

“THE OLD APPLE-TREE”

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

There's a memory keeps a-runnin'
Through my weary head to-night,
An' I see a picture dancin'
In the fire-flames' ruddy light;
'Tis the picture of an orchard
Wrapped in autumn's purple haze,
With the tender light about it
That I loved in other days.
An' a-standin' in a corner
Once again I seem to see
The verdant leaves an' branches
Of an old apple-tree.

You perhaps would call it ugly,
An' I don't know but it's so,
When you look the tree all over
Unadorned by memory's glow;
For its boughs are gnarled an' crooked,
An' its leaves are gettin' thin,

An' the apples of its bearin'
Would n't fill so large a bin
As they used to. But I tell you,
When it comes to pleasin' me,
It's the dearest in the orchard,—
Is that old apple—tree.

I would hide within its shelter,
Settlin' in some cosy nook,
Where no calls nor threats could stir me
From the pages o' my book.
Oh, that quiet, sweet seclusion
In its fulness passeth words!
It was deeper than the deepest
That my sanctum now affords.
Why, the jaybirds an' the robins,
They was hand in glove with me,
As they winked at me an' warbled
In that old apple—tree.

It was on its sturdy branches
That in summers long ago
I would tie my swing an' dangle
In contentment to an' fro,
Idly dreamin' childish fancies,

Buildin' castles in the air,
Makin' o' myself a hero
Of romances rich an' rare.
I kin shet my eyes an' see it
Jest as plain as plain kin be,
That same old swing a-danglin'
To the old apple-tree.

There's a rustic seat beneath it
That I never kin forget.
It's the place where me an' Hallie—
Little sweetheart—used to set,
When we 'd wander to the orchard
So 's no listenin' ones could hear
As I whispered sugared nonsense
Into her little willin' ear.
Now my gray old wife is Hallie,
An' I 'm grayer still than she,
But I 'll not forget our courtin'
'Neath the old apple-tree.

Life for us ain't all been summer,
But I guess we 'we had our share
Of its flittin' joys an' pleasures,
An' a sprinklin' of its care.

Oft the skies have smiled upon us;
Then again we 've seen 'em frown,
Though our load was ne'er so heavy
That we longed to lay it down.
But when death does come a-callin',
This my last request shall be,—
That they 'll bury me an' Hallie
'Neath the old apple tree.