

JEAN TUPPER

LET ME SHOW YOU MY DARK-EYED BEAUTIES

Sarah at five:

somersaulting
standing on her head

but graceful
in her arabesques, grand pliés
and fearless flips

seeming always
to land on her feet
to be ready to leap into

the next—impossible?
No! I can do it!
Russian Cossack *kazatsky*

seizing a fat brush
unwinding as she paints
surreal swirls of red

and black—*I love black!*
she says as she soaks the paper
with paint

that runs off the edge.
sudden hugs
for no reason at all

just wanting to touch
you . . . me
or that velveteen skirt

wanting always
the softest, prettiest
dress . . . and *more!*

Elizabeth at seven:

the firstborn,
hard-to-come-by child;

chasing butterflies
laughing at the upside-down
bird—her passion early on

for birds, loving *all of them!*
she listens for their song or cry
as eagerly as I listen

for hers. Elizabeth
with her wiggly tooth,
not wanting to let go

of something
that belongs to her;
counting the coins, the cost

the number of flies—
when I point to one
on the flypaper she says

No! There are two, Nana.
She is precision,
threading the tiniest beads

into a necklace
to give—or sell—and asking
her next three questions:

*Will the bee sting?
What makes the boat float?
Have you ever seen a ghost?*