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One Day at Arle.

By Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett.

One day at Arle—a tiny scattered fishing hamlet on the northwestern English coast—there stood at the door of one of the cottages near the shore a woman leaning against the lintel-post and looking out; a woman who would have been apt to attract a stranger's eye, too—a woman young and handsome. This is what a first glance would have taken in; a second would have been apt to teach more and leave a less pleasant impression. She was young enough to have been girlish, but she was not girlish in the least. Her tall, lithe, well-knit figure was braced against the door-post with a tense sort of strength; her handsome face was just at this time as dark and hard in expression as if she had been a woman with years of bitter life behind her; her handsome brows were knit, her lips were set; from head to foot she looked unyielding and stern of purpose.

And neither form nor face belied her. The earliest remembrances of the coast people concerning Meg Lonas had not been over-pleasant ones. She had never been a favorite among them. The truth was, they half feared her, even as the silent, dogged, neglected child who used to wander up and down among the rocks and on the beach, working harder for her scant living than the oldest of them. She had never a word for them, and never satisfied their curiosity upon the subject of the treatment she received from the ill-conditioned old grandfather who was her only living relative, and this peculiarity had rendered her more unpopular than anything else would have done. If she had answered their questions they might have pitied her; but as she chose to meet them with stubborn silence, they managed to show their dislike in many ways, until at last it became a settled point among them that the girl was an outcast in their midst. But even in those days she gave them back wrong for wrong and scorn for scorn; and as she grew older she grew stronger of will, less prone to forgive her many injuries and slights, and more prone to revenge them in an obstinate and bitter fashion. But as she grew older she grew handsomer, too, and the fisher boys who had jeered at her in childhood were anxious enough to gain her goodwill.

The women flouted her still, but she defied them openly; the men found it wisest to be humble in their rough style, and her defiance of them was more scornful than her defiance of their mothers and sisters. She would revenge herself upon them, and did, until at last she met a wooer who was tender enough, it seemed, to move her. At least so people said at first; but suddenly the lover disappeared, and two or three months later the whole community was electrified by her sudden marriage with a suitor whom she had been wont to treat worse than all the rest. How she treated him after the marriage nobody knew. She was more defiant and silent than ever, and gossips gained nothing by asking questions. So at last she was left alone.

It was not the face of a tender wife waiting for a loving husband, the face that was turned toward the sea. If she had hated the man for whom she watched she could not have seemed more unbending. Ever since her visitor had left her (she had had a visitor during the morning) she had stood in the same place, even in the same position, without moving, and when at last the figure of her husband came slouching across the sands homeward she remained motionless still.

And surely it was not the face of a happy husband. Not a handsome face at its dull best, it was doubly unprepossessing then as, pale and breathless, he passed the stern form in the door-way, his nervous, reluctant eyes avoiding hers.

"You'll find your dinner aw ready on th' table," she said to him as he passed into the house.

Everything was neat enough inside. The fireplace was clean and bright, the table was set tidily, and the meal upon it was good enough in its way; but when the man entered he cast an unsteady, uncomprehending glance around, and when he had flung himself into a chair he did not attempt to touch the food, but dropped his face upon his arm on the table with a sound like a little groan.

She must have heard it, but she did not notice it even by a turn of her head, but stood erect and steadfast until he spoke to her. She might have been waiting for his words—perhaps she was.

"Tha canst come in an' say what tha has to say an' be done wi' it," he said at last, in a sullen, worn-out fashion.

She turned round then and faced him, harder to be met in her rigid mood than if she had been a tempest.

"Tha knows what I ha' gotten to say," she answered, her tone strained and husky with repressed fierceness. "Aye! tha knows it well enough. I ha' not much need to tell thee owt. He comn here this morning an' he towed me aw I want to know about thee, Seth Lonas—an' more, too."

"He comn to me," put in the man. She advanced toward the table and struck it once with her hand.

"Tha'st towed me a power o' lies," she said. "Tha's lied to me fro' first to last to serve thy own eends, an' tha'st gained on 'em—tha'st lied me away fro' th' man as wur aw th' world to me, but th' time's comn now when thy day's o'er an' his is comn agen. Ah! thou bitter villin! Does ta mind how tha comn an' towed me Dan Morgan had gone to th' fair at Lake wi' that lass o' Barnegats? That wor a lie an' that wor th' beginnin'. Does ta mind how tha towed me as he made light o' me when th' lads an' lasses plagued him, an' threeped 'em down as he dinna mean to marry no such like lass as me—him as wor ready to dee fur me? That wor a lie an' that wor th' eend-in', as tha knew it would be, fur I spurned him fro' me th' very neest day, and wouldna listen when he tried to straighten out. But he got at th' truth at last when he wor fur fro' here, an' he browt th' truth back to me today, an' ther's th' end fur thee—husband or no."

The man lay with his head upon his arms until she had finished, and then he looked up all white and shaken and blind.

"Wilt ta listen if I speak to thee?" he asked.

"Aye," she answered, "listen to more lies!"

And she slipped down into a sitting posture on the door-step and sat there, her great eyes staring out seaward, her hands lying loose upon her knee and trembling.

There was something more in her mood than resentment. In this simple gesture she had broken down as she had never broken down in her life before. There was passionate grief in her face, a wild sort of despair, such as one might see in a suddenly-wounded, untamed creature. Hers was not a fair nature. I am not telling the story of a gentle, true-souled woman—I am simply relating the incidents of one bitter day whose tragic close was the ending of a rough romance.

Her life had been a long battle against the world's scorn; she had been either on the offensive or the defensive from childhood to womanhood, and then she had caught one glimpse of light and warmth, clung to it yearningly for one brief hour, and lost it.

Only today she had learned that she had lost it through treachery. She had not dared to believe in her bliss, even during its fairest existence; and so, when light-hearted,