



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

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1. My Cousin Rachel

by Margaret Turner

Chapter seven: A Strange Conversation

The following day was Saturday. I paid the men their wages, as Ambrose had always done. But Tamlyn, the head gardener, was not there. I was told that he was in the gardens somewhere, with the mistress.

I found them putting new plants into the ground.

‘I’ve been here since half past ten,’ my cousin Rachel said with a smile. ‘These are some of the plants Ambrose and I found in Italy. I had to put them into the ground quickly. Tamlyn has been helping me.’

‘And I’ve learnt a lot of things this morning, Mr Philip,’ Tamlyn said. ‘Mrs Ashley knows far more about these plants than I do.’

After lunch, I took my cousin Rachel around the estate. She sat on a quiet horse and I walked beside her. She wore a black dress and a black shawl round her head.

She looked very proud and very Italian — not like an Englishwoman at all.

To my surprise, my cousin Rachel knew the name of every field and farm on the estate. As I walked by her side, we began to talk about the gardens of my cousin Rachel’s villa.

‘When I was married to my first husband,’ she said, ‘I was not happy. So I spent my time planning the gardens of the Villa Sangalietti. I would like you to see them, Philip.’

I looked up in surprise. Didn’t my cousin Rachel know that I had been to Florence and seen the villa? I thought my godfather had told her in his letter. I began to speak, but the horse moved on and it was too late. I was very quiet on the way home.

After dinner, we sat down together by the library fire. My cousin Rachel was sewing. I smoked my pipe and watched her hands moving quickly. They were small, white hands and she wore two rings on her fingers.

‘Something is the matter, Philip,’ she said at last. ‘What is worrying you?’ ‘Did my godfather tell you I had been away?’

‘No.’

'I didn't hear of Ambrose's death from Signor Rainaldi's letter,' I said slowly. 'I found out about it in Florence, from your servants.'

My cousin Rachel gave me a long, strange look.

'You went to Florence?' she said. 'When? For how long?'

'I was in Florence for only one night — the night of the 15th of August,' I said. The sewing fell from my cousin Rachel's hands.

'But I left Florence only the day before. Why didn't you tell me this last night?' 'I thought you knew,' I answered awkwardly.

'I want you to tell me why you went to Italy, Philip,' my cousin Rachel said.

I put my hand in my pocket and felt the letters there.

'I had not heard from Ambrose for a long time,' I said. 'As the weeks went by, I grew worried. Then in July, a letter came, a very strange letter. I showed it to Nick Kendall. He agreed that I should go to Florence at once. As I was leaving, there was another letter. I have them both in my pocket. Do you want to see them?'

'Not yet. Tell me what you did in Florence.'

'I went to the Villa Sangalletti. When I asked for Ambrose, the servants told me he was dead. You had gone away. They showed me the room where Ambrose had died and gave me his hat. It was the only thing you had left behind.'

My cousin Rachel sat very still. 'Go on,' she said quietly.

'I went back to Florence, to Signor Rainaldi. He told me about Ambrose's illness. He did not know where you were. I left for England the following day.'

There was silence and then my cousin Rachel said, 'May I see the letters now?' She read them over and over again. At last, she handed them back.

Then my cousin Rachel looked deep into my eyes. 'How you must have hated me, Philip,' she said.

At that moment, I felt that my cousin Rachel knew everything. She knew everything I had been thinking about her, all these months.

'Yes, I have hated you,' I said slowly.

'Then why did you ask me here?'

'To accuse you of breaking his heart, perhaps - a kind of murder. I wanted to make you suffer, to watch you suffer.'

'You have your wish,' she said. Her face was very white and her dark eyes were full of tears.

I stood up and looked away. I had never seen a woman cry before.

‘Cousin Rachel, go upstairs,’ I said.

But she did not move. I took the letters from her hands and threw them in the fire.

‘I can forget,’ I said, ‘if you will too. Look, the letters have burnt away.’

‘We can both remember what Ambrose wrote,’ my cousin Rachel replied. ‘But it’s better if I say nothing more. I cannot explain. Let me stay until Monday. Then I will go away. Then you can either forget me, or go on hating me. At least we were happy today, Philip.’

‘But I do not hate you now,’ I said. ‘I hated someone I had never met. Even before those letters came, I hated Ambrose’s wife because I was jealous. Ambrose is the only person I have ever loved. You took him away from me and I was jealous of you. Love can do strange things to people.’

‘I know that,’ my cousin Rachel answered. ‘Love did strange things to Ambrose too. He was forty-three when we met and he fell in love. He was like someone who had been asleep all his life. His love was too strong. It was too strong for me and too strong for him. It changed him, Philip.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Something in me made Ambrose change,’ she replied. ‘Sometimes I made him happy, sometimes I made him sad. Then he became ill. You were right to hate me, Philip. If Ambrose hadn’t met me he would be alive today.’

She looked at me and smiled sadly.

‘Perhaps I was jealous of you too, Philip,’ she said. ‘He was always talking about you. Sometimes I grew very tired of hearing your name.’

She stopped talking and picked up her sewing. ‘If you wish, we can talk again tomorrow,’ my cousin Rachel said. ‘Then, on Monday, I shall leave. Nick Kendall has invited me to stay in his house.’

‘But I don’t want you to go,’ I said. ‘There are so many things to do together . . .’

As I looked down at her, her eyes seemed to see through me and understand all my thoughts.

‘Light me a candle,’ she said. ‘I must go to bed.’

Then she stood above me on the stairs, looking down at me. ‘You don’t hate me anymore?’ she asked.

‘No. And are you still jealous of me, or is that forgotten too?’

My cousin Rachel laughed. ‘I was never jealous of you,’ she said. ‘I was jealous of a spoilt boy whom I had never met.’ Suddenly she bent down and kissed me.

'Your first kiss, Philip,' she said. 'I hope you like it.'

I watched her as she walked up the stairs, away from me.



Chapter eight: Two Letters

On Sundays, Ambrose and I had always gone to church.

This Sunday, my cousin Rachel agreed to go with me. Our neighbours were able to see her for the first time and the church was full. I heard people saying that my cousin Rachel was beautiful. This surprised me very much.

As usual, the Kendalls and the vicar and his family came to dinner. I had never enjoyed these visits. But, to my surprise, the afternoon was a great success. The time passed quickly. How I wished Ambrose had been with us! Everyone enjoyed themselves, except, I think, Louise. She said very little and did not smile once.

When our guests left at six o'clock, my cousin Rachel and I went back into the library.

'Well, Philip,' my cousin Rachel asked me, 'have you enjoyed yourself?'

'Yes, but I don't know why,' I answered. 'Everyone seemed more interesting than usual.'

'When you marry Louise, it will always be like that,' my cousin Rachel said with a smile. 'A man needs a wife when he is entertaining.'

I stared at her.

'Marry Louise?' I repeated in surprise. 'I am not going to marry Louise, or anyone.'

'Aren't you?' my cousin Rachel replied. 'Your godfather thinks you are. And Louise does too. She will make you a good wife. When I am gone, you will need a woman here.'

'But you are not going, cousin Rachel,' I told her. 'What is wrong with this house and with me?'

'Nothing . . .'

'Tomorrow, you must begin visiting,' I went on. 'Then our neighbours will visit you. You will have many things to do here.'

'I don't think I really like that idea,' said my cousin Rachel, standing up. 'It would be better if I gave your neighbours Italian lessons. I am a poor widow and shall need money soon.'

I laughed. 'Then you must marry or sell your rings!'

I knew at once that I had been very rude. It was true that my cousin Rachel had nothing. She could not live without money.

I called the dog and went out into the garden. I felt very stupid and I stayed away from the house until it was dark. As I was walking, I had an idea. Some money must be given to my cousin Rachel. But I would not tell her that it was my idea.

When I turned back to the house, I saw that the windows of Rachel's bedroom were open.

'Why are you walking in the dark, Philip?' a soft voice asked. 'Are you worried about anything?'

'Why, yes,' I answered. 'I'm afraid you must find me very rude and stupid.'

'Nonsense, Philip. Go to bed.'

Something fell at my feet. It was a flower. The window was closed quietly.



That week, more plants and small trees arrived from Italy. On Thursday morning, I rode over to Pelyn, my godfather's house. My cousin Rachel was in the garden with Tamlyn. She told me that she and the gardeners would be busy until the afternoon.

I wasted no time and I was in my godfather's study by ten o'clock.

'My cousin Rachel must have some money,' I said. 'She is talking about giving Italian lessons. That is impossible!'

Nick Kendall looked pleased.

'I am glad you want to help Mrs. Ashley,' he said. 'The bank can pay some money to her every quarter. How much do you suggest?'

When I told him, my godfather looked surprised. 'That may be too much, Philip,' he said slowly.

'Ambrose would have wanted me to be generous,' I said. 'Write me a letter for her, and write a letter to the bank.'

'You are as impulsive as Ambrose,' Nick Kendall said. But he wrote the letters.

'I will take the letter to the bank,' I said. 'But I don't want cousin Rachel to know that I have arranged this. Will you send a servant to my house with the letter for her?'

Nick Kendall agreed.

As I was leaving, I saw Louise. 'I can't stop,' I said at once. 'I have come on business.'

Louise looked at me coldly.

'And how is Mrs Ashley?' she asked.

'Well and happy,' I answered. 'She is very busy in the garden today.'

'I am surprised that you are not helping her,' Louise said. 'I'm sure Mrs Ashley can make you do exactly what she wants.'

Louise made me feel very angry and I left the house without another word.

I rode to the bank and gave them the letter. I didn't get home until nearly four o'clock. I did not see my cousin Rachel. I rang the bell for Seecombe. He told me that Mrs Ashley had worked in the gardens until three o'clock. Then she had asked for water for a bath.

I decided to take a bath too and I asked for an early dinner. Later, I went to my cousin Rachel's sitting-room. I was feeling very happy.

She was sitting on a stool by the fire. She had washed her hair and she was drying it.

'Come and sit down,' she said. 'Why are you staring at me? Have you never seen a woman brushing her hair before? Wait here, while I go and change my dress for dinner.'

My cousin Rachel was in her bedroom when Seecombe came in with the letter from my godfather. I stood up, feeling awkward. There was no sound from the bedroom as my cousin Rachel read the letter. Then suddenly, she came

out of the room. She looked very angry.

'You made Mr Kendall write this letter,' she said. 'Did you think I was asking you for money? I am angry and ashamed.'

'Ashamed?' I repeated. 'I would be ashamed if Mrs Ambrose Ashley had to give Italian lessons. What would people think of Ambrose? The money is yours, take it.'

I was angry now. We stood staring at each other. Then my cousin Rachel's eyes filled with tears. She turned, went quickly into her bedroom and shut the door loudly.

That night, I had dinner alone. Is that how women behaved? Did they always cry when they were angry? Thank God I had no wife! Poor Ambrose! No wonder he had been unhappy. I knew I would never marry now.

After dinner, I read, and then fell asleep in my chair. When I woke up, it was time to go upstairs to my room.

On the table by my bed was a note from my cousin Rachel.

Dear Philip,

Please forgive me for my rudeness. I have written to Mr Kendall thanking him for his letter. I thank you too.

Rachel.

The door to her sitting-room was open. I walked straight through and knocked on the bedroom door. The room was in darkness, but I could see my cousin Rachel in bed.

'I want to thank you for your note and say goodnight,' I said. 'I'm sorry I made you angry. I did not want you to cry.'

'I cried because of what you said about Ambrose,' she said. 'I will take the money, Philip, but after this week, I must go.'

'But I thought you liked it here,' I said. 'You seemed so happy, working in the garden . . . You have a home here. If Ambrose had made another will, this would have been your home.'

'Oh God!' she cried. 'Why do you think I came?'

I looked down at her. She looked very young, very alone.

'I don't know why you came,' I said. 'But I know Ambrose would have wished you to stay, perhaps to plan the gardens

‘Very well. I’ll stay — for a time,’ she said.

‘Then you aren’t angry with me anymore?’

‘I was never angry with you, Philip, but you are sometimes very stupid. Come closer.’

As I bent down, she took my face between her hands and kissed me.

‘Now go to bed, like a good boy, and sleep well,’ she said.

I moved to the door like a man in a dream. When I was back in my room, I wrote a short note to Nick Kendall. I told him that my cousin Rachel would take the money. Then I walked down to the hall to put my letter in the post bag. In the morning, Seecombe would arrange for the letters to be delivered.

There were two letters in the bag. Both had been written by my cousin Rachel. One was addressed to my godfather, Nick Kendall. The other was addressed to Signor Rainaldi, in Florence. I stared at it, before putting it back in the bag.

Why had my cousin Rachel written to Signor Rainaldi? What did she have to tell him?

2. Grammar page

The Simple Present Tense

The **simple present** tense expresses a general truth or a customary action.

1. Mary enjoys singing.
2. Peter sometimes lends me his books.
3. Cows eat grass.
4. Monkeys like bananas.
5. Tinku collects stamps.
6. The earth goes around the sun.
7. It often snows in winter.
8. We always wash our hands before meals.
9. We eat three meals a day.
10. Father takes the dog for a walk every morning.

Exercise

Fill in the blanks with the simple present tense of the verbs in brackets.

1. Winter _____ after autumn. (**come**)
2. A dog _____. (**bark**)
3. You _____ tired. (**look**)
4. Everyone _____ mistakes. (**make**)
5. Ali _____ in a department store. (**work**)
6. Judy _____ English very well. (**speak**)
7. Tim's knee _____. (**hurt**)
8. Monkeys _____ bananas. (**like**)
9. Kate always _____ sandwiches for lunch. (**eat**)
10. He _____ very fast. (**type**)

Answers

Fill in the blanks with the simple present tense of the verbs in brackets.

1. Winter **comes** after autumn.
2. A dog **barks**.
3. You **look** tired.
4. Everyone **makes** mistakes.
5. Ali **works** in a department store.
6. Judy **speaks** English very well.
7. Tim's knee **hurts**.
8. Monkeys **like** bananas.
9. Kate always **eats** sandwiches for lunch.
10. He **types** very fast.