



Learn English Through Stories

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1. My Cousin Rachel

by Margaret Turner

Chapter nine: We Open Ambrose's Boxes

Now it was October, but the weather was fine and my cousin Rachel was able to work in the garden. We also had time to visit the tenants on the estate. They all loved my cousin Rachel. When they were ill, she gave them medicines made from herbs.

Sometimes in the afternoons, our neighbours came to the house. Sometimes my cousin Rachel went to visit them. I enjoyed listening to her at dinner. My cousin Rachel told me about the people she had seen during the day. She always made me laugh.

But at the end of the month, the weather changed. Rain fell every day. There was no gardening and no visiting.

One morning, my cousin Rachel and I were standing at the library window. Outside the rain was falling heavily. Then Seecombe reminded us about Ambrose's boxes. They were still in my room and had never been emptied. We began to open the boxes. The first box we opened was full of Ambrose's clothes. Suddenly my cousin Rachel was crying. Then she was in my arms, her head against my chest.

'Oh Philip! I'm so sorry,' she said. 'But we both loved him so much.' I moved my lips against her hair.

'Don't worry, Rachel,' I said. 'I'll do this.'

It was the first time I had called her by her name. She stopped crying and we continued to unpack the boxes. We decided to give Ambrose's clothes to the tenants on the estate. Then we began to look at the books.

As I opened a book on gardening, a piece of paper fell out. It looked like part of a letter, written by Ambrose.

She cannot stop spending money, I read. It is like an illness. If this goes on, my dear Philip, she will spend everything. You must tell Kendall in case ...

'What have you there?' my cousin Rachel said suddenly. 'That is Ambrose's writing.'



‘It’s nothing,’ I said and threw the piece of paper on the fire. We continued our work in silence.

That same morning, some boxes had arrived for my cousin Rachel from London. New dresses, perhaps. I remembered the words in Ambrose’s letter: It is like an illness. She will spend everything.

After dinner, when we went to the library as usual, the most beautiful blue and gold cloth lay over the chairs.

‘Do you like it, Philip?’ my cousin Rachel asked. ‘It’s Italian. It will make beautiful curtains for your room.’

‘Isn’t it very expensive?’ I asked.

‘Well, yes, but that isn’t important. If you like it, take it — as a present from me.’

I thought unhappily about the letter, but I could say nothing.

As we sat by the fire, my cousin Rachel began talking about her life in Italy. She spoke of the time before she had met Ambrose. I was listening with the greatest interest, when she suddenly said, ‘What was on that paper you threw in the fire, Philip?’

'It was from a letter,' I said, 'Ambrose was worried about money — I can't remember exactly.' The worried look went from Rachel's eyes.

'Was that all?' she said. 'Poor Ambrose. He did not understand life in Italy. He thought I spent too much money. He was very generous until he became ill. Then he changed so much.'

'How did he change?' I asked.

'When I wanted money for the house, he became very angry. In the end I had to ask Rainaldi for money to pay the servants. When Ambrose found out, he refused to have Rainaldi in the house.'

'It was a terrible time. I did not want to tell you about it, Philip. Ambrose was so ill. He trusted no one. You wouldn't have known him.'

'That is all over now,' I said. 'Don't make yourself unhappy. You cannot bring Ambrose back. This is your home now.'

My cousin Rachel looked into my eyes. 'You are so like him,' she said. 'Sometimes I am afraid. You must not change too.'

I took her hands in mine.

'I will never change,' I said. 'And we must remember Ambrose as he used to be. 'This house belongs to all three of us now.'

'You are very good to me, Philip,' my cousin Rachel said as she moved to the door. 'I hope that one day you will be as happy as I was with Ambrose — at the beginning.'

She went to bed and I sat alone by the library fire. My terrible jealousy had returned. But now I was jealous of Ambrose. I was jealous because of the love that my cousin Rachel had given him.

Chapter ten: A Christmas Present

In the past, I had always disliked the winter. But with my cousin Rachel in the house, things were very different. When I was with my cousin Rachel, I was happy. When she was away from the house, I was bored. Life was dull and uninteresting until she returned.

Like everyone else, I now thought that my cousin Rachel was beautiful. Whenever she came into a room, she made it a happier, more interesting place.

In the evenings, we sat together in her small sitting-room. We drank tisane as she and Ambrose had done in Florence. The evenings were the best times. But when I went to my room, I could not sleep. Any day, perhaps, my cousin Rachel would decide to go to London. If she left me, I would feel terribly alone.

When Ambrose had been at home, he had always given dinner to the tenants on Christmas Eve. This year, I decided to do the same.

My cousin Rachel was very pleased. At once, she began to make preparations. Packages arrived from London — presents perhaps — she began to plan the Christmas meal.

One thing worried me. What could I give my cousin Rachel for a present? I thought about it for a long time and at last I had an idea. I remembered the jewels that belonged to my family. They were kept in the bank for safety. In three months' time, on my birthday, they would be mine. But I did not want to wait that long. And I remembered that Nick Kendall had gone to London.

I went to the bank that day and asked the manager to show me the Ashley jewels.

They were very beautiful — blue, green and red. But my cousin Rachel always wore black. She could not wear coloured jewels with mourning clothes.

Then I saw the collar of pearls. How beautiful the white pearls would look on my cousin Rachel's neck!

'Your mother was the last woman to wear this collar,' the manager said. 'All the brides of the Ashley family wear it on their wedding-day.'

I put out my hand and took the collar. 'I will take this with me,' I said.

The manager looked worried. 'The pearls are not yours until the 1st of April,' he said. 'I don't think Mr. Kendall would like you to take them away.'

'I'll speak to Mr. Kendall,' I said. I put the collar in its box and stood up. I knew the pearls were the right present for my cousin Rachel. I felt very excited.

Then at last, it was Christmas Eve. Seecombe had brought a tree into the house and had decorated it as usual. Dinner was to start at five. After dinner, everybody would have a present. This year, my cousin Rachel was going to give out the presents with me.

Before I dressed for dinner, I sent the collar of pearls to her room. With it, was a note: My mother was the last woman to wear this. Now it belongs to you. I want you to wear it tonight and always. Philip.

When I was ready, I went downstairs and waited for my cousin Rachel. She came in slowly. Her dress was black, but it was one I had not seen before. The collar of pearls was round her neck. I had never seen her look so happy or so beautiful.

She put her arms around me and then she kissed me. She kissed me not as a cousin, but as a lover. This is what Ambrose died for, I thought. And for this I would happily die too.



She gave me her hand and we walked in to dinner.

At first, I thought this was going to be the happiest evening of my life. I remember the food, the noise and the excitement. My cousin Rachel had bought everyone a small present, carefully chosen. Mine was a gold chain for my keys with our initials, RA.R.A. hanging from it.

Our plates and glasses were filled, emptied and filled again. Then we gave everyone a present from the tree.

When dinner was over, I spoke to my godfather, Nick Kendall, for the first time that evening.

‘Good evening, sir, and happy Christmas,’ I said.

Nick Kendall looked angry and he said nothing. He was staring at the collar of pearls around my cousin’s neck.

Then at last, the tenants had all left. Louise and my cousin Rachel went upstairs. And I found myself alone with my godfather.

‘I have some bad news from the bank,’ he said. ‘The manager tells me that Mrs. Ashley is already several hundred pounds overdrawn. I don’t understand it. She must be sending money back to Italy.’

‘She is very generous,’ I said. ‘And there were debts in Florence, I think. You must give Mrs. Ashley more money.’

Nick Kendall looked unhappy. ‘There is something else, Philip,’ he said. ‘You should not have taken that collar of pearls. It is not yours.’

‘It will be mine in three months’ time,’ I said quickly. ‘My cousin Rachel will take good care of it.’

‘I am not so sure,’ Nick Kendall said. ‘I have been hearing stories about Mrs. Ashley and her first husband. They were both well-known for their bad lives. They spent money carelessly.’

‘That can’t be true!’ I cried.

‘True or not,’ my godfather replied. ‘I’m afraid that collar must go back to the bank.’

‘But I gave it to my cousin Rachel as a present. She has a right to wear the collar.’

‘Only if Ambrose had lived,’ Nick Kendall said. ‘That collar of pearls is worn by the Ashley brides, no one else. If you do not ask Mrs. Ashley to give it back, I will.’

Then suddenly, my cousin Rachel and Louise were in the room.

‘You are quite right, Mr. Kendall,’ my cousin Rachel said. ‘I was very proud to wear the collar and now I shall give it back.’ And she took off the collar and gave it to my godfather.

‘Thank you, Mrs. Ashley,’ he said. ‘And now Louise and I must go. We wish you both a happy Christmas.’

When they had gone, my cousin Rachel held out her arms. I went up to her. ‘I’m so sorry,’ I said. ‘Everything has gone wrong. My mother wore those pearls on her wedding-day, that is why I wanted you to have them. Don’t you understand?’

‘Of course I do, Philip dear,’ she said. ‘If Ambrose and I had been married here, he would have given them to me on my wedding-day.’

I said nothing. My cousin Rachel had not understood. I was thinking of another wedding-day, a wedding-day in the future ...

2. Grammar page

The Simple Present Tense

Use the simple present tense to talk about things that are planned for the future.



Melanie **starts**
school tomorrow.



Next week I **go** to
summer camp.

1. We **join** the senior scout troop in July this year.
2. My big brother **leaves** school at 4 o'clock.
3. The new supermarket **opens** next Friday.
4. The new grammar book **comes** out in September.
5. Grandad **retires** next year.
6. We **fly** to London next Thursday.
7. The plane **lands** at 5:30 P.M.
8. We **move** to our new house in a month.
9. My big sister **begins** her summer job next week.
10. The train **departs** in five minutes.
11. The bus **departs** at 9.10.
12. The train to London **leaves** every 30 minutes.