

Let Not Man Put Asunder

"You don't want to show your hand," said Lechmere, feeling checked again.

"I have none. The cards have not yet been dealt me. A girl, even at twenty-three as I am—"

"Holds the pack and has the deal."

"But the deal depends upon the cut, and the cut upon the cutter."

"And the cutter," said Lechmere, a little bitterly, "depends upon nothing but the blindest chance. That is the hard part of this life. He may give his opponent all the trumps and know nothing of it till the hand is played."

"So that your advice would be—?"

"To keep out of the game."

"And yet you haven't done so."

"I have played and—lost."

"You haven't the air of the vanquished."

"It is the poor devil that goes humming and smiling away from the *salles-de-jeu* who shoots himself behind the first clump of cactus."

"But he has had the excitement," said Petrina, with a certain lifting of the head.

"That is her first confession," Lechmere thought.

"Do you say that?" he asked aloud. "I had begun to think—but perhaps I ought not to say it."

"By all means. I shall not be offended."

"I had begun to think that you were one of those prudent modern women who will not risk the stakes they hold for fear of losing them."

"They keep out of the game. I understand that to be your counsel."

"A counsel given in haste, but not to be taken at leisure. In knocking about the world I see so many of my countrywomen who will not risk income and independence for higher joys."