

Let Not Man Put Asunder

"If your last word ends with an *N*, I can prove you wrong by—"

"Doing it yourself. Let it be *N* or *M*, then, as you please, so long as I deliver my soul."

"Let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

"I see you have been studying the marriage service. You will remember, then, that immediately before the words you have quoted there is a charge requiring any man who can show just cause why *N* and *M* may not be lawfully joined together to declare it."

"I remember that there is something of the sort."

"Then he would be no true friend who failed to show the impediment before things had gone too far?"

"I don't see what you are driving at, but go on."

"Therefore I stand here on this balcony, this lovely New Hampshire night, and forbid the banns. That is to say, I sit rather than stand, and object rather than forbid."

"On what ground?"

"On the ground that any man is mad who of his own voluntary act gives himself away in mind, body, income, liberty, and sometimes in very soul."

"Then your objection is not to my banns in particular, but to all banns in general?"

"To yours in particular, because they are yours. I don't want to see my old friend run his head into a halter out of which he can never wriggle without a good deal of choking. I've gone through that myself, you know. I should like to keep you out of it."

Vassall stirred uneasily. In the three months in which Lechmere and he had passed most of their leisure time together no reference had ever been made to that marriage and divorce whose details had been given in the press of two continents. Vassall had studiously