

When Your Pants Begin to Go

Words by
Henry Lawson 1892

Music by
Ellie Hallett

Henry Lawson's poem, *When Your Pants Begin to Go*, is a mixture of pathos and humour. It reflects Lawson's unhappy financial circumstances in that he was most certainly very well acquainted with poverty and despair.

In the Victorian age it was not polite for a gentleman to make reference to the garments that clothed the lower limbs, especially if there was a growing transparency indicating that one's trousers needed a patch. Lawson's poem describes this situation with a quiet but very real anxiety conveyed within the poetic eloquence of the words.

Performance suggestions

The long phrases of this poem/song require good breathing techniques. Use the surprise breath i.e. a quick silent intake of air as if you have just meet a friend unexpectedly, and then think like a swimmer to ease air out slowly. Small top-up breaths can be taken where appropriate and if needed. The clarity of the words is achieved with exaggerated mouth movements. Ride on the long vowel sounds and enunciate all consonants more clearly than in everyday speech. Try solo, duet, trio and quartet sectional singing to add tonal colour and contrasting sound textures.

You could wear an item of old clothing to add visual impact and feel more keenly the quiet desperation Lawson's words convey.

At a story-telling tempo; not too fast

f

When you wear a cloud - y coll - ar and a
You are none the less a her - o if you
Though the pres - ent and the fu - ture may be
Broth - er mine and of mis - for - tune times are

5

shirt that is - n't white, And you can - not sleep for think - ing how you'll
el - e - vate your chin, When you feel the pave - ment wear - ing through the
an - y - thing but bright, It is best to tell the fell - ows that you're
hard, but do not fret, Keep your cour - age up and strugg - le, and we'll

7

mf

reach to - morr - ow night, You may be a man of sorr - ow and on
leath - er, sock and skin; You are rath - er more her - o - ic than are
get - ting on al - right. And a man pre - fers to say it, 'tis a
laugh at these things yet. Though there is no corn in E - gypt, sure - ly

mf

mp

speak - ing terms with Care, But as yet you're un - ac - quaint - ed with the
 ord - in - ar - y folk, If you scorn to fish for pit - y un - der
 man - ly lie to tell, For the folks may be per - sua - ded that you're
 Af - ri - ca has some, Keep your smile in work - ing or - der for the

mp

rall. *mf*

Dem - on of Des - pair; For I'd rath - er think that noth - ing heaps the
 cov - er of a joke: You will face the doubt - ful glan - ces of the
 do - ing ver - y well; But it's hard to be a her - o, and it's
 bet - ter days to come! We shall of - ten laugh to - geth - er at the

rall. *mf*

a tempo

f

troub - le on your mind, Like the know - ledge that your trous - ers bad - ly
 peop - le that you know; But of course, you're bound to face them when your
 hard to wear a grin, When your most im - por - tant gar - ment is in
 hard times that we know, And get meas - ured by the tai - lor when our

f

Slower and with much feeling

need a patch be - hind. I have not - iced when mis - for - tune strikes the
 pants be - gin to go. If, when flush, you took your pleas - ures, failed to
 pla - ces ver - y thin. Get some sym - path - y and com - fort from the
 pants be - gin to go. Now the la - dy of re - fine - ment in the

mp

mp