

EXIT MRS. PACE

BY SOPHIE KERR UNDERWOOD



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 diamond tiaras 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—that 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. Foley 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.

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 Mrs. 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 he 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.

She talked a great deal, anyway, it seemed to me. She hadn't any children. And then she 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. Foley spoke to her about having more caution. Actually! At the very first meeting! Mrs. Foley 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 Maybaird—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 cut and any one ought to know it.

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"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 barmaid type!"

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

slipped into that house before I had to bow to her! This meeting was painfully like the first. Mrs. Pace said I ought not to be so quiet, and she seemed to pervade the room. The usual quiet, well bred air of the Thursday Bridge afternoons 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 snobbishness, 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 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 the maid 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 light cloth gown and her face was so covered 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 made eyes at him like a chorus girl and tried to talk kittenish—oh, you know—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?" I asked. "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."

"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 talks 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 get 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."

"That's so," said Lullie. "I suppose that applies to me too. Oh, dear—well, goodbye."

As I thought over the things she had said I couldn't blame Lullie Kent for being more than usual anxious to get home. I was always felt, and I suppose most women have, that their own house was the one place where you did not have to come in contact with people distasteful to you, and to have them literally force themselves upon you—why, it destroys the whole tradition of the home. She called on us all, and on some of us twice, on the pretext of a new embroidery stitch or a book she wanted us to read or something equally futile. She begged us all to call on her, urging us to be quite informal, and she even invited Lullie Kent and me to luncheon. I declined, of course, and so did Lullie. She came to the meetings early and stayed late, and it's hard to say which irritated us more, her frocks or her efforts to be familiar with us. We did not return her calls, and we tried, in a well bred way, to subdue her, but it seemed little use.

By the time the Thursday Bridge Club's season was half over we were completely disgusted. Mrs. Garrison, I'm happy to tell, had been brought to see her mistake and she was more than anxious to expiate her—I nearly said crime—offense. Especially since she had found out that Mrs. Pace was no real kin to the Bishop and would be no use to her at all. She really had been the most disagreeable of us all to Mrs. Pace, and I suppose it was natural of the eighth meeting. I shall never forget that day if I live to be a thousand. We were all rather late—the meeting was at Miss Maxwell's—and Mrs. Pace was already there when Lullie Kent and I came in. The creature had on another new frock, a green checked silk with yoke and sleeves of pink flowered organza, and very much shirred and lace trimmed. On anyone else it might not have been bad, but I don't believe she could have looked like a lady in anything—no, not even in deep mourning, with a crepe veil to hide her face and hair and a loose coat to cover her hour glass figure.

Every one seemed depressed, and we played listlessly. All the flavor of good fellowship was completely gone. I thought Mrs. Pace's manner was a little sharp and sharp, but I set it down to natural behavior of the woman and paid no attention. After we had finished playing and were sitting about waiting for Miss Maxwell to announce the prize winners and give the prizes, Mrs. Pace spoke up, very loudly and clear: "I can tell fortunes for the cards, perfectly," she said, apropos of nothing that I had heard. "Do let me tell yours, Mrs. Kent."

Lullie murmured something about not believing in such things, but of course she could not tell Mrs. Pace outright to stop. We all just turned to watch, and Mrs. Pace shuffled the cards and asked Lullie to divide them in three parts. As she looked at the first pile she gave a little start. "Dear me," she said, "I suppose it would be unfair to ask it, but it's very plain that you did not marry for love. Here's a love affair with a dark man



HE WENT ON AND PLAYED ALIVE EVERY WOMAN IN THAT CLUB

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