

“BREAKING THE CHARM”

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Caught Susanner whistlin’; well,
It’s most nigh too good to tell.
‘Twould ‘a’ b’en too good to see
 Ef it had n’t b’en fur me,
 Comin’ up so soft an’ sly
 That she didn’ hear me nigh.
I was pokin’ ‘round that day,
An’ ez I come down the way,
First her whistle strikes my ears,—
Then her gingham dress appears;
 So with soft step up I slips.
 Oh, them dewy, rosy lips!
Ripe ez cherries, red an’ round,
Puckered up to make the sound.
She was lookin’ in the spring,
Whistlin’ to beat anything,—
“Kitty Dale” er “In the Sweet.”
 I was jest so mortal beat
 That I can’t quite ricolleck
What the toon was, but I ‘speck

‘T was some hymn er other, fur
Hymny things is jest like her.
Well she went on fur awhile
With her face all in a smile,
An’ I never moved, but stood
Stiller ‘n a piece o’ wood—
Would n’t wink ner would n’t stir,
But a–gazin’ right at her,
Tell she turns an’ sees me—my!
Thought at first she ‘d try to fly.
But she blushed an’ stood her ground.
Then, a–slyly lookin’ round,
She says: “Did you hear me, Ben?”
“Whistlin’ woman, crowin’ hen,”
Says I, lookin’ awful stern.
Then the red commenced to burn
In them cheeks o’ hern. Why, la!
Reddest red you ever saw—
Pineys wa’n’t a circumstance.
You ‘d ‘a’ noticed in a glance
She was pow’rful shamed an’ skeart;
But she looked so sweet an’ peart,
That a idee struck my head;
So I up an’ slowly said:
“Woman whistlin’ brings shore harm,
Jest one thing ‘ll break the charm.”
“And what’s that?” “Oh, my!” says I,
“I don’t like to tell you.” “Why?”

Says Susanner. “Well, you see
It would kinder fall on me.”
Course I knowed that she ‘d insist,—
So I says: “You must be kissed
By the man that heard you whistle;
Everybody says that this ‘ll
Break the charm and set you free
From the threat’nin’ penalty.”
She was blushin’ fit to kill,
But she answered, kinder still:
“I don’t want to have no harm,
Please come, Ben, an’ break the charm.”
Did I break that charm?—oh, well,
There’s some things I must n’t tell.
I remember, afterwhile,
Her a–sayin’ with a smile:
“Oh, you quit,—you sassy dunce,
You jest caught me whistlin’ *once*.”
Ev’ry sence that when I hear
Some one whistlin’ kinder clear,
I most break my neck to see
Ef it ’s Susy; but, dear me,
I jest find I ‘ve b’en to chase
Some blamed boy about the place.
Dad ’s b’en noticin’ my way,
An’ last night I heerd him say:
“We must send fur Dr. Glenn,
Mother; somethin ’s wrong with Ben!”