

A person with long dark hair is seen from behind, looking out a window. The view outside is a snowy, hilly landscape under a pale sky. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The person's hair is dark and falls over their shoulders. The window frame is visible on the left and right sides.

***LEONARD
MERRICK***

***ONE
MAN'S
VIEW***

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MAN'S
VIEW***

Leonard Merrick

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INTRODUCTION

This story can be said to date, though quite in the sense that a story legitimately may. It is historic, though that is not to say old-fashioned. If one searches by internal evidence for the time of its writing, 1889 might be a safe guess. It was about then that many Londoners (besides the American girls in the story) were given their first glimpse of Niagara at the Panorama near Victoria Street. The building is a motor garage now; it lies beneath the cliffs of Queen Anne's Mansions; aeroplanes may discover its queer round roof. And it was in an ageing past too—for architectural ages veritably flash by in New York—that Broadway could be said to spread into the "brightness of Union Square." To-day there is but a chaos of dingy decay owing to that name. Soon it will be smart skyscrapers, no doubt; when the tide of business has covered it, as now the tide of fashion leaves it derelict. Duluth, too, with its "storekeepers spitting on wooden sidewalks"! Duluth foresees a Lake Front that will rival Chicago.

But in such honest "dating," and in the inferences we may draw from it, lie perhaps some of the peculiar merits of Mr. Merrick's method—his straight telling of a tale. And digging to the heart of the book, the One Man's View of his faithless wife—more importantly too, the wife's view of herself—is, in a sense, an "historic" view. Not, of course, in its human essentials. Those must be true or false of this man and this woman whenever, however they lived and suffered. Such sufferings are dateless. And whether they are truly or falsely told, let the reader judge. No preface-writer

need pre-judge for him. For in such things, the teller of the tale, from the heart of his subject, speaks straight to the heart and conscience of his audience, and will succeed or fail by no measurable virtue of style or wit, but by the truth that is in him, by how much of it they are open to receive.

Look besides with ever so slightly an historical eye at the circumstances in which the lives of these two were set to grow, and to flourish or perish, as it was easier or harder to tend them. See the girl with her simple passion for the theatre—so apt a channel for her happy ambition as it appears—and that baulked, her very life baulked. To-day, this war-day, and most surely for the immediate enfranchised to-morrow breaking so close, the same girl will turn her back light-heartedly on the glamour of that little tinselled world to many another prospect of self-fulfilment.

And the lawyer, lost in his law. If a Solicitor-Generalship is his aim, he will be worldly-wise enough, one hopes, to come home not too tired to make at least a passably attractive figure at his wife's well-chosen dinner-parties. Or is that phase of English government now also to pass? No; for probably a country will always be governed from its dinner-tables, while its well-being is finally determined by their quality! Mamie to-day, though, would be doing more than give dinners. It is a question if the Mamie of to-morrow will have time to.

And the literary flâneur—the half-hearted seducer of passionless ladies—is he out of date? Mr. Merrick implies the quite wholesome truth that he always was. Through books and bookish dreams—beautiful, wise dreams—lies the passage to life of many boys and girls. But the healthiest

instincts in them are seeking still a real world in which it will be both sane and fine to live. Their dreams are mostly a hard test of it when it is found; and, oh, the pity if the finding it quite breaks their dream!

In sum, then, it was Mamie's tragedy to seek her realities during a phase of art and letters which, in their utter unreality, seemed to deny the very existence of any real world at all. Neither true art nor true letters then; they were so turning from reality with fear.

Are they still denying it to-day? If so this story does not date at all, and Mamie's tragedy is a tragedy of our time. For tragedy it is, even though in *One Man's View* she finds at last reposeful salvation of a sort. But our hope is better. And half our pleasure in the story and in its historical truth is the thought that, true author as he is, were he writing it to-day, and of to-day, Mr. Merrick would have written it just so much differently.

Granville Barker.

CHAPTER I

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The idea was so foreign to his temperament that Heriot was reluctant to believe that he had entertained it even during a few seconds. He continued his way past the big pink house and the girl on the balcony, surprised at the interest roused in him by this chance discovery of her address. Of what consequence was it where she was staying? He had noticed her on the terrace, by the bandstand one morning, and admired her. In other words, he had

unconsciously attributed to the possessor of a delicious complexion, and a pair of grey eyes, darkly fringed, vague characteristics to which she was probably a stranger. He had seen her the next day also, and the next—even hoped to see her; speculated quite idly what her social position might be, and how she came beside the impossible woman who accompanied her. All that was nothing; his purpose in coming to Eastbourne was to be trivial. But why the sense of gratification with which he had learnt where she lived?

As to the idea which had crossed his brain, that was preposterous! Of course, since the pink house was a boarding establishment, he might, if he would, make her acquaintance by the simple expedient of removing there, but he did not know how he could have meditated such a step. It was the sort of semi-disreputable folly that a man a decade or so younger might commit and describe as a "lark." No doubt many men a decade or so younger would commit it. He could conceive that a freshly-painted balcony, displaying a pretty girl for an hour or two every afternoon, might serve to extend the clientèle of a boarding-house enormously, and wondered that more attention had not been paid to such a form of advertisement. For himself, however—— His hair was already thinning at the temples; solicitors were deferential to him, and his clerk was taking a villa in Brixton; for himself, it would not do!

Eastbourne was depressing, he reflected, as he strolled towards the dumpy Wish Tower. He was almost sorry that he hadn't gone to Sandhills and quartered himself on his brother for a week or two instead. Francis was always pleased to meet him of recent years, and no longer

remarked early in the conversation that he was "overdrawn at Cox's." On the whole, Francis was not a bad fellow, and Sandhills and pheasants would have been livelier.

He stifled a yawn, and observed with relief that it was near the dinner-hour. In the evening he turned over the papers in the smoking-room. He perceived, as he often did perceive in the vacations, that he was lonely. Vacations were a mistake: early in one's career one could not afford them, and by the time one was able to afford them, the taste for holidays was gone. This hotel was dreary, too. The visitors were dull, and the cooking was indifferent. What could be more tedious than the meal from which he had just risen?—the feeble soup, the flaccid fish, the uninterrupted view of the stout lady with the aquiline nose, and a red shawl across her shoulders. Now he was lolling on a morocco couch, fingering the *The Field*; two or three other men lay about, napping, or looking at the *The Graphic*. There was a great deal of tobacco-smoke, and a little whisky; he might as well have stopped in town and gone to the Club. He wondered what they did in Belle Vue Mansion after dinner. Perhaps there was music, and the girl sang? he could fancy that she sang well. Or they might have impromptu dances? Personally he did not care for dancing, but even to see others enjoying themselves would be comparatively gay. After all, why should he not remove to Belle Vue Mansion if he wished? He had attached a significance to the step that it did not possess, making it appear absurd by the very absurdity of the consideration that he accorded it. He remembered the time when he would not have hesitated—those were the days when Francis was always "overdrawn at

Cox's." Well, he had worked hard since then, and anything that Francis might have lent him had been repaid, and he had gradually acquired soberer views of life. Perhaps he might be said to have gone to an extreme, indeed, and taken the pledge! He sometimes felt old, and he was still in the thirties. Francis was the younger of the two of late, although he had a boy in the Brigade; but elder sons often kept young very long—it was easy for them, like the way of righteousness to a bishop.... A waiter cast an inquiring glance round the room, and, crossing to the sofa, handed him a card. Heriot read the name with astonishment; he had not seen the man for sixteen years, and even their irregular correspondence had died a natural death.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed in the hall. "Come inside."

In the past, of which he had just been thinking, he and Dick Cheriton had been staunch friends, none the less staunch because Cheriton was some years his senior. Dick had a studio in Howland Street then, and was going to set the Academy on fire. In the meanwhile he wore a yellow necktie, and married madly, and smoked a clay pipe; he could not guarantee that he would be an R.A., but at least he was resolved that he would be a bohemian. He had some of the qualifications for artistic success, but little talent. When he discovered the fact beyond the possibility of mistake, he accepted a relative's offer of a commercial berth in the United States, and had his hair cut. The valedictory supper in the studio, at which he had renounced ambition, and solemnly burned all his canvases that the dealers would not buy, had been a very affecting spectacle.

"My dear fellow!" cried Heriot. "Come inside. This is a tremendous pleasure. When did you arrive?"

"Came over in the *Germanic*, ten days ago. It *is* you, then; I saw 'George Heriot' in the Visitors' List, and strolled round on the chance. I scarcely hoped—— How are you, old man? I'm mighty glad to see you—fact!"

"You've been here ten days?"

"Not here, no; I've only been in Eastbourne a few hours."

"You should have looked me up in town."

"I tried. Your chambers were shut."

"The hall-porter at the Club——"

"What club? You forget what an exile I am!"

"Have a drink? Well, upon my word, this is very jolly! Sit down; try one of these."

"Would you have recognised me?" asked Cheriton, stretching his legs, and lighting the cigar.

"You've changed," admitted Heriot; "it's a long time. I've changed too."

They regarded each other with a gaze of friendly criticism. Heriot noted with some surprise that the other's appearance savoured little of the American man of business, or of the man of business outside America. His hair, though less disordered than it had been in the Howland Street period, was still rather longer than is customary in the City. It was now grey, and became him admirably. He wore a black velvet jacket, and showed a glimpse of a deep crimson tie. He no longer looked a bohemian, but he had acquired the air of a celebrity.

"Have you come home for good, Cheriton?"

Cheriton shook his head.

"I guess America has got me for life," he answered; "I'm only making a trip. And you? You're still at the Bar, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Heriot drily; "I'm still at the Bar." It is not agreeable, when you have succeeded in a profession, to be asked if you are in it still. "I've travelled along the lines on which you left me—it doesn't make an exciting narrative. Chambers, court, and bed. A laundress or two has died in the interval. The thing pays better than it used to do, naturally; that's all."

"You're doing well?"

"I should have called it 'doing well' once; but we are all Oliver's in our hearts. To-day——"

"Mistake!" said the elder man. "You wanted the Bar—you've got the Bar; you ought to be satisfied. Now /——"

"Yes?" said Heriot, as he paused. "How's the world used you, Cheriton? By the way, you never answered my last letter, I think."

"It was *you* who didn't answer *me*."

"I fancy not. You were going to Chicago, and I wrote——"

"I wrote after I arrived in Chicago."

"Well, it must be five years ago; we won't argue. What did you do in Chicago, Cheriton?"

"No good, sir. I went there with a patent horse-collar. Capital invention—not my own, I never invented anything!—but it didn't catch on. They seemed to take no interest in horse-collars; no money in it, not a cent! After the horse-collar I started in the dry-goods trade; but I was burned out. From Chicago I went to Duluth; I've an hotel there to-day."

"An hotel?"

"That's so. It isn't a distinguished career, running a little hotel, but it's fairly easy. Compared with hustling with horse-collars it's luxurious. Duluth is not ideal, but what would you have! I make my way, and that's all I ask now. If I had my life over again——" He sighed. "If we could have our lives over again, eh, Heriot?"

"Humph!" said Heriot doubtfully; he was wondering if he could make any better use of his own—if he would be any livelier the next time he was eight-and-thirty. "I suppose we all blunder, of course."

"*You* are a young man yet; it's different for you; and you're in the profession of your choice: it's entirely different. We don't look at the thing from the same standpoint, Heriot."

"You don't mean that you regret giving up Art?"

"Sir," said Cheriton mournfully, "it was the error I shall always regret. I wouldn't say as much to anybody else; I keep it here"—he tapped his velvet jacket—"but I had a gift, and I neglected it; I had power, and—and I run an hotel. When I reflect, man, there are hours—well, it's no use crying over spilt milk; but to think of the position I should have made, and to contrast it with what I am, is bitter!" He swept back his wavy hair impatiently, and in the momentary pose looked more like a celebrity still.

Heriot could see that the cherished delusion gave him a melancholy pleasure, and was at a loss how to reply. "It was uphill work," he said at last. "Who can tell? Luck——"

"I was a lad, an impetuous lad; and I was handicapped—I married." The man with a failure to explain is always grateful to have married. "But I had the stuff in me, I had

the temperament. 'Had' it? I have it now! I may keep an hotel, but I shall never be an hotel-keeper. God gave me my soul, sir; circumstances gave me an hotel. I mayn't paint any more, but an artist by nature I shall always be. I don't say it in any bragging spirit, Heriot; I should be happier if I didn't feel it. The commonplace man may be contented in the commonplace calling: he fills the rôle he was meant for. It's the poor devil like myself, who knows what he *might* have been, who suffers."

Heriot didn't pursue the subject; he puffed his cigar meditatively. After the effervescence subsides, such meetings must always have a little sadness; he looked at the wrinkles that had gathered on his friend's face, and realised the crow's-feet on his own.

"You lost your wife, you wrote me?" he remarked, breaking a rather lengthy silence.

"In New York, yes—pneumonia. *You* never married, eh?"

"No. Do you stay over here long?"

"A month or two; I can't manage more. But I shall leave my girl in London. I've brought her with me, and she'll remain."

"Of course," said Heriot, "you have a child—of course you have! I remember a little thing tumbling about in Howland Street. She must be a woman, Cheriton?"

"Mamie is twenty-one. I want to see if I can do anything for her before I go back. She loathes Duluth; and she has talent. She'll live with my sister. I don't think you ever saw my sister, did you? She's a widow, and stagnates in Wandsworth—Mamie will be company for her."

"Your daughter paints?"