

“TO LOUISE”

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

‘T was three an’ thirty year ago,
When I was ruther young, you know,
I had my last an’ only fight
About a gal one summer night.
‘T was me an’ Zekel Johnson; Zeke
‘N’ me ‘d be’n spattin’ ‘bout a week,
Each of us tryin’ his best to show
That he was Liza Jones’s beau.
We could n’t neither prove the thing,
Fur she was fur too sharp to fling
One over fur the other one
An’ by so doin’ stop the fun
That we chaps did n’t have the sense
To see she got at our expense,
But that’s the way a feller does,
Fur boys is fools an’ allus was.
An’ when they’s females in the game
I reckon men’s about the same.
Well, Zeke an’ me went on that way
An’ fussed an’ quarrelled day by day;
While Liza, mindin’ not the fuss,

Jest kep' a-goin' with both of us,
Tell we pore chaps, that's Zeke an' me,
Was jest plum mad with jealousy.
Well, fur a time we kep' our places,
An' only showed by frownin' faces
An' looks 'at well our meanin' boded
How full o' fight we both was loaded.
At last it come, the thing broke out,
An' this is how it come about.
One night ('t was fair, you'll all agree)
I got Eliza's company,
An' leavin' Zekel in the lurch,
Went trottin' off with her to church.
An' jest as we had took our seat
(Eliza lookin' fair an' sweet),
Why, I jest could n't help but grin
When Zekel come a-bouncin' in
As furious as the law allows.
He 'd jest be'n up to Liza's house,
To find her gone, then come to church
To have this end put to his search.
I guess I luffed that meetin' through,
An' not a mortal word I knew
Of what the preacher preached er read
Er what the choir sung er said.
Fur every time I 'd turn my head
I could n't skeercely help but see
'At Zekel had his eye on me.

An' he 'ud sort o' turn an' twist
An' grind his teeth an' shake his fist.
I laughed, fur la! the hull church seen us,
An' knowed that suthin' was between us.
Well, meetin' out, we started hum,
I sorter feelin' what would come.
We 'd jest got out, when up stepped Zeke,
An' said, "Scuse me, I 'd like to speak
To you a minute." "Cert," said I—
A—nudgin' Liza on the sly
An' laughin' in my sleeve with glee,
I asked her, please, to pardon me.
We walked away a step er two,
Jest to git out o' Liza's view,
An' then Zeke said, "I want to know
Ef you think you 're Eliza's beau,
An' 'at I 'm goin' to let her go
Hum with sich a chap as you?"
An' I said bold, "You bet I do."
Then Zekel, sneerin', said 'at he
Did n't want to hender me.
But then he 'lowed the gal was his
An' 'at he guessed he knowed his biz,
An' was n't feared o' all my kin
With all my friends an' chums throwed in.
Some other things he mentioned there
That no born man could no ways bear
Er think o' ca'mly tryin' to stan'

Ef Zeke had be'n the bigges' man
In town, an' not the leanest runt
'At time an' labor ever stunt.
An' so I let my fist go "bim,"
I thought I 'd mos' nigh finished him.
But Zekel did n't take it so.
He jest ducked down an' dodged my blow
An' then come back at me so hard,
I guess I must 'a' hurt the yard,
Er spilet the grass plot where I fell,
An' sakes alive it hurt me; well,
It would n't be'n so bad, you see,
But he jest kep' a-hittin' me.
An' I hit back an' kicked an' pawed,
But 't seemed 't was mostly air I clawed,
While Zekel used his science well
A-makin' every motion tell.
He punched an' hit, why, goodness lands,
Seemed like he had a dozen hands.
Well, afterwhile they stopped the fuss,
An' some one kindly parted us.
All beat an' cuffed an' clawed an' scratched,
An' needin' both our faces patched,
Each started hum a different way;
An' what o' Liza, do you say,
Why, Liza—little humbug—dern her,
Why, she 'd gone home with Hiram Turner.