



THE MOST REMARKABLE LOOKING PERSON

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By Sophie Kerr Underwood

THE Thursday Bridge Club has always had only the very nicest people in it. Of course, I don't mean the real society people who have yachts and diamonds and divorces, but we were all comfortably off and lived nicely with two and three maids and several of us had carriages or autos. And we almost all belonged to St. Andrew's. We had sixteen members—made two four tables and was not a tax to entertain, and was not so large a crowd that we could not select who was to belong. There was Mrs. Garrison and Mrs. Kent, and Mrs. Poley and Miss Maxwell and Mrs. Ten Eyck and Mrs. Perry and Miss Grey—and oh, a lot of others. The most of us lived in Pemberton square, too, and that made it convenient.

I think the trouble started when Mrs. Garrison's husband had that money stroke. Some old stocks that had been left to him by a great aunt turned out to be perfectly wonderful, and he just scooped in the money, you might say, without any effort to himself at all. Some people are so lucky! Now, Edward's great aunt would never do anything thoughtful like that for us. Mrs. Garrison was simply tickled to death. She got a big house in Allen avenue, three blocks above the square, and she left St. Andrew's and started to go to St. Mary's, where they say the occupants of the first ten pews average two millions apiece. It's the Bishop's church and awfully high. They intone and chant and swing censors and do dear knows what. Mrs. Garrison thought with all that money she ought to be taken in at once, but not a soul paid a bit of attention to her. She had gone there six months before even the curate called. You may know she felt bad, having left St. Andrew's, where all her old friends were, to get snubbed like that.

Somewhere Mrs. Garrison had been in the summer she had first met Mrs. Pace, and just before the bridge club started again she happened to see her again downtown, and in the course of conversation Mrs. Pace began to talk about being a cousin of the Bishop and she rung in "Cousin Gregory" about twice a minute. Mrs. Garrison fairly jumped at her, invited her to luncheon, and made such a fuss over her that I don't wonder Mrs. Pace felt that they were destined to be bosom friends. Of course Mrs. Garrison saw a vision of Mrs. Pace in her introduction to the Bishop, and she felt that she could have those people in the front pews at St. Mary's on her calling just in no time if she could once get hold of him. The truth of it was that Mrs. Pace's husband was second cousin to the Bishop's sister-in-law, or something equally remote, and neither the Bishop nor his wife had ever taken the least account of Mrs. Pace. But we didn't know about this until afterward.

Mrs. Kent gave a luncheon about the middle of October. She asked twelve, all of whom have been members of the Thursday Bridge for two years. Mrs. Kent is my nearest neighbor, and she is a very pretty, sweet looking little woman, but her tongue is like vitriol when she gets started. She has a lovely home and two dear little children, and she is a perfect housekeeper; even her sewing room is always neat.

After luncheon we all began to talk about the Bridge Club, and Mrs. Garrison spoke up and said, "Now that Mrs. Hollins has moved to Detroit we will have a vacancy, and I would so much like to ask a friend of mine, if you don't mind. She is Mrs. James Pace; she lives in Land avenue, and is a young woman, a Southerner and perfectly

charming. I'm sure she would be delighted to be asked."

There wasn't one of us but had some dear friend we would like to see in Mrs. Hollins' place, but Mrs. Garrison by speaking first had us in rather an awkward position. So we all looked at one another and Mrs. Kent said:—"Land avenue! That's rather an out of the way street, don't you think?" But Mrs. Garrison explained that Mrs. Pace was a new-comer and did not know much of the city, and finally we all said gracefully that we'd be glad to have any friend of Mrs. Garrison's, and that was the way it was settled.

If we had only known. The first meeting was Mrs. Garrison's, and we all dressed a little more smartly than usual just to show her that her old neighbors were not quite out of her way of living even if she had moved into that big house and had an English butler who had once been in service to a duke. I never believed he had, anyway, or if he had he had probably stolen the jewels and was afraid to go back to England. I was one of the first to arrive and I was shown upstairs by a nice looking maid—the butler had let me in—and into a magnificent bedroom, the furniture all Caucasian walnut and the hangings in coral and amber. Such ostentation! Well, I don't know what I'd do if I became suddenly wealthy, and I've known Sally Garrison too long not to know that these foolish fancies of hers don't affect her real character, and at heart she is sterling. I had taken off my coat and was patting my hair and straightening my hat before the dressing table when in came Lullie Kent and Hannah Maxwell and Mrs. Berry, and right behind them the most remarkable looking person. Her hair was too yellow and her cheeks were too pink and her eyebrows were too black. She had on a black princess gown made in the most exaggerated and artless style, with a sort of bolero effect outlined in gold and black braid, and she wore a light blue hat and a white veil with big blue dots. Her figure was pinched in at the waist and simply immense above and below. I spoke to the little ones I knew and started out, and Lullie Kent, who had thrown off her wraps, rushed after me and seized my arm at the head of the stairs.

"My dear," she whispered, "that's Mrs. Pace."

"Oh, not really!" I groaned. "Why, she's perfectly dreadful." "Ssh," said Lullie, "here she comes." And in another minute we were down stairs speaking to Mrs. Garrison and being introduced to Mrs. Pace. I will say for her that she talked things pretty well, and said the proper things, only with a little too much gush. But her getup! Hannah Maxwell asked me if I didn't think she had just come off the vaudeville stage, and I remember whispering back yes, and perhaps Mrs. Garrison would ask her to do a song and a dance for us.

During that first afternoon I studied the woman. I think she must have been a belle of some small college town, for a more self-assured person I never met and I never met one who felt herself so irresistible. She told me all about her ancestors and said that her father was on General Lee's staff. But I didn't believe it. For one thing, her hands and feet were so big, and I've never in my life seen a well born Southerner with large hands and feet. Of course that's a little thing, and Edward laughs at me for saying so, but it's true all the same. And she talked a good bit about things to drink, and that always stamps a woman to my mind, as lacking real refinement. Well bred women do not have the bar-keeper's manual at their tongue's end.

She talked a great deal, anyway, it seemed to me. She hadn't any children.

And then her playing! I'm not a bridge fiend, but I've had good lessons and I play a steady game, nothing brilliant, but I won three first prizes out of the sixteen meetings last year, so that speaks for itself. But Mrs. Pace had evidently been taught by a novice or picked it up out of the newspapers' "Half Hour Lessons in Bridge." She made misplays, gave the wrong leads, talked over the board and was so daring in making the trump that Mrs. Poley spoke to her about having more caution. Actually! At the very first meeting! Mrs. Poley is a fine, conservative player and hates to have a poor partner.

After we stopped playing we had sandwiches and salad and coffee. It is one of our rules never to serve more than two things to eat, with a drink, for refreshments. We made that rule so that our club would not degenerate into a scramble for each hostess to outdo the last. Of course we always have bonbons and salted nuts and olives and such things. They don't count. Sally Garrison's salad was not so very good, though she'd ordered it from Keith, and he's the best caterer in the city. My cook can make better.

All the time we were eating Mrs. Pace kept talking and making up to every one in the club. She told me how often she had heard of me and how she had longed to meet me and how much she hoped I would come to see her. She said she had so few friends, only cousin Gregory—Bishop Maxwell—and his family had been so good to her. Well, I wasn't taken in by her a minute. I smiled and listened and thanked her when she asked me to call—but I didn't say I would, and I do think that's a direct out and any one ought to know it.

Then she tried her arts on Lullie Kent and found out that Lullie used to live in Atlanta. So she said she had some relatives in Atlanta—the Morrises—and asked Lullie if she knew them. When Lullie said yes she did Mrs. Pace said at once how interested Mr. Pace would be to know that she had found some one who knew her relatives, and that she was going to bring him to call—very soon—on Mr. and Mrs. Kent. Lullie's face was a study. I've laughed to myself since to think of it. And that was the way she went on to each of us. She asked Miss Maxwell if she were any relation of the great artist, Henry Maxwell, and said that she knew him in New York before she went to Paris. And she told Mrs. Ten Eyck that Mr. Pace's sister had married a man named Ten Eyck Robinson, and she told Miss Grey that she begged her pardon for a personal remark, but that she had the most wonderful eyes and lashes she had ever seen. It was almost like a play. For with every speech she was making an enemy, and was imagining all the time that we liked and admired her. If she had been at all possible I believe I'd have felt sorry for her.

I asked Lullie Kent to drive home with me, and when we were in the carriage I turned around and looked at her and raised my eyebrows without saying a word.

"Yes, quite so," said Lullie. "I'm surprised at Mrs. Garrison. If that is the sort of person we are expected to associate with if we ever have lots of money I hope I'll stay poor." That is her extreme way of speaking.

"Do you know those Atlanta people she spoke of?" I asked.

"Yes, the Morrises are a fine family, too. I'm going to write to Henrietta Morrow and ask her what she knows about this woman. I can't think that they are closely related, or even well acquainted. Why, this creature is positively a barnyard type."

"Oh, say shop girl," I protested. "Barnyard is a little extreme."

During the week that followed I just made it my business to find out what the other members of the club thought of Mrs. Pace. One and all they were of the same opinion. Ordinary, impossible, loud, common, were but a few of the adjectives I heard applied to her. We all felt about something should be done—but what could we do? We were all justly indignant with Mrs. Garrison for bringing such a person among us. Little Mrs. Kirk, the quietest and most refined of women, had been talking with Mrs. Pace, and some mention was made of obstinate people.

"My father," said Mrs. Pace promptly, "was one of the most obstinate men that ever lived. When he had made up his mind to anything he wouldn't have been changed if it had been from heaven had come down and fanned his wings in his face." Mrs. Kirk was stunned. That is just one instance of the outlandish speeches she made. And slang! Now, I don't object to an occasional word of slang, provided it is not coarse, in a pretty woman's mouth. It adds piquancy. But any time and all the time it was slang with Mrs. Pace.

By the next Thursday we were determined to give her the cold shoulder. We met at Mrs. Ten Eyck's, and she lives just across the square from me, so I walked over. As I was going up the stoop I saw Mrs. Pace coming from the opposite direction and looking as though she had just stepped out of the chorus in a cheap musical comedy. She was all done up in pale mode cloth, very badly tailored and very, very tight, with lots of light braid on it and a big flaring hat with a huge aigrette in the same shade. I am not oversensitive to public opinion, but oh, how I did wish that I could have

slipped into that house before I had to bow to her!

This meeting was painfully like the first. Mrs. Pace's yellow hair and penetrating voice seemed to pervade the room. The usual quiet, well bred air of the Thursday Bridge afterwards was entirely dissipated. We all seemed to be infected with some latent excitement, and I, for my part, felt nervous and ill at ease. I don't think I ever enjoyed an afternoon at cards less in my life. It was horrid. And of course it was all owing to this call her that, since she was asked to join the club and probably thought she would meet women with whom she could make friends—her own class she doubtless expected. I'm no snob and I hate snobishness, but I do feel strongly that the word "interloper" is right and proper, and I told Edward so.

We all went home feeling uncomfortable and cross and out of sorts. Personally I felt like drawing right out of the club, but then I reflected that things often turned up, and I should not despair too early, and, besides, I had not yet entertained the club, and it would look as though I was trying to get out of doing so.

Two days later, early in the morning, Lullie Kent came rushing over. I was still at the breakfast table, so you may know how early it was, because I make it an unbreakable custom always to have breakfast with Edward, and he leaves at a quarter to nine. I don't approve of letting one's husband go away in the morning without knowing whether he has had anything fit to eat or not. I told the maid to bring Mrs. Kent into the dining room and I poured a cup of coffee for her, but she waved it away.

"I've just finished," she said, and looked at me so queerly. "Oh, Lydia," she burst out, "what do you think! That awful woman and her husband actually came to call last night!"

"I was struck speechless. I could only look at Lullie in the blankest astonishment. "Yes," she went on, "we had just finished dinner, and the bell rang and she was in the house and right in the library before we had time even to ask for cards and give me a chance to say 'Not at home.' She simply forced herself into the room where we were."

"What did you do?"

"There was nothing to do but make the best of it. She had on that absurd red with rouge and powder that she looked like a pink marshmallow. Oh, my dear, I never lived through such an evening. She gushed over me as though I had been her long lost twin sister, and her behavior toward Mr. Kent was outrageous—simply outrageous!"

"Oh, Lullie, what do you mean?"

"Why, she said that she had a chorus girl and tried to talk Lullie into a chorus girl—fairly jumped down his throat. I never was so angry in my life. She was so dignified and quiet I could not conceive of any one acting that way in the presence. "What did Mr. Kent do?"

"He simply froze!" Lullie laughed a little. "Oh, it was funny too. He looked all over and gave her the shortest answers, and the more quiet and monosyllabic he became the more gushing and—intimate—she acted."

No words seemed to me to compass the situation. At last I asked vaguely:—"What is her husband like?"

"He's about twenty years older than she, I suppose. Rather a flashy, sporting type. The sort of man who tells about getting drunk—'sophisticated,' he calls it—and how his wife behaved when he came home. He thinks such things are humorous and she stayed and stayed—they never went home until nearly eleven o'clock. Well, I must go; I have a hundred things to do this morning. But I couldn't settle down to anything until I had told some one. I don't think I'll ever go near a Thursday bridge again."

"I felt that way too, Lullie," I said.

"But then I reflected that I hadn't entertained the club, and the members might think I was trying to get out of it."

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plainly shown—your husband is fair—and, oh, yes, you've been rather indiscreet in various flirtations, have you not, Mrs. Kent? But perhaps you've outgrown that, for here is a card," and she laid one down, "that shows what a jealous temperament you have, and anxious to turn the king of hearts proves that you are intensely jealous of your husband."

Lullie Kent went white as a sheet. I thought for a minute she was going to strike Mrs. Pace. But she never moved. Mrs. Pace picked up the second pile of cards. My tongue was dry. We were all leaning forward like people at the theatre.

"Ah, here's the reason of that jealousy," went on Mrs. Pace. "Here's the blonde woman you know has your husband's real affection. And money troubles, too, you're having, aren't you? There's nothing good here. I'll just go on to your future."

"Dear me, the death of a near relative, loss of money, the peridy of one who professes to be your dearest friend. And there's a lot of sickness in your family coming soon, among the children, I should judge from the cards. I really hate to tell you all the bad luck the cards say is in store for you. But here's the end of your husband's affair, with that blonde woman, at least, and the dark man reappears for you." She paused a moment and threw the cards together. Now, all of us knew that Lullie had been engaged to Tom Jenkins before she met Mr. Kent and was said to have married for pique. I don't believe it, but you know how people love to talk.

Before any one could relieve the strained situation with a commonplace remark Mrs. Pace looked up at Miss Maxwell, who had been standing, struck dumb like the rest of us during the last half of the fortune. "Now I'll tell you, Miss Maxwell, and in another way. Cut the cards, please, and I'll lay them out and tell you all about yourself."

Hannah Maxwell cut the cards and tried to act natural and say something about being afraid of such a prophetic of evil—it really was the kindest thing she could do to try to spare poor Lullie's confusion—and Mrs. Pace deftly laid out a double row.

"So you're an old maid from necessity," she said cruelly, "even though you do go about and try to attract man's attention. Well, it is of no use, you'll die without a proposal. You've had great hope this year trying to get the bachelor brother of an old friend of yours; she glanced at Mrs. Ten Eyck, "but it is no use, he is mixed up with a little stenographer downtown." Mrs. Ten Eyck's eyes positively stood out like marbles.

"You have not been successful in the art you tried to follow; no one would buy your work." Poor Hannah's minuscule are the despair of all her friends. "You have a fondness for the vain things of life and go out a great deal and entertain, sometimes laying aside more serious considerations of charity and church work in order to seem to be one of the social whirl. The church work and the charities," (she pointed to two cards)

"would be far more fitting to your age. According to these you have never tried to make the most of your family ties; a certain death of a near relative not long ago was a positive relief. It looks as if you were to travel very soon and meet with a railway accident, but there is nothing to show that you will be injured and killed, though there is nothing to show that you will not. Now," she went on, sweeping the cards together, "I'll tell you, Mrs. Garrison."

Why some of us did not get up and stop this dreadful ordeal, none the less, dreadful because of its vulgarity, for the most of her statements held just enough truth to make them uncomfortable, I can not tell. But no one moved. We were fascinated by the sheer nerve of the performance. It was evident that she meant to pay up every aught and snub she had received.

"You are very rich," she began after she had laid her cards, and looking straight at Mrs. Garrison. "You have recently acquired a great deal of money and its possession sits heavily upon you. You have not yet learned how to spend it with the ease of one who has always been used to such things. But you are trying very hard to live up to your new possessions, and would be willing to sacrifice your friends, your family, anything, to get a better social position—something you will never achieve."

I suppose I am only human, but I did feel a little satisfaction in hearing those plain truths told to Sally Garrison! She had been awfully overbearing at times since she got her money.

"No, you will never achieve it," repeated Mrs. Pace. "You have tried very hard to find acquaintances in a better set than yours, but they only laugh at you. You find, too, that your husband will never be brought to sympathize with your social ambitions, for though he has all the money, he never could be polished up into even a remote likeness of a gentleman."

Gasp—we all gasped. I believe the woman had written it out and learned it by heart, she said it off so pat. But she was not done with Sally by any means. "You are soon to have your life darkened by the breath of serious scandal and will have great difficulty in proving yourself innocent, and will never be entirely free from the taint of it. You will learn what it is to have those whom you have looked down on look down on you, and there—that red queen, that might be your daughter, I presume—well, it looks as though she were to be deserted by her father at the very steps of the altar."

That wasn't the end. She went on and fayed alive every woman in that club. You'd never believe the things she said. She scored Miss Grey on her vanity, and told her she would be twice married and twice divorced, and have two sets of twins. She ridiculed Mrs. Ten Eyck's pretensions to fine ancestry, and said that her family tree and her coat of arms had been bought outright from some unscrupulous genealogist. Pretending to find all these things on the cards, too, the wretched creature! No little thing that had been said or done or even looked against her seemed to have escaped her and she paid us up in full. She even told me—that I was a hypocrite and a gossip, and she intimated that my husband was not true to me. Oh, heavens, I almost choked.

It was nearly six o'clock before she got up and put down the cards and walked up to Miss Maxwell and said, "I'm so sorry, Miss Maxwell," and every word had a spiteful emphasis, "that I cannot attend any more of these delightful meetings, but I have been invited to join Bishop Mayhead's Ethical Culture class, which meets on Friday afternoons, and since he is my cousin I feel that I ought to do it. I want to thank you for the many delightful afternoons I have had and the uniform kindness and cordiality you all have offered me."

And she flounced out of the room.

For a few minutes we sat there without a word. But when we heard the front door slam and knew she was out of the house we just looked at one another and burst out in the wildest laughing—we laughed and laughed—we just screamed. Lullie Kent was almost hysterical. But that laugh cleared the atmosphere and restored us to our normal selves. The Thursday Bridge Club was itself again.

She hadn't been invited to join the Bishop's class—that was just a bluff. And Hannah Maxwell did marry Mrs. Ten Eyck's brother. We have another member now in Mrs. Pace's place, a Mrs. Crane, from Boston, who is perfectly lovely and lives in Allen avenue, a block above Mrs. Garrison. And she is a D. A. R. and a Colonial Dame and a second countess of mine and I invited her into the club.



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