in early spring,
Quick and silver through the pool,
With no thought of books or school.

Oh, I want to be a frog,
Sunning, stretching on a log,
Blinking there in splendid ease,
Swimming naked when I please,
Nosing into magic nooks,
Quiet marshes, noisy brooks.

Free! And fit for anything!
Oh, to be a frog in spring!

Ambition

If I were a rocket
Shot high across the night,
I'd rather burst in silver stars
Than green or purple light;

For then, perhaps, I'd fool the moon,
Although she's very wise,
And thinking me a baby star
She'd keep me in the skies.

Dreams

I'd like to dream my own dreams,
Instead of dreaming those
The silly sandman brings along
Like moving picture shows.

I'd like to dream of palaces,
Of magic meadowlands,
Of silver gates and golden thrones
And chanting fairy bands;

Of seas of spraying jewels,
Of dancing crystal ships,
Of the queen of all the elves herself--
Two rubies for her lips;

But, alas! I never dream such things,
And when I jump and wake
As an oozy ogre clutches me--
It's just a stomach ache!

Water-Lily

I'd like to be a water-lily sleeping on the river,
Where solemn rushes whisper, and funny ripples quiver.
All day I'd watch the blue sky--all night I'd watch the black,
Floating in the soft waves, dreaming on my back,
And when I'd tired of dreaming, I'd call a passing fish,
"I want to find the sea!" I'd shout, "Come! You can grant my wish!"

He'd bite me from my moorings, and softly I would slip
To the center of the river like an ocean-going ship.
The waves would laugh upon me. The wind would blow me fast,
And oh, what shores and wonders would greet me as I passed!
Yes, if I were a water-lily, I'd sail to sea in state--
A green frog for my captain--and a dragon-fly for mate!

Humor

Have you ever watched the clowns at play,
White, red and black on circus day?
They're always very, very gay.
I wonder how they stay that way!

I'd like to be a clown,
Playing tricks around the town,

Turning somersaults and springs,
As if they were easy things,
Laughing morning, noon and night,
Being such a funny sight!

Do you think, then, I'd grow tired of fun,
Laughing so from sun to sun?
Or, when performances are done,
Do clown-folk cry like anyone?

Independence

I like to go out in the night
When there's neither a sound nor a light,
With my hands and feet bare,
And the wind in my hair,
Not a nurse nor a parent in sight;

But only the night, moon and me
As I dance in the dew joyfully,
Quite daring and bold
For there's no one to scold,
Because there is no one to see.

SONGS FOR OUT OF DOORS

A Comparison

Apple blossoms look like snow,
They're different, though.
Snow falls softly, but it brings
Noisy things:
Sleighs and bells, forts and fights,
Cosy nights.

But apple blossoms when they go,
White and slow,
Quiet all the orchard space,
Till the place
Hushed with falling sweetness seems
Filled with dreams.

Speculation

I wonder if God sits alone
Upon the highest mountain stone
To stir the clouds and drop the rain,
And then to pick it up again.

I wonder if he sends the brooks
Foaming from their distant nooks,
And, sitting there in robes of gray,
Turns rivers on at break of day.

Parade

The scarlet trumpet flowers are gay
And yet they never seem to play,
They never trumpet up the dawn
Nor blow retreat across the lawn.

But oh, to-day I heard a strain,
A happy, martial, quick refrain,
As down across the garden grass
I saw the marching flowers pass:

Gaudy phlox and flaunting rose,
Stiff and straight and on their toes,
And, blaring from the garden wall,
The trumpet flower led them all.

Flower Preferences

If I were a tiny fairy
With nothing else to do
But to wriggle into flowers
All the long day through,

I'd dance among the roses,
I'd take a stately walk,
Balancing precisely
On an Easter-lily stalk.

For play I'd choose the jonquils,
For swimming, poppy cups,
For jokes and tricks and tiny naps,
The Johnny-jump-ups!

But on some quiet evening,
I'd leave my fairy band,
And on a star-flower through the sky
I'd sail to fairyland.

Parental Advice

Who laid the egg that hatched the moon?
Was it the earth, I wonder,
Was it the sun, the clouds, or rain,
Was it night or thunder?

If I were mother to the moon
I'd spank her every day
Until she learned to stay at home
And never run away!

Song for a Child Watching Clouds

I've watched the clouds by day and night,
Great fleecy ones all filled with light,
Gray beasts that steal across the sky,
And little fellows slipping by.

Sometimes they seem like sheep at play,
Sometimes when they are dull and gray
The pale sun seems a ship to me,
Sailing through a rolling sea;

And I've seen faces in them too,
Funny white men on the blue,
They look so many different ways,
And not one single cloudlet stays;

But on across the heavens they blow,
I often wonder where they go,
Now sometime, maybe when I die,
I, too, will wander through the sky.

Problem

If I were a violet I'd think it a shame
To be always so simple and modest and tame,
To be hidden away like a hermit or nun
While the hare-brained pink roses can dance in the sun!
But consider the naughty wild ways of the rose--
There must be respectable flowers, I suppose!

Garden Musings

Why is the lily so stately and still?

Why doesn't she dance like the gay daffodil?
Why doesn't she blush like the rose or the pink,
Or, like mischievous pansy, indulge in a wink?
Do you think it's because she is holier than they,
Or did God just decide he would make her that way?

My Garden

My garden was silly and stubborn;
I worked, but the weeds worked, too;
I dug and scraped and scrambled--
They hustled themselves and grew;

Now Ted's garden's fine and cleanly,
He has lettuce and roses and peas--
Oh, most probably plants are like children--
They only behave when they please!

Tracks

I wonder where the rabbits go
Who leave their tracks across the snow;
For when I follow to their den
The tracks always start out again.

Chanticleer

High and proud on the barnyard fence
Walks rooster in the morning.
He shakes his comb, he shakes his tail
And gives his daily warning.

"Get up, you lazy boys and girls,
It's time you should be dressing!"
I wonder if he keeps a clock,
Or if he's only guessing.

Rainbow

The rainbow comes across the hill,
It shines upon the sky, until
It frightens all the tears from rain,
And then it hides itself again.

Now when I'm very tired of play

I'll cross that rainbow bridge some day;
And while dear nurse and father scold,
I'll reach the end--and find the gold!

Windmill

The windmill stands up like a flower on the hill
With its petals a-whirling--they seldom stay still--
And its funny old voice creaking all the long day
As it scolds little breezes for running away.

Cat-Fish

The cat-fish with whiskers that lives in the brook,
Is an ugly old beast with the wickedest look.
I suppose there were mouse-fish one time in brook town
Till that ugly old cat-fish gulped all of them down.

Visiting

You and I shall travel far,
We'll pass the old earth by,
We'll ride the moon and drive a star
Across the evening sky.

We'll flash upon the milky way
To pay Dame Night a call--
But should we happen on old Day--
We'd fall and fall and fall.

Castles

I used to build me castles of moisty sand and shells,
And dream they were for princesses who wove me magic spells;
But yesterday along the beach my fairy princess came--
And she's too big for castles--now isn't that a shame!

Parenthood

The birches that dance on the top of the hill
Are so slender and young that they cannot keep still,
They bend and they nod at each whiff of a breeze,

For you see they are still just the children of trees.

But the birches below in the valley are older,
They are calmer and straighter and taller and colder.
Perhaps when we've grown up as solemn and grave,
We, too, will have children who do not behave!

SONGS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Moral Song

Oh, so cool
In his deep green pool
Was a frog on a log one day!
He would blink his eyes
As he snapped at flies,
For his mother was away,
For his mother was away!

Now that naughty frog
Left his own home log
And started out to play.
He flipped and he flopped
And he never stopped
Till he reached the great blue bay,
Till he reached the great blue bay!

Alas, with a swish
Came a mighty fish,
And swallowed him where he lay.
Now it's things like this
That never miss
Little frogs who don't obey,
Little frogs who don't obey!

Serious Omission

I know that there are dragons,
St. George's, Jason's, too,
And many modern dragons
With scales of green and blue;

But though I've been there many times
And carefully looked through,
I can't find a dragon
In the cages at the zoo!

Choice

If I had just one penny
On the Fourth of July,
Oh, what a problem it would be
To think what I should buy!

With lollypops and fire-works,
With cakes and whiz-bangs, too,
With tops and candy cigarettes,
Whatever should I do?

Torpedoes have a splendid noise,
But noise is quickly past,
And the sweetness of a lollypop
Is something that will last.

Natural Fireworks

The fireflies in the valley
Are having their display
Among the river willows
Like little bits of day!

Come, light your silver sparkler
And wave it in the air.
Go dance among the willows
And sprinkle sparkles there.

Then, oh, the world will wonder
To see the willows shine,
And even the fireflies will not know
Their tiny sparks from mine.

Conspiracy

The sun has a face that is laughing and red
When nurse pulls me out in the morning from bed;
But he's not half so sly as the silly old moon,
Who winks when I'm sent to my bedroom too soon.

Cuckoo Clock

The cuckoo in the clock by day

Is usually very gay;
And that's because, with people near,
There's not a thing for him to fear;

But when the sitting room is dim
And no one's there to welcome him--
How tremblingly he must come out
To flap his wings and look about.

Why! Only just the other night
The cuckoo stopped the clock from fright!

The Sentinel

I'm only a little toy dough-boy,
And I have neither sorrows nor fears;
But I patiently wait,
With my gun pointed straight
And my helmet pulled down on my ears.

The ugly wood lions and tigers
May show their white teeth if they please,
If the whole Noah's ark
Should threaten and bark
It wouldn't unstiffen my knees.

And some day when you are a soldier
With your helmet pulled down on your ears
I'll still be as straight
As I wonder and wait,
Standing my watch through the years.

Royalty

If I should meet a king or queen
Upon the street some day,
Do you think that I'd be frightened?
Why, I'd know just what to say.

"Your reverend majesties," I'd say,
And humbly bow the knee,
"I am your very humble swain,
And will you honor me?"

The king would strike my shoulder
With a sword of passing might,
He'd lift me grandly to my feet,
He'd say, "Arise, O Knight!"

Oh, I would not be frightened,
For I've seen kings galore,

Don't you think it's just to learn of them
That playing cards are for?

Crackers

Oh, there are very many kinds
Of crackers, great and small,
Saltines and ginger-snaps and such,
I'd like to eat them all;

But there's a kind of cracker
That I _need much worse, _
A bright red giant cracker
To set off under nurse!

The Drum

The drum's a very quiet fellow
When he's left alone;
But oh, how he does roar and bellow,
Rattle, snap and groan,
Clatter, spatter, dash and patter,
Rumble, shriek and moan
Whene'er I take my sticks in hand
And beat him soundly for the band.

Theatricals

Now I'll play at being queen,
Hold my head quite stiff and haughty,
Always proud and never naughty,
Sweeping grandly down the green.

Or I'll be a moonlight fairy,
Bobbing lightly on the river,
Dancing where the shadows quiver,
Winged and shining, swift and wary.

If the doctor thinks I'm sick,
He's just silly. _I am not!_
I'm just tired and very hot,
Hating drink that's sweet and thick.

Flowers dance across the walls,
Mother's face seems far away,
She's the audience, I'm the play,
She will clap for curtain calls.

No!--I do not want to play!
Seven thrones around my bed,
Circling gold about my head--
Angels always fly away!

Sally

If I were a stately sailboat,
I'd sail to Zanzibar,
I'd sail the seven secret seas,
Where the secret cities are,
And some day I'd be sailing with the wind before my prow,
And all the mermaids of the sea would clamber up the bow.
They'd beckon me with laughter,
They'd beckon me with smiles,
They'd show me cakes and candies
In half a dozen styles,
They'd promise me a life of ease
Eating sweets beneath the seas,
They'd promise me a life of play--
A never ending holiday;
But I would say quite plainly,
And, oh, how stern I'd look!
Do you think that you can tempt me
While Sally is our cook?

If I were a little fire balloon
I'd float aloft to Mars,
I'd pay a call on Venus
And chatter with the stars,
And just as I'd be fluttering across the yellow moon,
The angels would come singing a solemn Sunday tune.
They'd beckon to me gravely,
They'd tell me I could stay,
They'd show me all the jewels
That pave the milky way.
They'd promise me a golden crown
And silver robes like eider-down,
They'd give me harps with shiny strings
And wonderfully fluffy wings;
BUT--I would tell them plainly
I didn't want to die--
Till all the angel cooks had learned
How Sally makes mince pie!

SONGS FOR A CHRISTMAS TREE

Bundles

A bundle is a funny thing,
It always sets me wondering;
For whether it is thin or wide
You never know just what's inside.

Especially on Christmas week,
Temptation is so great to peek!
Now wouldn't it be much more fun
If shoppers carried things undone?

The Candy Santa Claus

I'm very fond of candles
With their quaint coquettish way,
But alas! I wooed too often,
And now my life's to pay.

They knew I was important
When they decked the Christmas tree,
Yes, they hung me on the tip-top
For all the world to see.

But, alas! A lady candle
Has come with me to the top,
And I'm melting with affection,
I'm dying drop by drop.

The Tinsel Star

I'm just a shiny tinsel star,
Boxed all the time as such things are,
And only used just once a year,
Oh, life is very dull and drear!

A real star has far fields to roam,
A tinsel star must stay at home.
It is a terrible vexation
To be a silly imitation!

The Ambitious Mouse

If all the world were candy
And the sky were frosted cake,
Oh, it would be a splendid job
For a mouse to undertake!

To eat a path of sweetmeats
Through candy forest aisles--
Explore the land of Pepper-mint
Stretched out for miles and miles.

To gobble up a cloudlet,
A little cup-cake star,
To swim a lake of liquid sweet
With shores of chocolate bar.

But, best of all the eating,
Would be the toothsome fat,
Triumphant hour of mouse-desire,
To eat a candy cat!

Prayer

Last night I crept across the snow,
Where only tracking rabbits go,
And then I waited quite alone
Until the Christmas radiance shone!

At midnight twenty angels came,
Each white and shining like a flame.
At midnight twenty angels sang,
The stars swung out like bells and rang.

They lifted me across the hill,
They bore me in their arms until
A greater glory greeted them.
It was the town of Bethlehem.

And gently, then, they set me down,
All worshipping that holy town,
And gently, then, they bade me raise
My head to worship and to praise.

And gently, then, the Christ smiled down.
Ah, there was glory in that town!
It was as if the world were free
And glistening with purity.

And in that vault of crystal blue,
It was as if the world were new,
And myriad angels, file on file,
Glorified in the Christ-child's smile.

It was so beautiful to see
Such glory, for a child like me,
So beautiful, it does not seem
It could have been a Christmas dream.

About the author:

John Chipman Farrar (1896-1974), late of the New York publishing firm of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, attended Yale University where his poem "Portraits" was the Yale University Prize Poem in 1916. After serving during the First World War as an intelligence officer with the U.S. Air Service, Farrar returned to Yale and graduated in 1919. His first book "Forgotten Shrines" was published late that same year as the second volume of the Yale Series of Younger Poets, reprinted in 1971, over half a century later.

After graduation, Farrar turned to publishing and literary criticism, editing George H. Doran Company's periodical "The Bookman". Between 1927 and 1929, Farrar was editor at Doubleday, Doran and Company. In mid-1929, he and two sons of the famous mystery writer Mary Robert Rinehart started the publishing firm of Farrar and Rinehart, Inc. His connection with that firm lasted until 1945, although he was absent during the war years assisting in U.S. government psychological war efforts. Farrar and Rinehart was later absorbed by Henry Holt.

As a young editor in New York, Farrar volunteered in 1922 for the organizing committee of an American chapter of PEN (originally Poets, Essayists and Novelists) founded in England the year before by Sappho (Amy Dawson Scott) to foster support of visiting foreign writers. PEN grew quickly to become an international advocate for freedom of expression and continues its activism to this day. (See <http://www.pen.org>)

After the Second World War, the American chapter of PEN foundered for lack of direction. Farrar, co-principal of the newly formed publishing house of Farrar, Straus and Company, now Farrar, Straus and Giroux, stepped in to refocus its energies and recruit dozens of new members. He served as president twice, once from 1951-1953 and again from 1963-1965.

In his roles as both an editor and a publisher, Farrar had a lasting impact on literature through the years. Farrar, Straus & Giroux has published many Nobel Laureates (20 as of 1995) and dozens of distinguished poets and authors. It is my privilege to reprint this text of some of his own work for posterity.

- Stewart A. Levin

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