



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

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1. My Cousin Rachel

by Margaret Turner

Chapter One: I Begin My Story

My father and mother died before I was two years old. I cannot remember them. My father died first, fighting in the war against the French in 1815. My mother died a few months afterwards. My cousin Ambrose, who was twenty years older than me, became my guardian. He looked after me as if I was his son. From the beginning, I loved Ambrose more than anyone else in the world.

Ambrose Ashley was a rich, unmarried man. He lived in a beautiful old house in the west of England. The house was near the sea and there was farmland all round it. The house, the land and the farms around it had all belonged to the Ashley family for many years. The house was full of pictures, books and many beautiful things.

Ambrose was a gentleman of leisure. He was not a businessman. But he took good care of all the people who worked on his land. He knew them all by name. Everyone on the estate loved Ambrose as much as I did.

Ambrose was a shy man, with many unusual ideas. He looked after me himself and would not have a woman in the house to help him. But he was friendly with the people who lived in the other big houses in the district. Some of his neighbours did not understand Ambrose, but they all liked him.

As I grew older, Ambrose and I became more like brothers. We were both tall, shy men, with long arms and legs and big feet. We both had thick, curly hair, although Ambrose's hair was darker than mine.

We enjoyed doing the same things. We often rode our horses through the beautiful woods and fields near the house. When the weather was good, we sailed our boat on the sea, fished, or swam.

There were no female servants in the Ashley house. Ambrose said he did not want women in the house.

And as I grew older, I agreed more and more with his ideas. The big house was not very clean or tidy, but it was comfortable and we both loved it. The servants looked after us well and the food and wine were always good. Ambrose and I often sat together after dinner, drinking wine in the light of our candles. Then we sat in the library beside a bright fire. The walls of the library were covered with shelves full of beautiful books.



On Sundays, we always went to church. After breakfast, the carriage took Ambrose and me to the church in the village. All the servants came to church too. On Sunday evenings, we had an early dinner. Usually, some of our neighbors would eat with us.

When I was old enough, Ambrose taught me how to look after his land and his people. I was his heir. The house and the land were going to be mine when Ambrose died. But I never thought that Ambrose would die. We both expected that he would live for many years. Our days together passed in a calm happiness.

But sometimes changes come into people's lives that they do not expect. Things happen to us that we can do nothing about. My dear cousin Ambrose is dead. That is why I am writing this story. My cousin Rachel is dead too. And who was my cousin Rachel? You must read my story to find the answer to that question.

I know who killed Rachel, but I do not know how my dear Ambrose died. Was he killed too? I shall never be able to answer that question. I shall never know the answer. Perhaps, you who are reading this can decide. You must be my cousin Rachel's judge and mine too.

I, Philip Ashley, am only twenty-five now. Most of my life is in front of me. But the only people I shall ever love are dead. I cannot live with my thoughts any longer. I must write down everything that happened — everything about Ambrose, my cousin Rachel and myself.

Chapter two: News from Italy

Ambrose and I lived in Cornwall. It is often cold and damp in winter there. Rain falls nearly every day and the sea looks rough and grey. This weather was bad for Ambrose. By the time he was forty years old, he was walking with a stick and his hair was turning grey. His doctors told him that he must go abroad every winter to a drier country. If he did this, he would become stronger and he would live to be a healthy, old man.

I was twenty-two when Ambrose went abroad for the third winter. I had left University and I was old enough to look after the estate by myself.

This time, Ambrose was going to Italy. He wanted to see the beautiful gardens of Rome and Florence. Ambrose loved his own gardens and everything he planted grew well there. Now he was planning to bring back many unusual plants and trees from Italy.

The evening before Ambrose left for Italy, we sat together in the library as usual. We were both smoking our pipes and our long legs were stretched out in front of us. We were wearing old, comfortable clothes and the fire was burning brightly. The dogs were sleeping at our feet. We sat in silence for a while and then Ambrose said, 'I wish you were coming with me tomorrow, Philip.'

'Why not?' I replied quickly. 'I could soon be ready. Yes, Ambrose, let me go with you.'

Ambrose smiled. 'No,' he said. 'We can't both be away. Someone must look after the estate. Forget I asked you.'

'You are feeling well, aren't you?' I asked. 'You haven't any pain?'

'Of course not, Philip,' Ambrose replied. 'The trouble is that I love my home too much. I don't want to leave.'

Ambrose stood up and walked towards the windows. He pulled back the heavy curtains and looked out into the darkness.

'You must promise to look after the gardens for me, Philip,' he said.

'What do you mean?' I asked. 'You will be back here in the spring.'

'Yes, I will...' Ambrose answered slowly. 'Take care of things while I'm away, Philip. You are very young, but I need your help, you know that. And everything I have will be yours.'

Suddenly I felt afraid.

'Ambrose, please let me go to Italy with you,' I said again.

'No, Philip, that's enough,' Ambrose said with a smile. 'Go to bed.' That was all. We did not discuss the matter again.

Early the following morning, Ambrose left for Plymouth, our nearest big port. He was going by ship to the south of France. From there, he would travel by coach to Italy.

The weeks passed slowly for me. They always did when Ambrose was away. But I had plenty to do. And if I was lonely, I rode my horse into the nearest town or visited our neighbours.

The first letter from Ambrose arrived in the middle of November. He was well and happy. The journey by ship had gone well. At Christmas, Ambrose wrote to say that he had reached Florence. It was in this letter that he wrote about his cousin Rachel for the first time. He told me that our family and her family were related.

Rachel's father and mother were both dead. Rachel's husband, an Italian count, had died too. She lived alone near Florence in a big house, called the Villa Sangalletti. Rachel had planted the gardens of the villa herself and they were famous for their beauty.

I was glad when I read this letter. Ambrose had found a friend who loved gardens as much as he did.

The winter in Europe was very bad that year and snow covered the roads. Because of this, the next letter did not arrive until the early spring. In this letter, Ambrose told me more about his cousin Rachel. She had found him somewhere to stay near her villa.

My cousin Rachel is a very intelligent woman, Ambrose wrote. But, thank God, she doesn't talk too much. Her gardens are beautiful. The weather is getting warmer and I am spending a lot of time in them. My cousin Rachel is pleased to have an English friend and I am giving her advice about business matters. She has very little money. Because I have helped her, my cousin Rachel has helped me find many beautiful plants. I will bring them home with me.

I was surprised by this letter. Ambrose had never shown any interest in a woman before. But I was glad that he was well and happy.

There were a few more letters, but Ambrose did not say anything about returning to Cornwall. Then at the end of April, I received the letter that changed my whole life.

Dear boy,

I don't know how to begin to tell you - my cousin Rachel and I were married two weeks ago. I do not know why she has chosen me. But we are very happy together. I love her, Philip, and I am sure you will love her too. She is kind and good.

Tell our friends about my marriage, Philip. And remember, it will never change my feelings for you. Write soon and send some words of welcome to your cousin Rachel.

I could not believe it. I took the letter out in the gardens and walked slowly down to the sea. I sat there and read the letter again. I felt lonely, angry and very unhappy. I was already jealous of this woman, my cousin Rachel. I knew that my life would never be the same again.



I told all the neighbours about Ambrose's marriage. But I did not speak to anyone about my feelings. To my surprise, all our neighbours were very happy at the news. 'It's the best thing that could have happened. When are they coming home?' people said. But I did not know. Ambrose had not written anything about when he would come back.

Our nearest friends were Nick Kendall and his daughter, Louise. Nick Kendall was nearly sixty years old. He was my godfather. His wife was dead. Louise was a little younger than me and people said she was pretty. We had known each other all our lives and she was like a sister to me. The Kendalls were the first people I told about Ambrose's marriage.

Nick Kendall was a lawyer. When he heard the news, he looked at me carefully.

'You will have to start looking for a house, Philip,' he said. At first I did not understand.

'What do you mean?' I asked in surprise.

'Well, Ambrose and his wife will want to be together,' Nick Kendall told me. 'They may have children. I am sure Ambrose will buy you a house of your own. And you may get married yourself. There are many pretty girls in the district.'

He went on talking, but I did not hear what he said. I had never thought I would have to leave my home. I hated my cousin Rachel. What was she like, this woman who was completely changing my life? Was she pretty or plain, old or young?

In the middle of May, I received another letter from Ambrose. He said that he and my cousin Rachel were staying in Italy for the summer. I was so happy. Thank God, this woman was not going to come to the house yet! I began to enjoy life again.

The summer passed and winter came. Ambrose did not return. He continued to write to me but his letters changed. I began to feel that he was not happy. The summer and autumn were very hot in Italy that year. Ambrose was having terrible headaches. He had never had headaches before. But he said nothing about coming home.

The second winter passed and then the spring. Ambrose had been married for more than a year now. Many weeks passed and I did not receive a letter. I began to worry. At last a letter came in July. But it made me more worried than before. I got on my horse at once and rode over to Nick Kendall's house to show him the letter.

The writing was so bad that we could hardly read it. Ambrose wrote to say that he had a terrible illness. He wrote about his fear of Italian doctors and of a man called Rainaldi. He also seemed to be afraid of his wife, Rachel.

'These are the words of a very sick man,' Nick Kendall said slowly. 'A man whose mind is very disturbed. You do not know this, Philip, but Ambrose's father died of a tumour of the brain. In the last weeks of his life, he was sometimes like a madman. I hope that Ambrose . . .'

Then Nick Kendall looked at me and said, 'I think you had better go to Italy, Philip. You must find out what is happening.'

I knew immediately that I had to go to Italy. I did not look forward to the long journey in a strange country. I could not speak French or Italian. But I knew I had to go.

I went home and got ready to leave. Seecombe, our head servant, was going to look after the house while I was away. I did not tell him about Ambrose's illness.

I was in the carriage ready to leave when a last letter arrived from Ambrose. It was very short and almost impossible to read.

For God's sake, come quickly! Ambrose had written. Rachel, my torment, has won. I am dying. Come quickly, or it will be too late!

I began my journey with a terrible fear in my heart. It was the 10th of July. I knew I could not reach Ambrose until the middle of August.



2. Grammar page

Determiners:

The word **'the'** is called the definite article. Use the before a noun when you are talking about a certain person or thing.



The telephone is ringing.



Where is the cat? I think she is under the bed.

1. Granny is sitting in the garden.
2. The street is very busy today.
3. The sky is getting dark.
4. The sun is shining brightly.
5. The earth goes round the sun.
6. The moon goes round the earth.

Exercise

Write **a**, **an** or **the** in the blanks to complete the sentences.

1. There is _____ rainbow in _____ sky.
2. Who is _____ man outside _____ gate?
3. _____ doctor gave Jane _____ injection.
4. Paul opened _____ door to let _____ dog in.
5. Mark is _____ only child in _____ family.
- 6 What's _____ largest animal in _____ world?
7. There's _____ nest in _____ tree.
8. Sue is writing _____ letter to her grandfather.
9. Banat has _____ brother and _____ sister.
10. We reached _____ top of _____ hill in two hours.

Answers

Write **a**, **an** or **the** in the blanks to complete the sentences.

1. There is **a** rainbow in **the** sky.
2. Who is **the** man outside **the** gate?
3. **The** doctor gave Jane **an** injection.
4. Paul opened **the** door to let **the** dog in.
5. Mark is **the** only child in **the** family.
- 6 What's **the** largest animal in **the** world?
7. There's **a** nest in **the** tree.
8. Sue is writing **a** letter to her grandfather.
9. Banat has **a** brother and **a** sister.
10. We reached **the** top of **the** hill in two hours.