“Ned, please pass me those cigars.”

Tom lit a cigar, smoked awhile, looked foolish, and began.

“My love began like this cigar, in fire, and ended, as it will, in smoke.”

“Bah! don’t get too sentimental, Tom; stick to facts.”

“Permit me, Ned,—take your own advice of a moment ago. Calm yourself.”

“A hit, Tom! a hit! but proceed.”

“Before entering college I was, as you know, a teacher in a village school. To this school came both boys and girls; and among the latter was a young girl named Lizzie Temple. She was seventeen, overflowing with life and merriment, and with a tall and beautiful figure. Her fingers were toothpicks for Apollo, her nose and forehead Grecian, and her face full of expression,—a little wicked, too, sometimes,—and slightly brunette in complexion. Her hair fell in thick, jetty ringlets upon her neck and shoulders, like a beautiful drapery furnished by the gods, for charms that, fully seen, might drive men to madness; her eyes were black and voluptuous; and her lips—oh!—in their rosy labyrinth, when she smiled, the soul was lost.”

“Take a glass of water, Tom.”

“Ned, be quiet.”

“Pardon me, Tom, but I thought the suggestion opportune.”

“Well, Ned, I loved her madly, and I had a terribly hard time in keeping the other pupils from finding it out. My position would have been unbearable if they had suspected anything. In my opinion a man who could conceal his feelings to the extent I did mine, has in him the elements of a Talleyrand. To add to my trials I was not the only one in love with her. One of the boys, a good-looking, black-eyed rascal of eighteen was in love with her also. I shall never forget the feeling of extreme satisfaction I felt one day after I had flogged him for some trifling omission of duty. Of course I felt great interest in Lizzie’s progress, and was often at her desk, leaning over her shoulder, with my face almost in contact with her lovely lips, apparently to examine her writing, or to demonstrate some problem in geometry. The Temples, her parents, were most polite to me, and often asked me to tea. Her father, old Temple, was a clever old man of the New England farmer type, and very shrewd. I went frequently to his house and spent the evening, drank his cider, praised his apples, and discussed the weather and the neighborhood’s quarrels with him till the old fellow fell asleep, when I enjoyed myself with Lizzie.

“It was with feelings of the greatest joy that I viewed the slow approach of the end of the term, for then I would be relieved of my fear of the scholars, and would be able to speak. How I counted the days, and watched their slow advance. But at last the end came, and I was free.

“Two evenings after the close of the term I took a walk with Lizzie through the village into the park, and there, beneath the stars and sweet moonlight, I told the story of my love. At last I ventured the ugly question.”

Here Tom’s voice grew husky, and he paused for a moment, gazing in profound silence at his boots. Suddenly he turned to me, and said:—

“What do you think her reply was, Ned?”

“Really, Tom, I can’t imagine; too young, maybe, or perhaps she would like to see some more goods before purchasing.”

“No, Ned; you couldn’t guess—no man could. It was an outrage, and an unwomanly cruelty to me. She said, with a heartless laugh, that she had never cared for geometry, and thought it would be exceedingly dull to be all one’s life demonstrating Triangles.”

“The next morning I found myself in bed. I never knew how I got there. There was a panel knocked out of the door, a broken chair in the middle of the room, and my dress-coat hanging on the candle as an extinguisher! Three months afterward she became engaged to the young scoundrel whom I had flogged so soundly for loving her.”

“Ha, ha, ha! Forgive me, Tom, for—ha, ha, ha!”

A striking attitude—Pugilistic pose.