

A dramatic landscape photograph capturing a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with layers of clouds, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that filters through the clouds. In the foreground, there are dark silhouettes of trees and bushes. In the middle ground, several utility poles with power lines stretch across the scene. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under the colorful sky.

***BRET
HARTE***

***OPENINGS
IN THE OLD
TRAIL***

Bret Harte

Openings in the Old Trail

EAN 8596547368748

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

OPENINGS IN THE OLD TRAIL

by Bret Harte

A MERCURY OF THE FOOT-HILLS

COLONEL STARBOTTLE FOR THE PLAINTIFF

THE LANDLORD OF THE BIG FLUME HOTEL

A BUCKEYE HOLLOW INHERITANCE

THE REINCARNATION OF SMITH

LANTY FOSTER'S MISTAKE

AN ALI BABA OF THE SIERRAS

MISS PEGGY'S PROTEGES

THE GODDESS OF EXCELSIOR

OPENINGS IN THE OLD TRAIL

[Table of Contents](#)

by Bret Harte

[Table of Contents](#)

A MERCURY OF THE FOOT-HILLS

[Table of Contents](#)

It was high hot noon on the Casket Ridge. Its very scant shade was restricted to a few dwarf Scotch firs, and was so perpendicularly cast that Leonidas Boone, seeking shelter from the heat, was obliged to draw himself up under one of them, as if it were an umbrella. Occasionally, with a boy's perversity, he permitted one bared foot to protrude beyond the sharply marked shadow until the burning sun forced him to draw it in again with a thrill of satisfaction. There was no earthly reason why he had not sought the larger shadows of the pine-trees which reared themselves against the Ridge on the slope below him, except that he was a boy, and perhaps even more superstitious and opinionated than most boys. Having got under this tree with infinite care, he had made up his mind that he would not move from it until its line of shade reached and touched a certain stone on the trail near him! WHY he did this he did not know, but he

clung to his sublime purpose with the courage and tenacity of a youthful Casabianca. He was cramped, tickled by dust and fir sprays; he was supremely uncomfortable—but he stayed! A woodpecker was monotonously tapping in an adjacent pine, with measured intervals of silence, which he always firmly believed was a certain telegraphy of the bird's own making; a green-and-gold lizard flashed by his foot to stiffen itself suddenly with a rigidity equal to his own. Still HE stirred not. The shadow gradually crept nearer the mystic stone—and touched it. He sprang up, shook himself, and prepared to go about his business. This was simply an errand to the post-office at the cross-roads, scarcely a mile from his father's house. He was already halfway there. He had taken only the better part of one hour for this desultory journey!

However, he now proceeded on his way, diverging only to follow a fresh rabbit-track a few hundred yards, to note that the animal had doubled twice against the wind, and then, naturally, he was obliged to look closely for other tracks to determine its pursuers. He paused also, but only for a moment, to rap thrice on the trunk of the pine where the woodpecker was at work, which he knew would make it cease work for a time—as it did. Having thus renewed his relations with nature, he discovered that one of the letters he was taking to the post-office had slipped in some mysterious way from the bosom of his shirt, where he carried them, past his waist-band into his trouser-leg, and was about to make a casual delivery of itself on the trail. This caused him to take out his letters and count them, when he found one missing. He had been given four letters

to post—he had only three. There was a big one in his father's handwriting, two indistinctive ones of his mother's, and a smaller one of his sister's—THAT was gone! Not at all disconcerted, he calmly retraced his steps, following his own tracks minutely, with a grim face and a distinct delight in the process, while looking—perfunctorily—for the letter. In the midst of this slow progress a bright idea struck him. He walked back to the fir-tree where he had rested, and found the lost missive. It had slipped out of his shirt when he shook himself. He was not particularly pleased. He knew that nobody would give him credit for his trouble in going back for it, or his astuteness in guessing where it was. He heaved the sigh of misunderstood genius, and again started for the post-office. This time he carried the letters openly and ostentatiously in his hand.

Presently he heard a voice say, "Hey!" It was a gentle, musical voice,—a stranger's voice, for it evidently did not know how to call him, and did not say, "Oh, Leonidas!" or "You—look here!" He was abreast of a little clearing, guarded by a low stockade of bark palings, and beyond it was a small white dwelling-house. Leonidas knew the place perfectly well. It belonged to the superintendent of a mining tunnel, who had lately rented it to some strangers from San Francisco. Thus much he had heard from his family. He had a mountain boy's contempt for city folks, and was not himself interested in them. Yet as he heard the call, he was conscious of a slightly guilty feeling. He might have been trespassing in following the rabbit's track; he might have been seen by some one when he lost the letter and had to go back for it—all grown-up people had a way of offering

themselves as witnesses against him! He scowled a little as he glanced around him. Then his eye fell on the caller on the other side of the stockade.

To his surprise it was a woman: a pretty, gentle, fragile creature, all soft muslin and laces, with her fingers interlocked, and leaning both elbows on the top of the stockade as she stood under the checkered shadow of a buckeye.

“Come here—please—won't you?” she said pleasantly.

It would have been impossible to resist her voice if Leonidas had wanted to, which he didn't. He walked confidently up to the fence. She really was very pretty, with eyes like his setter's, and as caressing. And there were little puckers and satiny creases around her delicate nostrils and mouth when she spoke, which Leonidas knew were “expression.”

“I—I”—she began, with charming hesitation; then suddenly, “What's your name?”

“Leonidas.”

“Leonidas! That's a pretty name!” He thought it DID sound pretty. “Well, Leonidas, I want you to be a good boy and do a great favor for me,—a very great favor.”

Leonidas's face fell. This kind of prelude and formula was familiar to him. It was usually followed by, “Promise me that you will never swear again,” or, “that you will go straight home and wash your face,” or some other irrelevant personality. But nobody with that sort of eyes had ever said it. So he said, a little shyly but sincerely, “Yes, ma'am.”

“You are going to the post-office?”

This seemed a very foolish, womanish question, seeing that he was holding letters in his hand; but he said, "Yes."

"I want you to put a letter of mine among yours and post them all together," she said, putting one little hand to her bosom and drawing out a letter. He noticed that she purposely held the addressed side so that he could not see it, but he also noticed that her hand was small, thin, and white, even to a faint tint of blue in it, unlike his sister's, the baby's, or any other hand he had ever seen. "Can you read?" she said suddenly, withdrawing the letter.

The boy flushed slightly at the question. "Of course I can," he said proudly.

"Of course, certainly," she repeated quickly; "but," she added, with a mischievous smile, "you mustn't NOW! Promise me! Promise me that you won't read this address, but just post the letter, like one of your own, in the letter-box with the others."

Leonidas promised readily; it seemed to him a great fuss about nothing; perhaps it was some kind of game or a bet. He opened his sunburnt hand, holding his own letters, and she slipped hers, face downward, between them. Her soft fingers touched his in the operation, and seemed to leave a pleasant warmth behind them.

"Promise me another thing," she added; "promise me you won't say a word of this to any one."

"Of course!" said Leonidas.

"That's a good boy, and I know you will keep your word." She hesitated a moment, smilingly and tentatively, and then held out a bright half-dollar. Leonidas backed from the fence. "I'd rather not," he said shyly.

“But as a present from ME?”

Leonidas colored—he was really proud; and he was also bright enough to understand that the possession of such unbounded wealth would provoke dangerous inquiry at home. But he didn't like to say it, and only replied, “I can't.”

She looked at him curiously. “Then—thank you,” she said, offering her white hand, which felt like a bird in his. “Now run on, and don't let me keep you any longer.” She drew back from the fence as she spoke, and waved him a pretty farewell. Leonidas, half sorry, half relieved, darted away.

He ran to the post-office, which he never had done before. Loyally he never looked at her letter, nor, indeed, at his own again, swinging the hand that held them far from his side. He entered the post-office directly, going at once to the letter-box and depositing the precious missive with the others. The post-office was also the “country store,” and Leonidas was in the habit of still further protracting his errands there by lingering in that stimulating atmosphere of sugar, cheese, and coffee. But to-day his stay was brief, so transitory that the postmaster himself inferred audibly that “old man Boone must have been tanning Lee with a hickory switch.” But the simple reason was that Leonidas wished to go back to the stockade fence and the fair stranger, if haply she was still there. His heart sank as, breathless with unwonted haste, he reached the clearing and the empty buckeye shade. He walked slowly and with sad diffidence by the deserted stockade fence. But presently his quick eye discerned a glint of white among the laurels near the house. It was SHE, walking with apparent indifference away from him towards the corner of the clearing and the road. But this

he knew would bring her to the end of the stockade fence, where he must pass—and it did. She turned to him with a bright smile of affected surprise. “Why, you're as swift-footed as Mercury!”

Leonidas understood her perfectly. Mercury was the other name for quicksilver—and that was lively, you bet! He had often spilt some on the floor to see it move. She must be awfully cute to have noticed it too—cuter than his sisters. He was quite breathless with pleasure.

“I put your letter in the box all right,” he burst out at last.

“Without any one seeing it?” she asked.

“Sure pop! nary one! The postmaster stuck out his hand to grab it, but I just let on that I didn't see him, and shoved it in myself.”

“You're as sharp as you're good,” she said smilingly. “Now, there's just ONE thing more I want you to do. Forget all about this—won't you?”

Her voice was very caressing. Perhaps that was why he said boldly: “Yes, ma'am, all except YOU.”

“Dear me, what a compliment! How old are you?”

“Goin' on fifteen,” said Leonidas confidently.

“And going very fast,” said the lady mischievously. “Well, then, you needn't forget ME. On the contrary,” she added, after looking at him curiously, “I would rather you'd remember me. Good-by—or, rather, good-afternoon—if I'm to be remembered, Leon.”

“Good-afternoon, ma'am.”

She moved away, and presently disappeared among the laurels. But her last words were ringing in his ears. “Leon”—

everybody else called him “Lee” for brevity; “Leon”—it was pretty as she said it.

He turned away. But it so chanced that their parting was not to pass unnoticed, for, looking up the hill, Leonidas perceived his elder sister and little brother coming down the road, and knew that they must have seen him from the hilltop. It was like their “snoopin'”!

They ran to him eagerly.

“You were talking to the stranger,” said his sister breathlessly.

“She spoke to me first,” said Leonidas, on the defensive.

“What did she say?”

“Wanted to know the electshun news,” said Leonidas with cool mendacity, “and I told her.”

This improbable fiction nevertheless satisfied them. “What was she like? Oh, do tell us, Lee!” continued his sister.

Nothing would have delighted him more than to expatiate upon her loveliness, the soft white beauty of her hands, the “cunning” little puckers around her lips, her bright tender eyes, the angelic texture of her robes, and the musical tinkle of her voice. But Leonidas had no confidant, and what healthy boy ever trusted his sister in such matter! “YOU saw what she was like,” he said, with evasive bluntness.

“But, Lee”—

But Lee was adamant. “Go and ask her,” he said.

“Like as not you were sassy to her, and she shut you up,” said his sister artfully. But even this cruel suggestion, which

he could have so easily flouted, did not draw him, and his ingenious relations flounced disgustedly away.

But Leonidas was not spared any further allusion to the fair stranger; for the fact of her having spoken to him was duly reported at home, and at dinner his reticence was again sorely attacked. "Just like her, in spite of all her airs and graces, to hang out along the fence like any ordinary hired girl, jabberin' with anybody that went along the road," said his mother incisively. He knew that she didn't like her new neighbors, so this did not surprise nor greatly pain him. Neither did the prosaic facts that were now first made plain to him. His divinity was a Mrs. Burroughs, whose husband was conducting a series of mining operations, and prospecting with a gang of men on the Casket Ridge. As his duty required his continual presence there, Mrs. Burroughs was forced to forego the civilized pleasures of San Francisco for a frontier life, for which she was ill fitted, and in which she had no interest. All this was a vague irrelevance to Leonidas, who knew her only as a goddess in white who had been familiar to him, and kind, and to whom he was tied by the delicious joy of having a secret in common, and having done her a special favor. Healthy youth clings to its own impressions, let reason, experience, and even facts argue ever to the contrary.

So he kept her secret and his intact, and was rewarded a few days afterwards by a distant view of her walking in the garden, with a man whom he recognized as her husband. It is needless to say that, without any extraneous thought, the man suffered in Leonidas's estimation by his propinquity to the goddess, and that he deemed him vastly inferior.

It was a still greater reward to his fidelity that she seized an opportunity when her husband's head was turned to wave her hand to him. Leonidas did not approach the fence, partly through shyness and partly through a more subtle instinct that this man was not in the secret. He was right, for only the next day, as he passed to the post-office, she called him to the fence.

“Did you see me wave my hand to you yesterday?” she asked pleasantly.

“Yes, ma'am; but”—he hesitated—“I didn't come up, for I didn't think you wanted me when any one else was there.”

She laughed merrily, and lifting his straw hat from his head, ran the fingers of the other hand through his damp curls. “You're the brightest, dearest boy I ever knew, Leon,” she said, dropping her pretty face to the level of his own, “and I ought to have remembered it. But I don't mind telling you I was dreadfully frightened lest you might misunderstand me and come and ask for another letter—before HIM.” As she emphasized the personal pronoun, her whole face seemed to change: the light of her blue eyes became mere glittering points, her nostrils grew white and contracted, and her pretty little mouth seemed to narrow into a straight cruel line, like a cat's. “Not a word ever to HIM, of all men! Do you hear?” she said almost brusquely. Then, seeing the concern in the boy's face, she laughed, and added explanatorily: “He's a bad, bad man, Leon, remember that.”

The fact that she was speaking of her husband did not shock the boy's moral sense in the least. The sacredness of those relations, and even of blood kinship, is, I fear, not

always so clear to the youthful mind as we fondly imagine. That Mr. Burroughs was a bad man to have excited this change in this lovely woman was Leonidas's only conclusion. He remembered how his sister's soft, pretty little kitten, purring on her lap, used to get its back up and spit at the postmaster's yellow hound.

"I never wished to come unless you called me first," he said frankly.

"What?" she said, in her half playful, half reproachful, but wholly caressing way. "You mean to say you would never come to see me unless I sent for you? Oh, Leon! and you'd abandon me in that way?"

But Leonidas was set in his own boyish superstition. "I'd just delight in being sent for by you any time, Mrs. Burroughs, and you kin always find me," he said shyly, but doggedly; "but"—He stopped.

"What an opinionated young gentleman! Well, I see I must do all the courting. So consider that I sent for you this morning. I've got another letter for you to mail." She put her hand to her breast, and out of the pretty frillings of her frock produced, as before, with the same faint perfume of violets, a letter like the first. But it was unsealed. "Now, listen, Leon; we are going to be great friends—you and I." Leonidas felt his cheeks glowing. "You are going to do me another great favor, and we are going to have a little fun and a great secret all by our own selves. Now, first, have you any correspondent—you know—any one who writes to you—any boy or girl—from San Francisco?"

Leonidas's cheeks grew redder—alas! from a less happy consciousness. He never received any letters; nobody ever

wrote to him. He was obliged to make this shameful admission.

Mrs. Burroughs looked thoughtful. "But you have some friend in San Francisco—some one who MIGHT write to you?" she suggested pleasantly.

"I knew a boy once who went to San Francisco," said Leonidas doubtfully. "At least, he allowed he was goin' there."

"That will do," said Mrs. Burroughs. "I suppose your parents know him or of him?"

"Why," said Leonidas, "he used to live here."

"Better still. For, you see, it wouldn't be strange if he DID write. What was the gentleman's name?"

"Jim Belcher," returned Leonidas hesitatingly, by no means sure that the absent Belcher knew how to write. Mrs. Burroughs took a tiny pencil from her belt, opened the letter she was holding in her hand, and apparently wrote the name in it. Then she folded it and sealed it, smiling charmingly at Leonidas's puzzled face.

"Now, Leon, listen; for here is the favor I am asking. Mr. Jim Belcher"—she pronounced the name with great gravity—"will write to you in a few days. But inside of YOUR letter will be a little note to me, which you will bring me. You can show your letter to your family, if they want to know who it is from; but no one must see MINE. Can you manage that?"

"Yes," said Leonidas. Then, as the whole idea flashed upon his quick intelligence, he smiled until he showed his dimples. Mrs. Burroughs leaned forward over the fence, lifted his torn straw hat, and dropped a fluttering little kiss on his forehead. It seemed to the boy, flushed and rosy as a

maid, as if she had left a shining star there for every one to see.

“Don't smile like that, Leon, you're positively irresistible! It will be a nice little game, won't it? Nobody in it but you and me—and Belcher! We'll outwit them yet. And, you see, you'll be obliged to come to me, after all, without my asking.”

They both laughed; indeed, quite a dimpled, bright-eyed, rosy, innocent pair, though I think Leonidas was the more maidenly.

“And,” added Leonidas, with breathless eagerness, “I can sometimes write to—to—Jim, and inclose your letter.”

“Angel of wisdom! certainly. Well, now, let's see—have you got any letters for the post to-day?” He colored again, for in anticipation of meeting her he had hurried up the family post that morning. He held out his letters: she thrust her own among them. “Now,” she said, laying her cool, soft hand against his hot cheek, “run along, dear; you must not be seen loitering here.”

Leonidas ran off, buoyed up on ambient air. It seemed just like a fairy-book. Here he was, the confidant of the most beautiful creature he had seen, and there was a mysterious letter coming to him—Leonidas—and no one to know why. And now he had a “call” to see her often; she would not forget him—he needn't loiter by the fencepost to see if she wanted him—and his boyish pride and shyness were appeased. There was no question of moral ethics raised in Leonidas's mind; he knew that it would not be the real Jim Belcher who would write to him, but that made the prospect the more attractive. Nor did another circumstance trouble

his conscience. When he reached the post-office, he was surprised to see the man whom he knew to be Mr. Burroughs talking with the postmaster. Leonidas brushed by him and deposited his letters in the box in discreet triumph. The postmaster was evidently officially resenting some imputation on his carelessness, and, concluding his defense, "No, sir," he said, "you kin bet your boots that ef any letter hez gone astray for you or your wife—Ye said your wife, didn't ye?"

"Yes," said Burroughs hastily, with a glance around the shop.

"Well, for you or anybody at your house—it ain't here that's the fault. You hear me! I know every letter that comes in and goes out this office, I reckon, and handle 'em all,"—Leonidas pricked up his ears,—“and if anybody oughter know, it's me. Ye kin paste that in your hat, Mr. Burroughs.” Burroughs, apparently disconcerted by the intrusion of a third party—Leonidas—upon what was evidently a private inquiry, murmured something surlily, and passed out.

Leonidas was puzzled. That big man seemed to be “snoopin'” around for something! He knew that he dared not touch the letter-bag,—Leonidas had heard somewhere that it was a deadly crime to touch any letters after the Government had got hold of them once, and he had no fears for the safety of hers. But ought he not go back at once and tell her about her husband's visit, and the alarming fact that the postmaster was personally acquainted with all the letters? He instantly saw, too, the wisdom of her inclosing her letter hereafter in another address. Yet he finally resolved not to tell her to-day,—it would look like “hanging

round” again; and—another secret reason—he was afraid that any allusion to her husband's interference would bring back that change in her beautiful face which he did not like. The better to resist temptation, he went back another way.

It must not be supposed that, while Leonidas indulged in this secret passion for the beautiful stranger, it was to the exclusion of his boyish habits. It merely took the place of his intellectual visions and his romantic reading. He no longer carried books in his pocket on his lazy rambles. What were mediaeval legends of high-born ladies and their pages to this real romance of himself and Mrs. Burroughs? What were the exploits of boy captains and juvenile trappers and the Indian maidens and Spanish señoritas to what was now possible to himself and his divinity here—upon Casket Ridge! The very ground around her was now consecrated to romance and adventure. Consequently, he visited a few traps on his way back which he had set for “jackass-rabbits” and wildcats,—the latter a vindictive reprisal for aggression upon an orphan brood of mountain quail which he had taken under his protection. For, while he nourished a keen love of sport, it was controlled by a boy's larger understanding of nature: a pantheistic sympathy with man and beast and plant, which made him keenly alive to the strange cruelties of creation, revealed to him some queer animal feuds, and made him a chivalrous partisan of the weaker. He had even gone out of his way to defend, by ingenious contrivances of his own, the hoard of a golden squirrel and the treasures of some wild bees from a predatory bear, although it did not prevent him later from capturing the squirrel by an equally

ingenious contrivance, and from eventually eating some of the honey.

He was late home that evening. But this was “vacation,”—the district school was closed, and but for the household “chores,” which occupied his early mornings, each long summer day was a holiday. So two or three passed; and then one morning, on his going to the post-office, the postmaster threw down upon the counter a real and rather bulky letter, duly stamped, and addressed to Mr. Leonidas Boone! Leonidas was too discreet to open it before witnesses, but in the solitude of the trail home broke the seal. It contained another letter with no address—clearly the one SHE expected—and, more marvelous still, a sheaf of trout-hooks, with delicate gut-snells such as Leonidas had only dared to dream of. The letter to himself was written in a clear, distinct hand, and ran as follows:—

DEAR LEE,—How are you getting on on old Casket Ridge? It seems a coon's age since you and me was together, and times I get to think I must just run up and see you! We're having bully times in 'Frisco, you bet! though there ain't anything wild worth shucks to go to see—'cept the sea lions at the Cliff House. They're just stunning—big as a grizzly, and bigger—climbing over a big rock or swimming in the sea like an otter or muskrat. I'm sending you some snells and hooks, such as you can't get at Casket. Use the fine ones for pot-holes and the bigger ones for running water or falls. Let me know when you've got 'em. Write to Lock Box No. 1290. That's where dad's letters come. So no more at present.

From yours truly,
JIM BELCHER.

Not only did Leonidas know that this was not from the real Jim, but he felt the vague contact of a new, charming, and original personality that fascinated him. Of course, it was only natural that one of HER friends—as he must be—should be equally delightful. There was no jealousy in Leonidas's devotion; he knew only a joy in this fellowship of admiration for her which he was satisfied that the other boy must feel. And only the right kind of boy could know the importance of his ravishing gift, and this Jim was evidently “no slouch”! Yet, in Leonidas's new joy he did not forget HER! He ran back to the stockade fence and lounged upon the road in view of the house, but she did not appear.

Leonidas lingered on the top of the hill, ostentatiously examining a young hickory for a green switch, but to no effect. Then it suddenly occurred to him that she might be staying in purposely, and, perhaps a little piqued by her indifference, he ran off. There was a mountain stream hard by, now dwindled in the summer drouth to a mere trickling thread among the boulders, and there was a certain “pot-hole” that he had long known. It was the lurking-place of a phenomenal trout,—an almost historic fish in the district, which had long resisted the attempt of such rude sportsmen as miners, or even experts like himself. Few had seen it, except as a vague, shadowy bulk in the four feet of depth and gloom in which it hid; only once had Leonidas's quick eye feasted on its fair proportions. On that memorable occasion Leonidas, having exhausted every kind of lure of painted fly and living bait, was rising from his knees behind the bank, when a pink five-cent stamp dislodged from his pocket fluttered in the air, and descended slowly upon the

still pool. Horrified at his loss, Leonidas leaned over to recover it, when there was a flash like lightning in the black depths, a dozen changes of light and shadow on the surface, a little whirling wave splashing against the side of the rock, and the postage stamp was gone. More than that—for one instant the trout remained visible, stationary and expectant! Whether it was the instinct of sport, or whether the fish had detected a new, subtle, and original flavor in the gum and paper, Leonidas never knew. Alas! he had not another stamp; he was obliged to leave the fish, but carried a brilliant idea away with him. Ever since then he had cherished it—and another extra stamp in his pocket. And now, with this strong but gossamer-like snell, this new hook, and this freshly cut hickory rod, he would make the trial!

But fate was against him! He had scarcely descended the narrow trail to the pine-fringed margin of the stream before his quick ear detected an unusual rustling through the adjacent underbrush, and then a voice that startled him! It was HERS! In an instant all thought of sport had fled. With a beating heart, half opened lips, and uplifted lashes, Leonidas awaited the coming of his divinity like a timorous virgin at her first tryst.

But Mrs. Burroughs was clearly not in an equally responsive mood. With her fair face reddened by the sun, the damp tendrils of her unwound hair clinging to her forehead, and her smart little slippers red with dust, there was also a querulous light in her eyes, and a still more querulous pinch in her nostrils, as she stood panting before him.

“You tiresome boy!” she gasped, holding one little hand to her side as she gripped her brambled skirt around her ankles with the other. “Why didn't you wait? Why did you make me run all this distance after you?”

Leonidas timidly and poignantly protested. He had waited before the house and on the hill; he thought she didn't want him.

“Couldn't you see that THAT MAN kept me in?” she went on peevishly. “Haven't you sense enough to know that he suspects something, and follows me everywhere, dogging my footsteps every time the post comes in, and even going to the post-office himself, to make sure that he sees all my letters? Well,” she added impatiently, “have you anything for me? Why don't you speak?”

Crushed and remorseful, Leonidas produced her letter. She almost snatched it from his hand, opened it, read a few lines, and her face changed. A smile strayed from her eyes to her lips, and back again. Leonidas's heart was lifted; she was so forgiving and so beautiful!

“Is he a boy, Mrs. Burroughs?” asked Leonidas shyly.

“Well—not exactly,” she said, her charming face all radiant again. “He's older than you. What has he written to you?”

Leonidas put his letter in her hand for reply.

“I wish I could see him, you know,” he said shyly. “That letter's bully—it's just rats! I like him pow'ful.”

Mrs. Burroughs had skimmed through the letter, but not interestedly.

“You mustn't like him more than you like me,” she said laughingly, caressing him with her voice and eyes, and even