



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

D36

Adapted and modified by

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Contents

- 1. My Cousin Rachel.
Chapters 13 and 14. The End.**
- 2. Grammar Page.**

1. My Cousin Rachel

by Margaret Turner

Chapter thirteen: Louise ... and Laburnum Trees

When I went down to breakfast in the morning, there was a note for me on the table. It was not from Rachel, but from Louise.

Dear Philip,

I was sorry for you last night. If you want a friend to talk to, please let me know.

Louise.

At first, I did not want to see Louise. But I had not slept all night and I was very unhappy. Louise knew me well. I sent her a note asking her to meet me in the church that morning.

'I have been worried about you for a long time,' Louise told me. 'She has deceived you from the beginning.'

'I made a mistake,' I said.

'But Mrs Ashley did not,' Louise replied. 'She came here to get the money. She stayed until she got it. That is all.'

'I don't believe you!' I cried. 'She came on impulse. She stayed because she was happy here.'



'No, she had a plan,' Louise replied. 'She has been sending money back to Italy all the winter. She waited until you were twenty-five. But then you made her a present of everything. You made things easy for her.'

'I know you don't like Rachel,' I said. 'That is why you are saying these things. But I have asked her to marry me. And I shall go on asking her.'

'But she will never marry you,' Louise said with a sad smile. 'When you gave Mrs Ashley the document, she went straight to my father. She asked him if everything now belonged to her. My father told her that that was true. But he warned her that if she married again, she would lose the money. She told him she had no plans to marry again.'

'But if she marries me, she will lose nothing,' I said.

'She would not be able to go back to Italy, or send money there,' Louise said quietly.

She looked at me and said, 'I will go now, Philip. I have upset you deeply. I am very sorry.'

As I rode home, the rain began to fall heavily. When I got back, I was cold and wet. There was a note from Rachel in my room.

I have asked Mary Pascoe to stay here with me. After last night, I cannot be alone with you again.

Mary Pascoe, the vicar's daughter? Mary Pascoe was a large, plain girl. Rachel and I had often laughed about her. I could not believe it.

But it was true. This was the punishment for my one moment of anger.

Whenever I was with Rachel, Mary Pascoe was there too. Oh, God, what had I done?

By dinner-time, I was feeling very ill. I went upstairs to my room. I got into bed and the sheets felt very cold. I hoped that Rachel would come to me, but she did not.

In the morning, I tried to dress, but I was too weak. My neck was stiff and there was a terrible pain in my head. When I called for Seecombe he took one look at me and hurried out of the room. Then my cousin Rachel was there, her face very white.

'I will not hurt you, Rachel,' I said. 'Please send Mary Pascoe home.' 'Don't talk now, lie still,' Rachel answered.

Then the room was dark. The doctor came. I was hot, then cold. I called for Rachel and she held my hand. 'I am with you,' she said. I closed my eyes.

When I awoke, the room was full of light and warmth. How long had I been asleep? Rachel was sitting near my bed. I put my hand to my face.

'I have grown a beard!' I said. I began to laugh. At once, Rachel was holding a glass to my lips. She made me drink the bitter liquid.



'Have you sent Mary Pascoe away?' I asked. Rachel looked surprised.

'She went away five weeks ago,' she answered. 'You have been so ill that you nearly died. The doctors could not help you. Your strength and my medicines saved you.'

I lay there, with her hand in mine. I could not speak. Five weeks had passed and I could remember nothing! Only that Rachel and I had been married on the day before my birthday. We had kept our marriage a secret. But in two months' time, Rachel would be out of mourning and we would be able to tell everyone.

I was very weak for a long time. But the weather was good and I was soon able to go into the garden.

The workmen had been busy for many months. They had dug out the ground to make the sunken water-garden. It was very deep, but it was not yet finished. Yellow flowers hung on the laburnum trees that Rachel had planted. I remembered the laburnum tree at the Villa Sangalletti and the green, poisonous seeds lying under it.

That evening, as Rachel and I were drinking our tisana, I said, 'I heard something strange today. Seecombe told me you were going back to Florence. I thought you had sold the villa.'

'No, I have enough money to keep it now. I shall probably stay there for the winter. Perhaps you could visit me in the spring.'

'Visit you?' I repeated. 'But a husband should be with his wife always.' Rachel sat very still.

'Your wife? Oh, God, Philip,' she whispered. 'What do you mean? We are not married.'

'But we are,' I said. 'I remember clearly ...' But as I spoke, the pain returned to my head. I suddenly knew that our marriage was a dream.

'Why didn't you let me die?' I cried. 'I cannot live here alone, I cannot.' I looked at her face.

'Give me a few weeks, only a few weeks,' I said. She did not reply.

Chapter Fourteen: What is the Truth?

The summer came, but Rachel did not speak of leaving. I became stronger. But sometimes the terrible pain in my head came back and I could not think clearly. But I told Rachel nothing about it.

Then Rachel began to drive into the town — two or three times a week. When I asked her about these visits, she told me that she had a lot of business to do.

One day when Rachel was busy at home, I rode into the town alone. It was Saturday and the streets were full of people. As I walked slowly through the town, a man came out of an inn. He stood in the doorway for a moment, looking up and down the street. It was Rainaldi.

That evening, as Rachel was going up to her room after dinner, I stopped her. ‘How long has Rainaldi been in the town?’ I asked. ‘Why is he here?’

‘Because he is my friend,’ Rachel answered. ‘I know you hate him and do not want him here. Ambrose was jealous of him. Are you too?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I hate Rainaldi, because he is in love with you. Send him away.’

‘Certainly not,’ she said. ‘I need him. I will have him here if I wish — the house is mine.’

In my anger, I took a step towards her.

‘Don’t touch me!’ she cried. ‘That is how Ambrose behaved. I can’t suffer it again

I turned away. ‘If you want to see Rainaldi, ask him here,’ I said. ‘Don’t go secretly into the town to meet him.’

And so Rainaldi came to stay in the house. He behaved politely but I could not bear to see them together. They always spoke in Italian and she looked at him all the time.

Food seemed to have no taste now. The tisana I drank with them in the evenings tasted bitter. Then the fever returned again. I was sick and too weak to stand. I had to stay in bed for a few days. When I was better again, Rachel told me that Rainaldi had gone back to Italy.

‘When are you going there?’ I asked. Rachel did not reply.

A day or two later, a letter arrived for Rachel in Rainaldi’s handwriting. As I drank tisana with Rachel that evening, I saw the letter on her desk. Was it a

love letter? I had to know.

That night, when Rachel was in bed, I crept into her sitting-room and searched the desk. The letter was not there. But in one small drawer, I found an envelope. Inside it were some small, green seeds. They were laburnum seeds, poisonous to animals and men.

I put back the envelope and returned to my room. There were two bottles of medicine on the table. I poured the medicines out of the window. Then I went downstairs. The cups from which we had drunk our tisane had not been washed. Did the liquid in my cup have a bitter taste? I could not be sure.

I went to bed and lay there thinking. I was not angry, but I was very unhappy. I remembered Ambrose's words: Are they trying to poison me? ... Rachel has won — I am dying ...

The following day was Sunday. Rachel and I went to church as usual. As she sat beside me, her face was calm and happy. I wished I could hate her, but I could not.

After church, Rachel went to speak to Mary Pascoe. A workman came up to me and said, 'Excuse me, Mr Ashley, but I wanted to warn you. Don't walk on the new bridge over the sunken garden. It is not finished yet. Anyone walking on it would fall and break their neck!'

'Thank you,' I said. 'I will remember.'

At dinner, Rachel was kinder than she had been for a long time. She talked about Florence. She said she would look for a stone statue there to make a fountain for the sunken garden. She made tisane as usual, but I refused to drink it. I would never again drink anything she gave me.

'But it is good for you, Philip,' she said.

'No,' I said. 'You drink it.'

'I have drunk mine already,' Rachel said. 'I will pour this away.'

We talked together for half an hour or so and then Rachel said, 'I think I shall walk for a little. I want to look at the sunken garden. Will you come with me, Philip?'

I shook my head. 'Take care, Rachel,' I said.

'Of what?' she answered with a smile. 'There is no danger here, Philip.'

I sat by the window until it was almost dark. Rachel had not returned. At last, I ran out of the house and down to the sunken garden. The bridge was broken.

My cousin Rachel lay on the ground below. I climbed down and held her hands in mine. They were cold.



My cousin Rachel lay on the ground below.

'Rachel,' I said. She opened her eyes and I thought she knew me. But she called me Ambrose. I held her hands until she died.

You know now who killed Rachel. But how did Ambrose die? Did Rachel kill him? I shall go on asking myself that question until the day I die.

I live alone now. I am a young man, but I think only of the past. The two people I loved are dead. I have an empty life in front of me. That is my punishment and it is worse than death.

- THE END -

2. Grammar page

Am, Is and Are:

Use the verb **is** with singular nouns and **are** with plural nouns.

1. Banta is a lawyer. His brother is a doctor. Both his sisters are teachers.
2. Rex is a clever dog.
3. A duck is a kind of bird.
4. The playground is full of people today.
5. My house is near the school.
6. These questions are too difficult.
7. The balloons are very colourful.
8. Those people are very busy.

Use **is** and **are** with the word **there** to say what you can see and hear.

1. There is a fence around the school.
2. There are a lot of books in the library.
3. There are two guards at the gate.
4. Is there any food in the fridge?
5. Are there any apples left on the tree?
6. How much rice is there?
7. There are a few sharks in the bay.
8. There are enough candies for everyone, aren't there?
9. There are two pigeons on the roof.