OUR SHORT STORY

"The First Mrs. Keener."

*66666666

Aaron, and people with a vague Biblical knowledge had an idea that it was in some way appropriate, for they consociated the name of Aaron with a she declared.

Was able to point out to Juanata that it was in some way appropriate, for they ding will be about October—you'll see," she declared. red, and Mrs. Grayson with the provero in regard to sparing the rod. The connection was not very closely linkd. but it always came into Willie de Ferriere's mind when he saw his mother-in-law belaboring Aaron into a stiff-jointed trot, while she sat bolt upright in the carriage flapping the lines with her driving hand. He knew then that something had happened, or somebody had made a remark in Pontomoc, and Mrs. Grayson was either hastening to the scene of action to take command, or leaving it to give an itemized account of the occurrence to all the people who had kept out of the because they were not interested.

Willie de Ferriere escaped, if possi-ble, whenever Aaron's blazed nose poked itself appealingly over the top of the De Ferriere gate, and Mrs. Grayson's voice disturbed the silence of the Point, calling for someone to come and let her in. There was always time to escape, for old Ann, the cook, saw to It that the gate was never opened with undignified haste. One day Agron's nose appeared, and Mr. Willie disappeared, going down the sheltered path which led to the bayou landing. Ann was so very slow about the gate that Mrs. Grayson was still flushed from calling when she reached the house.

"I wish you would let me train your servants for you, Juanita," she said to her daughter. "I was tempted to get out and open the gate myself. If you knew what I'd come to tell you, you wouldn't have let me wait so long. Not that it will please you," she added. "I knew you would live to repent of throwing over George Keener to marry a poor man, and I told you so at the time.'

Juanita lifted her eyebrows. "You tould me a good many things at that time that haven't come true," she said.
"Weli, this has come true," Mrs.
Grayson declared. "Mr. Keener has come back from Mexico richer than before, and a widower. You see, he didn't break his heart for you, after all."

"Why, mamma, I didn't expect to break his heart," Juanita said with a little appeal of gravity, which was lost upon her mother. Mrs. Grayson was warm and tired; under these conditions she was always sure that Juan-ita's motives had been bad; but Juan-Ita could not help trying to escape from the ground of censure and retort. I had thought he would break his heart"—she went on, tying Aaron in the shade of a live oak while her mothor descended heavily from the buggy— if I hadn't been sure that he would love some other girl just as well, it wouldn't have been so easy to tell him never to come back for me, after he had postponed our wedding day. But I knew he would soon care for someone

else. I'm sorry that she died."
"But she has left him an immense fortune!" Mrs. Grayson exclaimed, "He was well off before, but now his wealth is fabulous, and I reckon he has come back looking for a second wife. I hope some girl right here in Pontomoc will snap him up, so that you can see what you have missed."
"But, mamma——" Jaunita began,

and then she sat down on the door-step and laughed until old Ann's mahogany face came peering around the side of the house to see what had hap-"Don't you see, mamma," pened. said at last, "if I had married him when you wanted me to there wouldn't have been any rich wife to die and leave him any fortune—even if I had died it wouldn't have put a penny in

Mrs. Grayson looked bland for a minute, and then she saw her way. You talk like a child!" she asserted. "He had plenty of money in the first place, and if his wife hadn't left more to him he would have made it. that kind of a man, while Willie de

"Is another kind, and I thank God for it!" Juanita broke in. "Where shall we keep coolest—out here on the gallery or in the house?'

"In the house, where the reflection of the water don't blind us," Mrs. Gray-"It is very evident he is looking for a second wife," she went on, more placidly, as they sat down in Juanita's shady room and a carressing breeze from the bay touched her warm cheeks. "I hear that he has called at the Hollingsworths' twice already, and since Dolly is married, and Louise engaged, and Jessamine in short dresses yet, it must be that Dabney takes his fancy. She is very much such a girl as you were six years ago."

"But, mamma, his wife can't have been dead very long," Juanita protest-"and the Hollingsworths are old

"Old friends sometimes make young Mrs. Grayson returned, sagely. "Wait and see."
It was not long before Mrs. Grayson

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*66666666 Mrs. Grayson's horse was named | was able to point out to Juanita that

> Dabney was a slender, girlish thing, and everybody began to wonder what she found attractive about old George Keener, except the money in his pockets. People were slow in saying that she liked him on account of his money, for Dabney did not seem that kind of a girl, yet it was hard to find any other cause. It was not so much that Keener was old, though he and her fore the live oaks which shaded the Potomos were planted, and the live oaks had been growing for 40 years. It was more that he had never been provided to the live oaks had been growing for 40 years.

young. He was one of these men who had changed from large-faced, soberminded infants into slow-motioned, sober-minded boys, whose mission in life is to make bad boys seem attractive and thus reserve to them their due portion of tove; afterward, and still with sobriety, they grow slowly

into men.
At 50 George Keener looked just as he had looked at five months, even to the baldness above his large round forehead. But he had learned to talk, and in his ponderous way he talked rather well. More adventures had come to him in the last six years than usually come to such quiet people, and in Pontomoc a man who has had adven-tures does not lack Desdemonas to listen to his accounts of them. In the evening Dabney liked to sit on a low step of the gallery and watch the moon steering along the deep blue channel of the sky, between the white clouds, while he talked. She was the foolish. while he talked. She was the sand her romantic one of the four girls, and her head held enough girlish notions of an held enough girlish notions of an held fashioned kind to hide the pom"They were lies," Dabney asserted, romantic one of the four girls, and her old-fashioned kind to hide the pompous commonplaces of a less interesting man than Keener. Perhaps, too, she was intuitive enough to feel that he was rather a good and gentle man, and certainly she was flattered by receiving the attention of the man whom all Pontomoc delighted to honor. Dabney's sisters and her brother-in-law shook their perplexed heads and let

matters alone.
It was not long before the engagement was announced, and, as Mrs. Grayson had said, the wedding was Pontomoc society set for October. Pontomoc society fluttered with excitement, arranged marriage, decided that they should more pleasant in itself, and you belive mainly in Pontomoc, and began to think that you could show talk of "our esteemed fellow-citizen, George Keener," in the local paper. As for Mr. Keener he was ponderouscontent, and in his complaisance he developed a new conversational tendency, and began referring frequently to his dead wife. The prospect of giving her a successor seemed to enable him to mention her calmly, and he antedated matters by speaking of heras the first Mrs. Keener. People were startled when they heard the phrase for the first time, but at the Hollingsworths' they did not mind It so much the first time as they did the Lortieth. Dabney was the only one wno and not fume about it; the others marveled at If she was annoyed in any way she showed no sign of it, but seemed to live in a gentle day dream in which the first Mrs. Keener took part as na-

turally as any actor. The long Pontomoc summer crept past, and people grew pale and nervous under its continued strain. There were no single overpowering days like those of the hottest weather in the North, but from April to October there was an unbroken monotony of heat. Everyone noticed that Dabney Hollingsworth was looking very worn, and her sisters knew that she was irritable. One evening, when a storm was coming up, she and Keener sat down on the pier-head watching the restless fishes stir the phosphorescence in the water. Neither of them had spoken for a long time, and Keener felt that he ought to break the silence, so he

began The first Mrs. Keener used to say-Dabney lifted her head; her face was very white in the dusk. "I have favor to ask of you," she said distinetly

"A favor," he repeated. "Why, you know, if there is anything I can do for

you-"There is," she said. "To be engaged is not the same as being married. I am willing to hear anything you wish to tell me about your wife, but until you have married a second time. I wish you would stop referring to her as the first Mrs. Keener.'

'Dabney." he exclaimed. "Oh, I know I have kept so quiet about it that you thought I didn't care, and at first I didn't care very much, because-well, your love for her interested me. Now I'm tired of it. I'm not sure that I care to marry & man who has been married before Even if you stop talking about it, you have ground it in until I can never forget that there was a first Mrs.

He got up and paced the pier-head. "This is a sudden turn," he said.
"No, it's not sudden," she declared. "Did you imagine that any girl would like to marry a man who kept talking about another woman all the

"Why-I-I hadn't thought of it," he answered slowly. "When I mentioned the-er-the first Mrs. Keener before our engagement, you seemed interested in her."

Yes; I was a little fool." He paused in front of her, and she saw that his features had a strained look like those of a big. sober-minded child whose face is slowly forming itself for tears. "Dabney," he expostu-lated. "I don't understand what you mean talking like that. If I have annoved you, you have only to tell me so and I will stop. If you have been an-noved, why haven't you told me so be-You know I wouldn't conscious-

ly do anything to hurt you." Somewhere in an obscure corner of her heart Dabney was sorry for him, but the mood which changes patience into bitterness urged her on. "There are some things which a man must know without telling if he is to make a woman happy," she declared, "I didn't realize, myself, how unbearable it was until you had everdone it past

remedy. After all you've said I couldn't be happy with you or any man who had been married before. I should feel that you were comparing me to your first wife all the time."

He sat down across from her and He sat down across from her and rested his head in his hands. She heard rested his head in his hands. She heard him sigh once, and then everything was quiet except a single breath of land breeze whispering something in a pine-tree top. Dabney's nerves quivered, and she tooked intently across at Krener. He was short and middle-aged and heavy. She felt as one does who has had a beautiful thought in the night and wakes to find it commonplace. It seemed as if she it commonplace. It seemed as if she had never seen the man before, and she wondered how he could have interested her. It occurred to her that she must be far more fickle than other women, and that he would be justified in telling her that the first Mrs. Reen-er always formed an unbiased opinion at the commencement of an acquaint-ance and then never changed.

It was horrible of him to keep silent. There seemed to be nothing more that she could say, but she gave a nervous, bitter little laugh, recognizing that she was possessed by a desire to draw him out a little more about the first Mrs. Keener. He spoke to her without looking up. "Is that final, Dabney?" he asked, with the ghost of his usual ponderous tone. "Have you fully decided that you cannot marry any man who has been married before?" She caught a sharp breath, thinking

of all the stir that there would be in Pontomoc. "Yes," she said. He rose, crossed the little space be-

tween them, and stopped in front of her. "Then I have something to tell you, Dabney," he began in a trembling voice. "I have never been married in my life."

She drew herself a little farther from him and looked at him a long time. He was not the man to trifle or lay a trap of words to catch her feelings in. He seemed excited and half-exultant. "Either you have lied before or you are lying now," she said

"Wait a minute; let me tell you about it"—his voice bungled with the words. "I—I did lie, if you call it so, but I didn't think it would do any harm. I-I-didn't dream, you know, of getting engaged to anybody when I first came back. I—I only wanted—I thought it would appear—well, less as if I had been hurt—" he stopped, with all he meant to say sticking in his throat. His fat hands were lock-

ed in front of him. Dabney rose. "Don't you mean," she asked, "that you made all this up because-because you wanted to show Juanita de Ferriere that you didn't mind her throwing you over that-that

time?" He straightened himself, swallowing all the justifications which he could not speak. "That's what I mean," he said.

"And those other things you told about your adventures-were these lies, too?

and he clutched his hands together more tightly; there was something hard and ungirlish in her voice. "They were lies, and you began telling them to me so that they would be repeated, and Juanita de Ferriere would hear.' The little breeze which had been in the pine tops had reached the water

and was tracing ripples of silvery

phosphorescence across the dim shadow of the bay. The ripples stole up with an almost soundless whisper and died upon the beach. Keener glanced over his shoulder, as if they had spoken to him, but he said nothing. "And when you saw that I listened beneficence for the two after their and believed, you found the telling gan to think that you could show Juanita still more plainly that you didn't care by making love to me fore her eyes. And I—" she buried her face in her hands. "Oh," she sobbed, "I thought I had made you forget Juanita and your wife and all in love for me. And then, when we were engaged and you began talking of your wife all the time, I-I told myself not

> but a lie. She stood sobbing in the dusk, and he felt bewildered and chagrined and awkward. "Dabney," he said at last, "I think you are making a great deal too much of this. I-I only told you because you didn't want to marry a widower. And don't you see, nobody but us two need ever know."

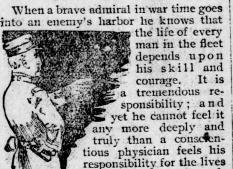
to be jealous of the dead-and there

wasn't any dead. There was nothing

He tried to put his hand on her shoulder, but she flung it off. "Do you think I am likely to tell?" she demanded. "Do you think I want the world to know how I've been fooled, and to hear Mrs. Gravson talk about it the rest of my life? No. you will pack up your things and leave Pontomoc, and people may think we have quarreled, or anything they please. "But—good heavens, Dabney, don't ou see that I can't do that?" he cried. you see that I can't do that?" 'I can't be jilted again the way

Juanita jilted me. right here in her sight, I—Dabney!" "Do you think I care?" the girl asked, and her voice told him how every nerve and muscle in her stiffened

POINTING THE WAY.



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against his appeal. "Have you treated me well enough for me to care how you are humbled before Juanita? You deserve it, too. You've done all this to be revenged."

"You don't know how she hurt me,"

"You don't know how she hurt me,"

Keener pleaded; "and if that was all in the beginning, it is not all now. I have become more than reconciled. When I analyze my affections—"

"When you analyze your a ections, you want to lie, and have me keep your secret," Dabney broke in. She caught her breath and waited an in-

stant. Keener tried to laugh. There were tones in her voice which he had never expected to find there. She stood before him, no longer dreamy eyed and hanging on his word, but a slender, erect, accusing woman, be-fore whom he felt bewildered and desperately unhappy and cowed. He crushed his straw hat in his hands.
"I said I did not want the world to know what a fool I had been," she went on; "but after all, it's you who

fear the world, not I. I despise it, and to show you how I despise it I promise you this: If you ever speak to me of our engagement, or trouble me in any way again, I'll tell the world—I'll tell Mrs. Grayson-about the first Mrs. | Keener?' Keener, and I'll tell Juanita first of

Keener shrank back a step, letting the relies of his hat drop at his feet. "Er, Dabney," he began huskily, "you don't mean—you can't be so hard on me—I nothing has changed in my feel-

ing toward you—"
Dabney's slender, white-clad figure went glimmering along the pier. "Dabhe called, running after her; least let us walk up together. Your sisters might notice-

The girl paused a moment. "Stay where you are," she said. "You may come up after I have gone in the He sat down limply on one of the

seats, and Dabney passed on along the pier, and under the rustling live oaks, and through the garden where the sun had burned out nearly all the flowers. Her face was set in hard lines, and her hands were clenched in mortification for the past. Five minutes afterward Keener fol-

lowed, tiptoeing through the yard, glancing furtively at the dark gallery where the family usually spent the evenings; there was nobody in sight and he blessed all his saints. He thought he would take the night train without bidding any one good-by, and leave Dabney to face the explanations as she pleased: but he was too late for the night train, and next morning the accents and image of her scorn had faded somewhat from his mind. When he thought it all over he found himself in a boiling rage because a girl had presumed to lay down the law to him, and, without knowing exactly how he should do it, he decided to go back to her and batter down the conditions she had made. Having come to a decision, he waited until after not to seem too eager, and when he had finally started, fate placed Mrs. Grayson and her slow-going horse, Aaron, as a barrier in front of him where the road was too narrow for one carriage to pass another unless the first drove far to one side. Mrs. Grayson turned and greeted

"Curb your eagerness," she said, him. with that genial superiority which people employ toward lovers. best Aaron moves as if the snails were after him, but Dabney is not going to run away from you. I'm he should have felt so desperate a little myself."

She beamed upon him and seemed to have no thought of urging Aaron to any greater speed. Keener's face turned red.
"It is I who have cause to thank

road," he answered, shortly. The crumbs of compliment which had fallen within Mrs. Gravson's reach of late had been small. She identified this but regretting its size, retorted with a mixture of acidity and arch-"Poor Mr. Keener; it's heartless of me not to whip up Aaron, but everybody takes the liberty of trying to educate an engaged man in patience. There's no telling how many

times Dabney will delay you." Keener fldgeted with the reins, and tried to remember where the road broadened so that he could pass. It was certainly just around the corner made by the Saunders pecan grove. He tried to smile. "You know human nature, Mrs. Grayson," he said. more people took your advice they'd be happier afterward."

The color deepened in her face. was intensely gratified. "It has to be admitted for you, Mr. Keener, that it isn't your fault that you didn't follow my advice at a time which we both remember," she declared.

The broadening of the road came into view. Keener gathered up his reins and his whip. "I feel that I have a friend in you," he said, cordial-"and some day when I'm less in a hurry I want to ask your advice." Mrs. Grayson gathered up her reins, reached forward for her whip, and jerked the bit in Aaron's mouth, with-

out taking her eyes from Keener. Keener lifted his hat. "Good-day," he said. He touched his horse with the whip-lash and would have passed, but something excited Aaron. Mrs. Grayson turned and gave full attention to her horse. For an instant the two animals were neck and neck, then the road narrowed again and Keener fell behind. Mrs. Grayson was sawing at Aaron's mouth, although Aaron had subsided to a walk.

when he was younger," she stated, calmly. "He is slow enough, ordinarily, but sometimes when another horse tries to pass I can't control him." Aaron looked over his shoulder in surprise, but Mrs. Grayson jerked his

"I think he must have been raced

head again unamlably, as if she thought him about to speak.

Keener was still working with ais handkerchief. The road was consistently narrow from that point to the Hollingsworth gate. He began to lose his confidence of making any impresson on Dabney. As likely as not Mrs. Grayson would turn in at the Hollingsworths', too, and make a call. could feel her looking from his face to Dabney's, and then going to tell "Horses are-er-unaccount-Juanita. able," he suggested. "Less so than men," Mrs. Grayson

said, while Aaron shambled forward, looking critically at the herbage on the roadside. "Yes," Keener agreed, "less so than

men." It seemed to him that he was talking to Mrs. Grayson on more equal ground than he had ever felt between himself and Dabney, or even Juanita. She had been on his side in the affair with Juanita, and he began to feel that she would be on his side now if she knew. The thought led him toward confidence. "Take my own case," he began, but the words dried on his lips. After all, his own case was far too desperate to talk about. Mrs. Grayson leaned still farther out

of the carriage back. "Do you know, George," she said, "when you first came back and I heard you had called at the Hollingsworths', I told Juanita you would fall in love with Dabney. It was at first sight, wasn't it?"
Keener shook his head. His eyes
protruded with misery. "Gradual," he
mumbled; "it came gradually."



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often wanted to ask you," she went on. "Did she attract you first by reminding you of Juanita, or the first Mrs.

Keener turned a deep crimson dropped the reins and pulled his hat on with both hands. It was not the hat he had worn the night before, but it seemed likely to suffer in a similar cause. His voice stuck in his throat. "Er-neither!" he gasped.

"Oh," Mrs. Grayson commented. "I Do you know, you have never told any rein in, then and there, to announce the of us what she looked like. Would news. you mind?"

He glanced up and down the road. No one was coming from either way. A deep blue sky hung close above the pine tree tops. The air was full of the scent of pine and myrtle leaves, and so warm that it smelled as if their spices had been burned. It was quiet and secluded enough to warrant confidences, even between carriages driving tandem. "Er—let us speak of something else," he begged.

ed to be drawn out in regard to Dabney, and he refused to describe the first Mrs. Keener.

"Well, what do you want to talk about?" she asked blankly. Keener took the whip out of its socket, slipped it back again and met her glance. His mind was devoid of topics. "Let's talk about—you," he

It was so unexpected that her eyes "Why, George," she murmured, fell. "nobody's interested in me." Her confusion was salve to Keener's injured pride. He lifted his hat and

let it settle more easily upon his fore-"I am interested in you," he "When I-er-analyze my feelings I find that I have been interested in you a very long time." The high color faded a little out of

her cheeks, and she looked younger for the change. "Yes, we're very old friends," she said, "and, George, I can't help seeing that you're not happy today. Has anything come between you and Dabney? Keener settled his coat sleeves over his cuffs. It seemed odd to him that

ended," he announced. "She is too of our people. young to be a companion for a man. Combs, "George," she broke in, "I know what it is to have lost a companion Ara wou sure that I

could take the place of the first Mrs. Keener?" The perspiration gleamed on Keener's checks. "Oh, quite so; don't mention it," he urged. Dabney had said that no girl would like to marry a man who kept talking about another woman, but Mrs. Grayson persisted in dragging forward the first wife

whom he had never had and thought it would be wise to forget. "Don't mention it," he repeated. "We will just start fresh as if nothing had happened. I-er-think it's the happier

wav.' "Now look here," Mrs. Grayson re joined with a shade of disapproval in her voice, "we're both middle-aged people, and it's useless for us to pretend that this is the beginning of our lives. I'm very fond of you, and always have been, but I shouldn't be honest if I claimed to have the same sort of a feeling for you that I had for Mr. Grayson. I've always told Juanita that nobody should take her father's place, but of course things are different now that she is married and

I am left alone." Keener chirruped uneasily to his horse, though it had its nose almost in Mrs. Grayson's face. Things were certainly different with him, too, since Juanita had married; and as for Mr. Grayson's place, he had never known that Mr. Grayson had a place except in the graveyard. Mr. Grayson had died long ago, and had been forgotten, apparently; Keener had an idea that he had been as silent and unobtrusive as his portrait, which hung in Mrs Grayson's parlor, carefully with net. But Mrs. Grayson had been holding him in reserve, it seemed. The thought of Mr. Grayson's portrait had come to her, too, by one of those coincidences which are so much

more natural than strange. "Take my word for it," she went on, putting aside the nose of Keener's horse with her hand, "the happier way

is to be perfectly frank with each other, and not to ignore the past. Now should not be content without Mr Grayson smiling down at me out of his picture, just as he has done for twenty years, and I know that you will want a picture of the first Mrs. Keener somewhere in sight; they can hang on opposite sides of the room.

Keener looked at her with an expression which she could not under-stand. Family portraits are as easily acquired as memories. He knew that Dabney could be trusted, and the habit of referring to the first Mrs. Keener was a very pleasant one. Mr. Grayson would seem less lonely, too, with a companion piece upon the wall. A sense of humor which was rare to him made him happy with its implication of superior knowledge and worldliness. He inclined his head. "My dear Mrs. Grayson, you are generous, and you know the human heart," he declared; "but let me assure you that in my af-fection there will never be any difference between you and the first Mrs. She flushed and turned away abrupt-

ly, so touched that she did not want him to see her face. "You'll drive right along with me," she said over her shoulder, "and we'll tell Juanita." She lifted her whip and flapped the lines over Aaron's back. Aaron roused himself into a rapid, stiff-kneed trot; Keener's horse pricked up his ears and followed—just as his master was to follow the rest of his life. A slight ex-hilaration filled Keener. This was a hilaration filled Keener. This was a very different outcome from anything that he had planned, but it would show Dabney and Juanita their inconse-Mrs. Grayson was called aggressive, but in his experience she had always been aggressive on his side, and her views of life were reasonable. Mrs. Grayson had not been a lover's instead of hysteric, like a girl's. He confidante for years. It pleased her to the heart. "There's one thing I've he could tell her his secret, if he chose, ELLIOTT, MARR & CO., 333 Rich.

without its shocking her as it shocked Dabney. Still, it was far better to

keep the secret as an offset to the revival of Mr. Grayson.

He blinked suddenly. Bars of sunshine falling through the shadow of a
high picket fence which inclosed the Hollingsworth place struck across his face as if each picket had leaped forward and given him a blow. Dabney and Juanita came out of the Hollings-worth gate, starting for the village. Keener set his feet hard against the thought perhaps it might have begun dashboard, and held one hand in readithat way." She noticed the agitation ness to lift his hat. He was glad that of his face. "You were very fond of Mrs. Grayson was in advance to decide your first wife, weren't you, George? what to do. He wondered if she would

For once Mrs. Grayson was content to let appearances tell their own tale. She gianced back to see that Keener was safe and close behind. Then she flapped the lines over Aaron's back and leaned out of her buggy in pass-

"Good-day, Dabney, my dear," she said. "Juanita, George and I are going to your house, but you needn't hurry back. We can entertain each other."

Keener lifted his hat without a word Mrs. Grayson had never seen him in and their buggy wheels rattled osa mood like this before. He had refus-ed to be drawn out in regard to Dab-Juanita started after them in amazement. Dabney dug her parasol into the shells

"My engagement with Mr. Keener broken," she explained.
"Oh," Juanita said. She drew the girl toward her, and their eyes met in an understanding of what they had

each escaped.

"And mamma is comforting him,"
Juanita added. She sat down under a tree and began to laugh. "Oh, thank the Lord." she said, "thank the Lord."

Dabney did not laugh; her pride was too sore; but she smiled a little as she watched the two equipages sweep up to the Farriage 2016. each escaped.

to the Ferriere gate.
"Ann," Mrs. Grayson called. Keener made a motion as if to climb down and open the gate. Mrs. Gray-son turned and checked him. "Ann!" she called again.-Saturday, Evening Post.

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