Turquoise and Pearl ....

Rumor, So Often False, Was So in This Case.

"I SHALL count on you," said Mrs. Danton; "you must dine with us every night she is here. That will be three nights, beginning with tomorrow. You will take her in to dinner, of course."

"I can't possibly——" I began.

"You must," said Mrs. Danton, smiling in the delightful way in which Mrs. Danton does smile. "You really must. You know what our party is. We fish, every one of us, men and women. We think and talk of nothing else, whereas you are a clever man, the only clever man in the neighborhood."

I should not venture to call myself a clever man, although I won a Hebrew prize when I was in college, a second prize, and since then have done a little work at old Gaelic. Indeed, I published a paper some time ago in the Philologist on the connection between Gaelic and Sanskrit. I could not flatter myself that Mrs. Danton knew anything about either Gaelic or Sanskrit, and I was quite unreasonably pleased to hear her call me clever. Nobody else in the world recognizes my ability, except my sister Margaret, who lives with me; and she admires me, so to speak, from a distance, in an uneducated and uninspiring way. Mrs. Danton has always been nice to me since I first knew her, and whether she knew anything about Sanskrit or not, I appreciated her way of calling me clever. I would do a good deal to please Mrs. Danton.

"Besides," she went on, "Lady Egerton said in her letter that Miss Bentley particularly wanted to meet you. It was Lady Egerton who insisted on me having her here. I couldn't well refuse, you know, because she's Tom's aunt."

I knew beforehand that it was Lady Egerton, and not Miss Bentley, who was the aunt, and so I was not confused by Mrs. Danton's use of the pronouns.

"Tom is furious, of course," she said. "He can't bear literary women: but I couldn't help myself."

Tom is Mrs. Danton's husband. He fishes when they come over here in the summer. What he does at the other seasons of the year when he is elsewhere I do not know. Very likely he shoots and hunts. I could quite easily believe that he would have little or nothing in common with a literary woman. I did not expect to have much in common with her myself. I doubted much whether my Hebrew and Gaelic would help me.

"Her name," said Mrs. Danton, "is Rose, Rose Bentley. I looked her out in Mudie's list, and I find she has written a novel called 'Turquoise and Pearl.' You've read it, perhaps."

She looked at me in a curious way as she spoke. If I had not known Mrs. Danton as a woman of the world whose self-possession it was impossible to shake, I should have thought she felt a little shy in making the suggestion that I had read "Turquoise and Pearl."

"No," I said: "I've never even heard of it."

"I haven't read it, of course," she said. "But there's been a lot of talk about it. The men had it in the smoking room at Deeside when we were there for the cock shooting. I believe it's—well, it's not exactly the sort of book a woman would care to read."

"I'm sorry," I said firmly, "but I cannot possibly dine with you tomorrow night."

I am the curate of the parish. I felt that I could not possibly face Miss Rose Bentley. I am not, I trust, prejudiced or narrow minded, but as a clergyman I do not feel that I am the proper man to cope with an emancipated woman novelist. I failed altogether to guess why Miss Bentley should want to meet me.

"It will be all right," said Mrs. Danton. "She won't talk that way. Lady Egerton would not have sent her here if she was in the least—in fact, now I have found out what she wrote, I'm rather surprised that Lady Egerton did send her here. As a rule, Lady Egerton is quite the opposite, quite—almost too much so. She disapproves dreadfully of poor Tom. You needn't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," I said untruthfully. Mrs. Danton was smiling and seemed inclined to laugh outright. "The fact is Margaret, my sister Margaret, promised that we'd go up to tea at the rectory tomorrow night."

"Put them off," said Mrs. Danton, "and bring Margaret with you. She'll be one woman too many, but I'll fit her in."

Margaret would, I knew, detest being "fitted in." She has a high sense of personal dignity. She also dislikes Mrs. Danton, because she imagines that Mrs. Danton patronizes her. This is quite a mistake, and I used to tell her so at first. I do not press my contradiction now, because she has a theory, which she puts into plain words, that Mrs. Danton makes a fool of me and winds me around her finger.

"I'm sure," I said, "that Margaret won't break her engagement."

"I shall be sorry if she doesn't," said Mrs. Danton. "She would have helped me with Miss Bentley after dinner. But I shall count on you. After all its simply your duty to come. Isn't it? As a clergyman, I mean."

I did not quite see how my duty as a clergyman came into the matter, but I had no doubt about my inclination. I felt shy of Miss Bentley, but I reflected that I should have somebody else on the other side of me at dinner, and, too, tea at the rectory is really a dull entertainment. I promised to do my best with Miss Bentley.

Margaret, as I expected, flatly refused to dine with the Danton's. She said that if she was wanted she ought to have been asked properly. She even objected to my going. I pointed out to her that I was asked to meet a woman of literary eminence, and that the invitation, coming as it did at the special request of the lady herself, was most flattering. Margaret sniffed. I went on to explain that my opportunities for intellectual intercourse with clever people were few, and that it would be a great pleasure to me to meet Miss Rose Bentley. I brought out the name rather anxiously, sincerely hoping that Margaret had never heard of "Turquoise and Pearl." She never had. Indeed, when I put the matter that way she took rather a nice view of it. Margaret is really fond of me, and has a high opinion of my scholarship. She thinks that here in Connemara I am a kind of unrecognized genius pining in a wilderness.

"Of course," she said, "if Miss Bentley is really a clever woman——"

"She is," I said. "Amazingly clever. Mrs. Danton says so."

Margaret sniffed again.

"If you've only got Mrs. Danton's word for it——"

"Of course," I explained, "Mrs. Danton doesn't say it on her own authority. She is simply repeating the opinion current in—in London and other places."

"Very well," said Margaret. "If she really is a clever woman I don't want to deprive you of the chance of talking to her. But I won't go."

Thus it happened, much, I imagine, to Mrs. Danton's relief, that I went up to dinner without Margaret. I arrived early and sat for some minutes alone in the drawing room. Then Mrs. Danton rustled in with a charming apology for not being downstairs to receive me.

"I wrote for the book," she said, "directly I was sure she was coming. I wish I had had it yesterday, so that you could have read it before you met her; but it didn't come until this afternoon. Here it is."

She fished a book in a red cover out of a drawer in her writing table.

"I kept it hidden," she said, "so that Tom shouldn't get hold of it. If he did, he'd make jokes. You know Tom's sort of joke?"

I did, and urged her to conceal the book again.

"I can't read it now," I said. "There wouldn't be time. I'm not sure that I care to read it at all."

"O, it will be all right for you," said Mrs. Danton. "Nobody could object to your reading it—as a clergyman, I mean."

Mrs. Danton has a peculiar view, all her own, of the clerical office. I am never quite sure what she will expect me to do or say "as a clergyman."

"Keep off the subject as well as you can for tonight," said Mrs. Danton, "and read it tomorrow. Then you'll be able to talk to her about it."

A woman entered the room.

"Miss Bentley," said Mrs. Danton, "how nice of you to be down in such good time after your journey! Let me introduce Mr. Meares to you. I know you're longing to meet him, and he is looking forward to a great talk with you about books and literature and art and music and everything that we poor ordinary people know nothing about."

Miss Bentley is quite a good looking girl. I thought beforehand that she might be good looking in a handsome, showy style. I did not expect her to be a girl. As a matter of fact, she looked little more than a child. I should have put her down at the first glance as about 18 years old. She wore a plain white dress, and had large, innocent looking exes. I reflected that appearances are extraordinarily deceptive things. Miss Bentley did not look as if she could possibly have written the sort of book which would shock Mrs. Danton. Mrs. Danton, being Tom's wife, is not at all easily shocked.

I commented on the length of the drive from the station and the extremely unsatisfactory nature of our train service while the rest of the party dribbled into the room. There were eight of them, altogether, without counting Tom, who was late. They were all fishing people—a fishing colonel with a wife and daughter that fished; a fishing stock broker with a wife who was an enthusiast about salmon; an elderly Miss Danton, Tom's sister; a London barrister, the butt of the party, because he never caught anything; and a nondescript boy, who was, I understood, reading for Sandhurst. No one showed the least wish to interrupt my conversation with Miss Bentley.

We trooped in to dinner, and I found myself between Miss Danton and Miss Bentley. This sealed my fate. Miss Danton does not like me. She does not, I believe, like any one whom her sister-in-law does like. I knew she would not talk to me under any circumstances. I pulled myself together and devoted my attention to Miss Bentley.

"Is this," I asked, "your first visit to Ireland?"

"Yes. I spent two weeks last summer in the Hebrides, and this spring I was in Brittany. I was determined to visit Ireland next."

"And what do you think of us?" I asked.

She looked at me with a mild surprise in her eyes. I felt that the question was banal, and hastened to redeem myself.

"I met a lady once," I said, "who was paying her first visit to Ireland. She told me that the thing which surprised her most was that Irishmen never fall in love."

This was not strictly true. I did not meet the lady myself. It was Tom Danton who met her, and told me afterward what she said. But I thought the remark was a good one to make to Miss Bentley. The authoress of "Turquoise and Pearl," supposing it to be the kind of book Mrs. Danton said it was, ought to be interested in this peculiarity of Irishmen. I fully expected Miss Bentley to say something brilliant in reply. I was disappointed. All she said was, "Indeed?"

I tried again. "I suppose," I said, "that it isn't simply for pleasure that you have come here. You probably are hard at work."

"Indeed I am," she said. "I spent the last fortnight in the Arran islands."

"Ah," I said, "local color. Isn't that the phrase? You couldn't have gone to a better place for it."

Then, to my surprise, she began to talk about the Irish language. It is still spoken in great purity by the Arran islanders. I was still more surprised when I found that she appeared to know something about the subject. She quoted, to my absolute astonishment, the opinions of Prof. Windleschein of Heidelberg on some points of Gaelic philology. In the course of our conversation I gathered that she herself was half German and that the professor was her uncle. I am ashamed to say that I forgot all about her literary work, and allowed myself to be seduced into giving her a sort of lecture on ancient Gaelic and its connection with the early Aryan languages. Before the women left us I had promised to take her next day to see some stones with Ogam inscriptions in a remote corner of the parish.

Afterward, while Tom Danton, the colonel, the stock broker, the barrister, and the boy were telling each other fishing stories of extraordinary imaginative power, I reflected that Miss Bentley. My sister Margaret, who, of course, understands such matters much better than I do, has often told me that an intelligent woman can make a fool of any man.

"All she has to do," so Margaret says, "is to pretend to be interested in his particular hobby until she starts him talking about it. Then she need only smile, and he will think her charming."

Margaret is very wise. I leaped to the conclusion that Miss Bentley had played this trick on me. I rather resented it, but was forced to admit that she had done it uncommonly well. I should not have believed beforehand that any one could have successfully pretended to possess a knowledge of ancient Irish.

As I was saying good-night Mrs. Danton slipped "Turquoise and Pearl" into my hand. I took the book up to bed with me, and, although I had to go downstairs between 1 and 2 for a fresh candle, I finished it before I went to sleep. It was worse, considerably worse, than any novel I had ever read. I have in my time studied the classic poets. I also have read "The Early Fathers