

Perhaps Peggy is pretty enough, only shrewish.

—No matter for cold coffee; you should have been up before.

What sad, thin, poorly cooked chops to eat with your rolls!

—She thinks they are very good, and wonders how you can set such an example to your children.

The butter is nauseating.

—She has no other, and hopes you'll not raise a storm about butter a little turned. I think I see myself, ruminated I, sitting meekly at table, scarce daring to lift up my eyes, utterly fagged out with some quarrel of yesterday, choking down detestably sour muffins, that my wife thinks are "delicious," slipping in dried mouthfuls of burnt ham off the side of my fork tines, slipping off my chair sideways at the end, and slipping out, with my hat between my knees, to business, and never feeling myself a competent, sound-minded man till the oak door is between me and Peggy.

—"Ha, ha! not yet," said I; and in so earnest a tone that my dog started to his feet, cocked his eye to have a good look into my face, met my smile of triumph with an amiable wag of the tail, and curled up again in the corner.

Again, Peggy is rich enough, well enough, mild enough, only she doesn't care a fig for you. She has married you because father or grandfather thought the match eligible, and because she didn't wish to disoblige them. Besides, she didn't positively hate you, and thought you were a respectable enough young person; she has told you so repeatedly at dinner. She wonders you like to read poetry; she wishes you would buy her a good cook-book, and insists upon your making your will at the birth of the first baby.

She thinks Captain So-and-So a splendid-looking fellow, and wishes you would trim up a little, were it only for appearance's sake.

You need not hurry up from the office so early at night; she, bless her dear heart! does not feel lonely. You read to her a love tale; she interrupts the pathetic parts with directions to her seamstress. You read of marriages; she sighs, and asks if Captain So-and-So has left town! She hates to be mewed up in a cottage or between brick walls; she does so love the Springs!

But, again, Peggy loves you; at least she swears it, with her hand on the "Sorrows of Werther." She has pin-money which she spends for the *Literary World* and the *Friends in Council*. She is not bad-looking, save a bit too much of forehead; nor is she sluttish, unless a *negligee* till three o'clock and an ink stain on the forefinger be sluttish; but then she is such a sad blue!

You never fancied, when you saw her buried in a three volume novel, that it was anything more than a girlish vagary; and when she quoted Latin you thought innocently that she had a capital memory for her samplers.

But to be bored eternally about divine Dante and funny Goldoni is too bad. Your copy of Tasso, a treasure print of 1680, is all bethumbed and dogs-eared and spotted with baby gruel. Even your Seneca—an Elzevir—is all

sweaty with handling. She adores La Fontaine, reads Balzac with a kind of artist scowl, and will not let Greek alone. You hint at broken rest and an aching head at breakfast, and she will fling you a scrap of Anthology, in lieu of the camphor bottle, or chant the *alai, alai*, of tragic chorus.

—The nurse is getting dinner; you are holding the baby; Peggy is reading Bruyere.

The fire smoked thick as pitch, and puffed out little clouds over the chimney piece. I gave the fore-stick a kick, at the thought of Peggy, baby and Bruyere.

—Suddenly the flame flickered bluely athwart the smoke, caught at a twig below, rolled round the mossy oak stick, twined among the crackling tree limbs, mounted, lit up the whole body of smoke, and blazed out cheerily and bright. Doubt vanished with Smoke, and Hope began with Flame.

## II.

### BLAZE—SIGNIFYING CHEER.

I pushed my chair back; drew up another; stretched out my feet cosily upon it, rested my elbows on the chair arms, leaned my head on one hand, and looked straight into the leaping and dancing flame.

—Love is a flame, ruminated I; and (glancing round the room) how a flame brightens up a man's habitation.

"Carlo," said I, calling up my dog into the light; "good fellow, Carlo!" and I patted him kindly; and he wagged his tail and laid his nose across my knee, and looked wistfully up in my face; then strode away, turned to look again, and lay down to sleep.

"Pho, the brute!" said I; "it is not enough, after all, to like a dog."

—If now in that chair yonder, not the one your feet lie upon, but the other, beside you—closer yet—were seated a sweet-faced girl, with a pretty little foot lying out upon the hearth, a bit of lace running round the swelling throat, the hair parted to a charm over a forehead fair as any of your dreams; and if you could reach an arm round that chair-back, without fear of giving offence, and suffer your fingers to play idly with those curls that escape down the neck; and if you could clasp with your other hand those little, white, taper fingers of hers, which lie so temptingly within reach, and so, talk softly and low in presence of the blaze, while the hours slip without knowledge, and the winter winds whistle uncared for; if, in short, you were no bachelor, but the husband of some such sweet image (dream, call it rather), would it not be far pleasanter than this cold, single, night sitting, counting the sticks, reckoning the length of the blaze, and the height of the falling snow?

And if, some or all of those wild vagaries that grow on your fancy at such an hour, you could whisper into listening because loving ears—ears not tired with listening, because it is you who whisper; ears ever indulgent, because eager to praise; and if your darkest fancies were lit up, not merely with bright wood-fire, but with a ringing laugh of that sweet face turned up in fond rebuke—how far better than to be waxing black and sour over pestilential humors alone, your very dog asleep?