

*LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES*

*THE SON'S VETO*

## LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

### THE SON'S VETO

#### I

To the eye of a man viewing it from behind, the nut-brown hair was a wonder and a mystery. Under the black beaver hat,<sup>1</sup> surmounted by its tuft of black feathers, the long locks, braided and twisted and coiled like the rushes of a basket, composed a rare, if somewhat barbaric, example of ingenious art. One could understand such weavings and coilings being wrought to last intact for a year, or even a calendar month; but that they should be all demolished regularly at bedtime, after a single day of permanence, seemed a reckless waste of successful fabrication.

And she had done it all herself, poor thing. She had no maid, and it was almost the only accomplishment she could boast of. Hence the unstinted pains.

She was a young invalid lady—not so very much of an invalid—sitting in a wheeled chair, which had been pulled up in the front part of a green enclosure, close to a band-stand, where a concert was going on, during a warm June afternoon. It had place in one of the minor parks or private gardens that are to be found in the suburbs of London, and was the effort of a local association to raise money for some charity. There are worlds within worlds in the great city, and though nobody outside the immediate district

4 eye] eyes E1 [*and printed texts except ILN*] 4 it MS2] her MS1

5 surmounted by MS2] with MS1 6 the long MS2] these MS1

6 and twisted and MS2] and MS1

7 rare, if somewhat barbaric,] whole which was a <finished> ^rare^ MS

9 last intact for] last ILN 9 calendar month] month only MS, ILN

9–10 that they should ... at bedtime] to be all <undone> ^demolished^ again at <night>

^bedtime^ MS] that they should be all demolished again at bedtime ILN

10 seemed] it seemed MS

15–16 sitting in a wheeled chair,] sitting in a wheeled chair [*transposed in MS from after was in previous line*]

17–18 on, during a warm June afternoon] on MS1] one warm June afternoon MS2

19 that are to be MS2] <wh[ich]> that may be MS1

18–19 garden] gardens MS, ILN

## LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

had ever heard of the charity, or the band, or the garden, the enclosure was filled with an interested audience sufficiently informed on all these.

As the strains proceeded many of the listeners observed the chaired lady, whose back hair, by reason of her prominent position, so challenged  
 5 inspection. Her face was not easily discernible, but the aforesaid cunning tress-weavings, the white ear and poll,<sup>2</sup> and the curve of a cheek which was neither flaccid nor sallow, were signals that led to the expectation of good beauty in front. Such expectations are not infrequently disappointed as soon as the disclosure comes; and in the present case, when the lady, by a  
 10 turn of the head, at length revealed herself, she was not so handsome as the people behind her had supposed, and even hoped—they did not know why.

For one thing (alas! the commonness of this complaint), she was less young than they had fancied her to be. Yet attractive her face unquestionably was, and not at all sickly. The revelation of its details came each time  
 15 she turned to talk to a boy of twelve or thirteen who stood beside her, and the shape of whose hat and jacket implied that he belonged to a well-known public school. The immediate bystanders could hear that he called her “Mother.”

When the end of the recital was reached, and the audience withdrew,  
 20 many chose to find their way out by passing at her elbow. Almost all turned

- 2 sufficiently informed on all these] who seemed to know all about each MS  
 3 chaired MS2] lady in the chair MS1 4 prominent MS1, MS3] forward MS2  
 5 inspection MS2] attention MS1 5–6 cunning tress-weavings MS2] hair weavings MS1  
 6 the curve of a cheek] <a cheek> ^the^ curve of ^a cheek^ MS 7 signals MS2] traits MS1  
 7 good MS2] more MS1  
 8–9 as soon as the disclosure comes; GR] by the <event> ^disclosure^ MS] on a disclosure, ILN  
 10 handsome MS2] beautiful MS1  
 11 why. ¶ For one ... this complaint),] why. ^¶^ Yet attractive <she> ^her face^ unquestionably was, notwithstanding that MS1] why. ^¶^ For one thing (alas, the commonness of this complaint),^ MS2  
 13 fancied her to be MS2] fancied MS1  
 14 MS was ^<seen to be>^ <whenever she revealed it>; and  
 14 The revelation of ... each time] Each revelation came whenever MS1] The revelation came each time MS2, ILN  
 15 MS who <sat in> ^<had c>^ stood 16 the shape of whose MS2] whose MS1  
 16 implied MS2] suggested MS1 19 MS When <at> the  
 19 recital was reached, and] <performance> recital ^was reached and^ MS recital was reached and ILN] programme was reached, and A1  
 20 chose to find MS2] found MS1  
 20 Almost MS3] They almost MS1] <Near[ly]> almost MS2

## THE SON'S VETO

their heads to take a full and near look at the interesting woman, who remained stationary in the chair till the way should be clear enough for her to be wheeled out without obstruction. As if she expected their glances, and did not mind gratifying their curiosity, she met the eyes of several of her observers by lifting her own, showing these to be soft, brown, and affection-  
 ate orbs, a little plaintive in their regard. 5

She was conducted out of the gardens, and passed along the pavement till she disappeared from view, the schoolboy walking beside her. To inquiries made by some persons who watched her away, the answer came that she was the second wife of the incumbent of a neighbouring parish, and that  
 she was lame. She was generally believed to be a woman with a story—an  
 innocent one, but a story of some sort or other. 10

In conversing with her on their way home the boy who walked at her elbow said that he hoped his father had not missed them.

"He have been so comfortable these last few hours that I am sure he cannot have missed us," she replied. 15

"*Has*, dear mother—not *have!*" exclaimed the public-school boy, with an impatient fastidiousness that was almost harsh. "Surely you know that by this time!"

His mother hastily adopted the correction, and did not resent his making it, or retaliate, as she might well have done, by bidding him to wipe that crumby mouth of his, whose condition had been caused by surreptitious attempts to eat a piece of cake without taking it out of the pocket wherein it lay concealed. After this the pretty woman and the boy went onward in  
 silence. 20  
 25

1 take MS2] give MS1 3 MS to <get> be

4 met the eyes MS2] lifted her eyes and met those MS1 7 gardens] garden A1

8–9 inquiries made by ... watched her MS2] those who inquired if it was known who she was MS1

9 came] was returned MS 10 MS was ^<believed to be>^ the <wif[e]> second

10 the incumbent of a neighbouring MS2] a neighbouring vicar MS1

11 She was generally believed to be MS2] It was believed she was MS1

11 MS a <histo[ry]> story 13 way home MS2] way MS1] way home, ILN

16 she replied MS2] replied his mother MS1 17 MS <sai[d]> exclaimed

17 with an MS2] with MS1 20 adopted the MS2] corrected herself MS1

20 and MS2] but MS1 21 might well MS2] might MS1

21–22 that crumby mouth MS2] his crumby mouth which MS1

22 surreptitious] his surreptitious MS

24 After this the ... the boy MS2] <Then> After this they MS1

## LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

That question of grammar bore upon her history, and she fell into reverie, of a somewhat sad kind to all appearance. It might have been assumed that she was wondering if she had done wisely in shaping her life as she had shaped it, to bring out such a result as this.

- 5 In a remote nook in North Wessex, forty miles from London, near the thriving county-town of Aldbrickham,<sup>3</sup> there stood a pretty village with its church and parsonage, which she knew well enough, but her son had never seen. It was her native village, Gaymead,<sup>4</sup> and the first event bearing upon her present situation had occurred at that place when she was only a girl of  
 10 nineteen.

How well she remembered it, that first act in her little tragi-comedy, the death of her reverend husband's first wife. It happened on a spring evening, and she who now and for many years had filled that first wife's place was then parlour-maid in the parson's house.

- 15 When everything had been done that could be done, and the death was announced, she had gone out in the dusk to visit her parents, who were living in the same village, to tell them the sad news. As she opened the white swing-gate and looked towards the trees which rose westward, shutting out the pale light of the evening sky, she discovered, without much surprise, the  
 20 figure of a man standing in the hedge, though she roguishly exclaimed as a matter of form, "Oh, Sam, how you frightened me!"

He was a young gardener of her acquaintance. She told him the particulars of the late event, and they stood silent, these two young people, in that elevated, calmly philosophic mood which is engendered when a tragedy has

1 reverie,] reflection MS1] reverie MS2

5–6 North Wessex, forty ... of Aldbrickham GR] Upper Wessex MS1] North Wessex forty miles from London MS2] North Wessex, forty miles from London, near the town of Oldbrickham ILN

6 village MS2] vicarage MS1 8 village, Gaymead GR] village MS, ILN

9 MS occurred <there> at 11 tragi-comedy,] comedy; MS1] tragi-comedy; MS2

12 her reverend GR] her MS, ILN 12 happened MS1] occurred MS1

13 MS now <filled> and 14 then parlour-maid] parlourmaid MS] then parlor-maid A1

15 MS When <the> everything 15 had been done ... be done] was over MS, ILN

17 MS village, <&> to 18 rose] stood MS

20 man MS1] man ^a young gardener of her acquaintance^ MS2

20 she roguishly MS2] she MS1 21 Sam,] Ned; MS] Ned, ILN

22 He was a ... acquaintance. She MS2] Then she MS1 22–23 the particulars MS1] particulars MS2

24 elevated, calmly philosophic mood] elevated philosophic mood MS] elevated, calmly philosophic mind E1

24 when a MS2] when MS1

THE SON'S VETO

happened close at hand, and has not happened to the philosophers themselves. But it had its bearing upon their relations.

"And will you stay on now at the Vicarage, just the same?" asked he.  
 She had hardly thought of that. "Oh, yes—I suppose!" she said.  
 "Everything will be just as usual, I imagine?"

He walked beside her towards her mother's. Presently his arm stole round her waist. She gently removed it; but he placed it there again, and she yielded the point. "You see, dear Sophy, you don't know that you'll stay on; you may want a home; and I shall be ready to offer one some day, though I may not be ready just yet."

"Why, Sam, how can you be so fast! I've never even said I liked 'ee; and it is all your own doing, coming after me!"

"Still, it is nonsense to say I am not to have a try at you like the rest." He stooped to kiss her a farewell, for they had reached her mother's door.

"No, Sam; you sha'n't!" she cried, putting her hand over his mouth. "You ought to be more serious on such a night as this." And she bade him adieu without allowing him to kiss her or to come indoors.

The vicar just left a widower was at this time a man about forty years of age, of good family, and childless. He had led a secluded existence in this college living,<sup>1</sup> partly because there were no resident landowners; and his loss now intensified his habit of withdrawal from outward observation. He was still less seen than heretofore, kept himself still less in time with the rhythm and racket of the movements called progress in the world without.

1 happened close at hand GR] happened MS, ILN 2 bearing] bearings MS, ILN  
 4 She had hardly ... she said.] 'O yes—I suppose.' She had hardly thought of that. MS1] 'O yes—I suppose.' she said She had hardly thought of that. MS2  
 5 usual, I imagine?"] usual.' MS1] usual, I imagine; she added. MS2] usual, I imagine.' MS3, ILN, A1  
 8 you don't MS2] you'll h[?] MS1 9 be ready MS2] be MS1  
 11 Sam,] Ned; MS] Ned, ILN 11 never even MS2] never MS1  
 12 MS coming <like> after 13 you GR] 'ee, MS, ILN] you, A1  
 14 her a farewell MS2] her MS1 15 Sam;] Ned— MS] Ned; ILN  
 15 cried, putting her ... his mouth MS2] cried. MS1  
 16 this."] this! <A[nd]> [transposed to line above:] putting her hand over his mouth MS  
 17 him to kiss her or MS2] him MS1  
 18 vicar just left a widower] vicar, now a widower, MS] vicar left a widower ILN  
 19 had led] led MS 19 MS secluded <life> existence 19 this MS2] a MS1  
 20 living, partly because ... resident landowners; MS2] living, MS1  
 22 still less seen] seen still less W 22 time MS2] touch MS1

## LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

For many months after his wife's decease the economy of his household remained as before; the cook, the housemaid, the parlour-maid, and the man out-of-doors performed their duties or left them undone, just as Nature prompted them—the vicar knew not which. It was then represented to him that his servants seemed to have nothing to do in his small family of one. He was struck with the truth of this representation, and decided to cut down his establishment. But he was forestalled by Sophy, the parlour-maid, who said one evening that she wished to leave him.

"And why?" said the parson.

"Sam Hobson has asked me to marry him, sir."

"Well—do you want to marry?"

"Not much. But it would be a home for me. And we have heard that one of us will have to leave."

A day or two after she said: "I don't want to leave just yet, sir, if you don't wish it. Sam and I have quarrelled."

He looked up at her. He had hardly ever observed her before, though he had been frequently conscious of her soft presence in the room. What a kitten-like, flexuous, tender creature she was! She was the only one of the servants with whom he came into immediate and continuous relation.

What should he do if Sophy were gone?

Sophy did not go, but one of the others did, and things went on quietly again.

When Mr. Twycott, the vicar, was ill, Sophy brought up his meals to him, and she had no sooner left the room one day than he heard a noise on the

1 the economy of his MS<sub>3</sub>] his MS<sub>1</sub>] the internal economy of his MS<sub>2</sub>

2 MS housemaid, <&> the

2–3 parlour-maid, and the man out-of-doors] parlourmaid, MS<sub>1</sub>] parlourmaid, and the man out of doors, MS<sub>2</sub>, ILN] parlor-maid, and the man out-of-doors A<sub>1</sub>

4 Nature] nature MS, A<sub>1</sub> 4 them—the vicar] them; he MS

5 his small family] such a meagre household MS<sub>1</sub>] his small household MS<sub>2</sub>

10 Sam] Ned MS, ILN 12 MS <Someth> 'Not much

14–15 A day or ... have quarrelled."] A day or two after she said: 'I don't want to leave just yet, sir, if you don't wish it. Ned and I have quarrelled.' <a bit.> [*transposed in MS from after was three lines below*]

15 Sam] Ned MS, ILN 17 frequently conscious MS<sub>2</sub>] conscious MS<sub>1</sub>

18 was! She was the only one] was. MS<sub>1</sub>] was. [*added when transposition was effected:*] She was the only one MS<sub>2</sub>

19 immediate and continuous relation GR] immediate relations MS] immediate relation ILN

21 went on] proceeded A<sub>1</sub> 23 Twycott, the vicar, MS<sub>2</sub>] Twycott MS<sub>1</sub>

## THE SON'S VETO

stairs. She had slipped down with the tray, and so twisted her foot that she could not stand. The village surgeon was called in; the vicar got better, but Sophy was incapacitated for a long time; and she was informed that she must never again walk much or engage in any occupation which required her to stand long on her feet. As soon as she was comparatively well she spoke to him alone. Since she was forbidden to walk and bustle about, and, indeed, could not do so, it became her duty to leave. She could very well work at something sitting down, and she had an aunt a seamstress. 5

The parson had been very greatly moved by what she had suffered on his account, and he exclaimed, "No, Sophy; lame or not lame, I cannot let you go. You must never leave me again!" 10

He came close to her, and, though she could never exactly tell how it happened, she became conscious of his lips upon her cheek. He then asked her to marry him. Sophy did not exactly love him, but she had a respect for him which almost amounted to veneration. Even if she had wished to get away from him she hardly dared refuse a personage so reverend and august in her eyes, and she assented forthwith to be his wife. 15

Thus it happened that one fine morning, when the doors of the church were naturally open for ventilation, and the singing birds fluttered in and alighted on the tie-beams<sup>6</sup> of the roof, there was a marriage-service at the communion-rails, which hardly a soul knew of. The parson and a neighbouring curate had entered at one door, and Sophy at another, followed by two necessary persons, whereupon in a short time there emerged a newly-made husband and wife. 20

2 The village MS2] A MS1 3 incapacitated MS2] lame MS1

4 again walk much or MS2] again MS1 9 by MS2] at MS1

10 and MS <in a moment she> he

11 me again! MS2] me MS1] me again. A1 13 her cheek] hers MS, ILN

13–14 He then asked ... him. Sophy] Though she MS1] He then asked her to marry him. ¶ Sophy MS2

14 but she MS2] she MS1 14 MS a <great> respect

16 refuse MS2] offend MS1 16 reverend and august] august MS, ILN

19–20 singing birds fluttered in and alighted MS2] song-notes of the birds wandered into the roof and tower MS1

21 MS <chancel> communion-rails

22 and Sophy MS2] Sophy MS1 23 whereupon] and MS1] till MS2

23–24 newly-made husband and wife. ¶] man and <an> his wife. MS1] new husband and wife. ¶ MS2



## LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

Mr. Twycott knew perfectly well that he had committed social suicide by this step, despite Sophy's spotless character, and he had taken his measures accordingly. An exchange of livings had been arranged with an acquaintance who was incumbent of a church in the south of London, and as soon  
 5 as possible the couple removed thither, abandoning their pretty country home, with trees and shrubs and glebe,<sup>7</sup> for a narrow, dusty house in a long, straight street, and their fine peal of bells for the wretchedest one-tongued clangour that ever tortured mortal ears. It was all on her account. They were, however, away from every one who had known her former position;  
 10 and also under less observation from without than they would have had to put up with in any country parish.

Sophy the woman was as charming a partner as a man could possess, though Sophy the lady had her deficiencies. She showed a natural aptitude for little domestic refinements, so far as related to things and manners; but  
 15 in what is called culture she was less intuitive. She had now been married more than fourteen years, and her husband had taken much trouble with her education; but she still held confused ideas on the use of "was" and "were," which did not beget a respect for her among the few acquaintances she made. Her great grief in this relation was that her only child, on whose  
 20 education no expense had been and would be spared, was now old enough to perceive these deficiencies in his mother, and not only to see them but to feel irritated at their existence.

Thus she lived on in the city, and wasted hours in braiding her beautiful hair, till her once apple cheeks waned to pink of the very faintest.

5 the couple MS<sub>2</sub>] they MS<sub>1</sub> 6 glebe,] field MS<sub>1</sub>] glebe MS<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> 5 their MS<sub>2</sub>] a MS<sub>1</sub>  
 7–8 one-tongued clangour that ever tortured] one-tongued clang [clang *transposed from before*  
 one-tongued] ever heard by MS<sub>1</sub>] one-tongued clang that ever tortured MS<sub>2</sub>  
 10 and also] moreover MS 11 any] <any> ^any^ MS  
 12–13 ¶ Sophy the woman ... her deficiencies. [*full stop inserted GR*] Sophy the woman was  
 as charming a partner as a man could <have> ^possess^, though Sophy the lady had her  
 deficiencies. [*transposed from after thither 8.1*] MS, ILN  
 13 showed MS<sub>2</sub>] had MS<sub>1</sub> 14–15 MS <& thi> but <fo> in 15 had now MS<sub>2</sub>] had MS<sub>1</sub>  
 16 fourteen GR] thirteen MS, ILN  
 17 held confused] had many different MS<sub>1</sub>] had confused MS<sub>2</sub>  
 19–22 Her great grief ... their existence.] [*added in MS after deletion of "T[hus]" which would have*  
*started the next paragraph*]  
 19 MS only <son> child  
 20 had been and would GR] was to MS] would ILN] had been or would A<sub>1</sub>  
 23–24 and wasted hours ... very faintest GR] her once cherry cheeks grew ^lily-^pale MS, ILN

THE SON’S VETO

Her foot had never regained its natural strength after the accident, and she was mostly obliged to avoid walking altogether. Her husband had grown to like London for its freedom and its domestic privacy; but he was twenty years his Sophy’s senior, and had latterly been seized with a serious illness. On this day, however, he had seemed to be well enough to justify her accompanying her son Randolph to the concert. 5

II

The next time we get a glimpse of her is when she appears in the mournful attire of a widow.

Mr. Twycott had never rallied, and now lay in a well-packed cemetery to the south of the great city, where, if all the dead it contained had stood erect and alive, not one would have known him or recognized his name. The boy had dutifully followed him to the grave, and was now again at school. 10

Throughout these changes Sophy had been treated like the child she was in nature though not in years. She was left with no control over anything that had been her husband’s beyond her modest personal income. In his anxiety lest her inexperience should be overreached he had safeguarded with trustees all he possibly could. The completion of the boy’s course at the public school, to be followed in due time by Oxford and ordination, had been all provisioned and arranged, and she really had nothing to occupy her in the world but to eat and drink, and make a business of 15 20

1 Her foot had ... natural strength] She had never been strong on her feet MS1] Her foot had never regained <the> its natural strength MS2  
1 and she MS2] and MS1  
2–3 husband had grown ... but he MS3] husband, who had never liked London save as a screen, and who MS1] husband, who had acquired no love for London save as a screen, and who MS2  
4 Sophy’s senior, and] wife’s senior MS1] Sophy’s senior and MS2  
4 seized with MS2] taken in MS1 6 son Randolph] son MS  
8 of] which proclaimed her to be MS] that proclaims her to be ILN  
10 well-packed cemetery] cemetery MS, ILN  
11 great city,] metropolis, MS] Metropolis, ILN, G] Great City, GR  
12–13 boy had dutifully ... grave, and MS2] boy MS1  
15 nature though not in years] nature ILN 16 her modest MS2] the modest MS1  
18 with trustees all he possibly could MS2] all he possibly could with trustees MS1  
18 course MS2] education MS1 19 time MS2] order MS1 20 her] herself with MS