

## THE OLD MARE'S GAIT.

Some folks is quite particular about the way they go.  
A'lopin', a-trottin' or a-bitchin' sorier slow;  
While sum has noshuns 'bout the style o' dockin'  
o' the tail.  
An' others like to git that this or next week  
w/out fail,  
An' others like to hurry, fur they've never  
learned to wait.  
I'm a chap who stan's accordin' to the ole mar's  
gait.

The sorier ambles easy-like adown the village  
lane,  
A-shakin' o' her quarters wi' no tenshun on the  
rein;  
A-browsin' an' a-dibbin' o' the weeds along the  
way;  
A-sorier growin' wobbly, like her master  
growin' gray;  
A-sorier easy-goin', an' no matter if it's late,  
it's all the same to both o' us—it is the critter's  
gait.

We've got beyond the burryin' an' scamperin'  
to git

Down to the wire fust o' all; for easy is the bit  
That rattles' round among the stubs o' one that's  
be'n a colt.  
We've got a breakin' in' her bones, though once  
she used to jolt  
A takin' stride along the way—twas 'fore we  
learned to wait;  
But now we both are satesfied wi' just a slowin'  
gait.

Hur pedergerie it reaches back to Lady Thorn, a  
queen  
Who rakked the scullups off the cake a-trottin'  
down the green;  
Hur blood was red when she was young, but  
now it's gettin' gray  
WV years that come an' years that go an' years  
that slip away.  
For what she's be'n an' what she's done when  
she was counted great,  
She's just a right to jog along accordin' to her  
gait.

She used to rank the purses at the county fairs  
when she  
Was limber in her noshuns, when her j'nts  
was free.  
She used to fool the smarties wi' the sleepy  
look she wore,

But she trotted to the finish an' she always led  
the score.  
O' course that was before she learned like me to  
rest and wait,  
An' long before she settled to this easy-goin' gait.  
She's twenty-one this summer, an' she's good  
fur thirty-six,  
She nibbles in the clover, an' her feed I grind  
an' mix  
Just like you would a pussin's who is toothless,  
old and gray—  
Fur, to tell you fact, hur grinders, like my own,  
have passed away.  
Thar, take her as she's standin', I love her  
though she's late,  
Fur we're growin' ole together an' I fashion to  
her gait.

—H. S. Keller, in Judge.



AMERICAN PUNCH  
BY EDGAR FAWCETT  
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CHAPTER XL—CONTINUED

"Scandalous?" he said, with swiftly-changing manner. "What a name to call honesty by!"

"Oh! I am not so honest, I assure you."

"There, you confessed that you are. Anyone else would have spoken so differently."

"Any other woman, you mean?"

"Well, yes," he assented.

"And other women, when they talk with you, monsieur, are anxious to convince you of their honesty."

"Well, yes."

Kathleen seemed to muse a little, slowly shaking her head. "That is because you are you."

He made an impatient gesture. "It is so conducive to feminine deception, then, this being I, as you put it?" and, without waiting for her to respond, he went on: "What made me in the first place like you so much, mademoiselle, was your charitable forgetfulness of who I really am."

"I didn't forget it in the least, however. I cultivated myself into seeming as if I did."

"Ah! you're bent on disappointing me."

"No, monsieur, only on telling you the truth."

"The truth from people never disappoints me."

"Are you so sure?" she murmured, a little vaguely, not meeting his look.

He gave a slight start. "Not quite sure, not quite sure—in your case. . . . For example, it did disappoint me to learn that you are unhappy."

She would not admit that she had ever confessed this to him during their previous talks, and for a good while they gently battled with one another concerning what human happiness truly means, until Clarimond at last said, with an accent of mild irritation:

"For a man or woman of reasonable age there is but one perfect kind of happiness. The heart is a mill, whose wheel should always turn in a full stream and grind forth golden grain. The soul, like a wealthy miller, must be buoyant and gladsome at the labor performed; the deeper he is covered with the dust of that delicious industry the more prosperous he rates himself, while he looks forth on the world deeded by his heart's consoling thrift."

"It is not everybody," smiled Kathleen, as the speaker paused, "who can be both king and poet in one short life."

"Are you now satisfied, mademoiselle?"

"No, no! But I am skeptical. There are so few hearts I like that—Mine, I fear, is an idle mill wheel above an empty stream-bed!"

"Yet one whose waters have been dried. Or, if not dried, cruelly dammed."

"I have not said that, monsieur."

"You say more, I find, than you mean to say."

"And yet you do not think me deceptif; you have granted as much."

His eyes, for an instant, seemed to caress her face. "I think you strangely miserable!" he affirmed. Then, lowering his voice a little, and leaning nearer to her: "I can't but wonder if you are incurably so."

"I am not miserable," she said, with wistful ardor of denial. "It is too bad that you should think this. You said something of the same sort yesterday. But you are wrong—wrong. I still have a great deal to live for."

"Still! And you say that in the early glow of your maidenhood! Still! It is amazing. Or, no; it isn't amazing at all; it is thoroughly explainable. There is something you want. I wonder if I could get it for you."

She shook her head quickly and then stared down at the hands which lay like two pale curled feathers in her lap.

"No, monsieur," she breathed, enshirring the words, as it were, in a sort of long sigh. "It is nothing that you could get me."

He accepted her reply as a surrender. She was a sorrier, after all, and the feints of her assertion to the contrary had been admittedly futile.

In the silence that now followed they both looked forth upon the incomparable valley, flanked by its mighty mountains, over-scattered by its ethereal villas, crowned, accentuated, dignified by its romantic and imposing palace.

The king slowly lifted his hand and pointed to that pale and beauteous edifice. His voice was quite faint (though it reached her ears very clearly indeed) as he said:

"I have thought of offering you this for a home."

She did not make the slightest sign of reply. He saw the color leave her cheeks and the light greater in her eyes. But she did not turn her look towards him. Now her breath came visibly quicker, pulsing the spray of lace at her throat. Soon he saw her delicate hands flutter a little there in her lap like fallen flowers that a breeze blows over and vaguely unsettles. But that was all.

"Yes," he went on, "I have thought of asking you to dwell there with me—as my wife."

At once she turned and met his gaze with great directness.

"You—had he this thought, monsieur?"

"It is my wish—my request—my entreaty."

"Your wife?" she repeated, and he saw that she was deeply perturbed.

"My queen," he continued. "I want you to share my throne and crown with me, such as they are. I have never asked any woman to do this until now. I have never asked any woman, for the simplest of reasons. Need I tell you that reason?" He reached his hand forward and took her hand, lifting it to his lips. It had grown cold—piteously

you that way. Perhaps it will come to me in time. You spoke of my mother. No, it is not she—not wholly she. Of course she wants such a marriage; what mother would not? I myself am proud to be your wife; only there is that other love which will not die. Am I not wiser to let you know this? You can't blame me. I see now in your eyes that you do not blame me. I've never asked you if he has spoken of me; I've never waited to know. It's quite over between us. There, that is all. I go to you without a guilty conscience. You know me just as I am. I've tried to crush it but it would not be crushed. Suppose I had never said a word about it and let you take me with a falsehood in my soul. Many a woman would have done that. Almost every other woman in the world would have done it. But I'm not vaunting my virtues. I'm simply making a clean breast of things—don't you see? You do see; you must! There—I dare say I'll be a worthy wife to you, monsieur, and I'm certain that I'll be a very faithful and devoted one. As for a queen (and she laughed wildly through her tears), I may fall at that. It is such an undreamed-of part for me to play! But I'll try. I'll try hard, strengthened by your help!"

The tears were glistening on her cheeks as she put forth both hands to him. He took them, kissing them both, and then, still holding them, he said:

"Kathleen, you are a very noble and brave girl. I thank you sincerely for what you have told me. One easily multiplies words. You will understand just how grateful I feel. The evening of the ball is so near that a press of affairs may keep me from seeing you till then. But (as I said to you yesterday, if I mistake not), my carriage will be here at the hour named to conduct your mother and yourself to the palace. *Au revoir*. Let everything rest undetermined, please, until we meet again."

She felt his lips touch her hand, and then in the twinkling of an eye, before she could even be sure that he meant to leave her, he had vanished from the room.

She sank into a chair. Her heart was throbbing and her head swam a little as she leaned it backward. In a few more seconds her mother shot into her presence by another door.

"Kathleen!"

"Well, mamma!"

"You've been crying! You're in tears yet! What has happened? Is it arranged?"

"No; nothing is arranged. That is, if you mean—"

"Good gracious! I hope you haven't quarreled!"

"We haven't quarreled."

"Thank heaven!" Mrs. Kennaird dropped at her daughter's feet, in a collapse oddly picturesque, considering her size and weight. But after all she was a woman who never dealt awkwardly with her avaridupos, though just now carried away by an emotion which might well have imperiled gracefulness.

"Kathleen! Kathleen! Tell me, my darling. You can't be unkind enough not to tell me! Did he mention it? Did he say one single word about it? Now, my child, consider how I suffer. Don't torture me. Let me know everything!"

Kathleen regarded her mother for a moment, and then slipped both arms round her neck. "Mamma," she said, with a deceit born of pity, and also of that love which all the icy ambition, all the worldly striving, all the hard, harsh, American push of her parent had never served to annul, "there is really nothing for you to know except that the king was very kind to me, very kind, and I—well, I became a little nervous. It seems like such a great ordeal, mamma, for me to open the ball with him. And yet he's good enough to insist that I will get through all right. He—"

"All right!" cried Mrs. Kennaird, regaining her feet with a phenomenal alacrity. "There won't be a woman in the ballroom who can hold a candle to you."

At this same time, as it happened, Alonzo Lisenpenard was crossing the threshold of a small apartment, full of books, busts and a few very rare pictures, where Eric Thaxter had passed many an hour of artistic musing.

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