THEY MEET AGAIN.

Decked in the sheeniest of white robes, Alene floated down the wide lawn of Ellerby Hall.

Nestling in her gold-brown hair were rose-tipped apple-blossoms, and clustering over her dress were the same sweet-scented blooms which she had gathered from the queenly trees of the orchard not far away, where each stood out a perfect dream of beauty against the pale-blue sky. Not more fairy-like were they, not more beautifully tinted, than Alene Ellerby herself. So at least thought the young man who joined her—Raymond Ogere.

But he sighed as he gazed upon the pretty vision before him, who had promised herself to another only the day before. Promised to marry Robert Willis, a man for whom Raymond felt some contempt, as being too superficial and weak to deserve the consideration of a girl like Alene Ellerby. Indeed, it had been a great surprise to him, for in his acquaintance with Alene he had studied well her character, and having seen something of the world and women, Raymond had felt that she inclined kindly toward himself, and some day he had hoped to win her for his wife.

"I have come to bid you good-by," he said, "for I am going away. Business requires me again in the city."

She turned away her face when he lifted his eyes to meet hers. For, in the way people will, each looked while the other was not looking, and he had not seen the expression on her face when he announced his departure. The soft twilight was gathering about them, and though Raymond could see but little, he felt that her manner had grown reserved and quiet.

"Good-bye," he said again, as he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," was the reply in a low formal voice, as she laid her slim, cool fingers in his.

He held them as he looked at her, and then he said in a wistful tone, a strange, sad expression glowing in his eyes the while:

"I wish you would give me a bunch of those flowers that you wear."

She loosened some and laid them in his hand.

When he had left her he smiled a bitter, grim smile.

I had quite forgotten the significance of apple-blossoms. 'Preference!' What a mockery that she should give them to me when her preference is given to another!

So Alene stayed on for a while with her aunt in Ellerby Hall. Alene's mother was living, but her father had long been dead, and left them but a scant income.

Her aunt, Mrs. Ellerby, was also in moderate circumstances, for the Hall had now a heavy mortgage upon it, and it cost the good lady a struggle to maintain the old place that had grown so dear to her.

So Alene was not an heiress, or even a young lady with rich relatives. The men who liked her at all, she had every reason to believe, loved her for herself alone. And as for Alene—well she was altogether too heedless and frank even to think twice when she fell in love.

The creature of romance, possessing the keen love of pleasure natural to youth, whether her lover owned bonds or estates, would be thought of only as belonging to that surrounding halo of circumstances which made him great in her eyes.

Her aunt had called Raymond Ogere a "cultivated gentleman." Again, she had called Bob Willis a "foolish fop."

Two days before Raymond Ogere's departure Alene astounded her aunt by saying she wished to go home. This announcement set Aunt Ellerby to pondering many things, for her niece usually wished to prolong her visits to the Hall. Bob Willis had been there only that afternoon, and she had seen him going down the gravelled walk, with a remarkably crestfallen air for such a young braggart as she considered him.

"He is a prodigious numbskull, but his father is worth a mint," Aunt Ellerby had said to herself.

Whatever conclusion the good lady arrived at concerning the state of affairs, she said to Alene the next morning at breakfast:

"You see, dear, I am thinking of selling the Hall (I have had a fair offer for it), and going to live with Bess."

Bess was her daughter, married, and living in Paris.

Alene started.

"Why, Aunt Nan, I thought you never meant to sell the place."

"Well, Bess urges me to come, and the care I have here is ageing me, so I think I shall go. And, child, you may go along if your mother can pay the