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MY COUSIN RACHEL

A Play

Adapted by
DIANA MORGAN

from the novel by
DAPHNE DU MAURIER

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON
NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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CHARACTERS

Rachel Ashley
Philip Ashley
Nicholas Kendall
Louise Kendall
Antonio Rainaldi
Seecombe
James

The action takes place at Barton Hall

Time—mid-nineteenth century

ACT I
SCENE 1 A night in early September
SCENE 2 The next morning
SCENE 3 A few days later
SCENE 4 Sunday afternoon
SCENE 5 Late afternoon, the next day
SCENE 6 Christmas afternoon

ACT II
SCENE 1 Three months later. Evening
SCENE 2 Afternoon, the following day
SCENE 3 Afternoon, a few days later
SCENE 4 Afternoon, three weeks later
SCENE 5 Afternoon, two days later

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(See also page ii)

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PRODUCTION NOTE

The Curtain should not be dropped between the scenes. Lapses of time should be denoted by the fading down and fading up of Lights

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Hall at Barton. Night

This is the Great Hall of a large Cornish Manor House. At the back are a big window and a door leading to the drive and the garden. To one side a staircase leads to a gallery, and on the opposite side is a door to the servants' quarters. Below the staircase is a door leading to the dining-room

It is dark. Candles flicker. There is a distant rumble of thunder

Seecombe, the elderly, shabby steward enters from the servants' quarters, carrying a candle in a jam pot. He is followed by James pulling on a jerkin. Seecombe waves the boy out to the front door and puts down the jam pot. A horse is heard neighing. James returns, carrying a valise

James Do I put it in Master Philip's room?
Seecombe No, put it in Mr Ashley's old room.

As James goes to the stairs, half-followed by Seecombe, Philip Ashley enters. He is young, sensitive looking, obviously very exhausted. He wears a coat with a cape and carries a small travelling-case. Seecombe takes the case and hands it to James

See that the fire's still going. Go on, lad!

James goes upstairs

Philip I beg that no-one makes a fuss, Seecombe.
Seecombe We've all been so worried, Mr Philip. It's been such a time. And we were afraid you might take the fever like poor Mr Ashley.
Philip I'm not ill, Seecombe. Only very tired. It's a long journey from Florence.
Seecombe Best part of three weeks.
Philip Yes. Well, I'm for bed. We'll talk in the morning.
Seecombe I took the liberty of informing Mr Kendall of your return, sir. I sent James over to Pelyn when I got your letter.
Philip Thank you.
Seecombe And I also took the liberty of making up the bed in poor Mr Ashley's room.
Philip Ambrose's room. (*Pause*) Yes, that will do very well.

James comes downstairs

Seecombe You must be hungry, sir. I'll send up a tray.
Philip No nothing to eat—just a hot brandy and lemon. Good night.

Seecombe gives Philip the candle and he goes slowly upstairs, opens the door, and when he shuts it the stage is in darkness

There is a distant rumble of thunder and the wind rises

The Lights fade

Scene 2

The same. The next morning

Sunshine streaming through the great window reveals the shabby interior—dust and cobwebs everywhere. The door-bell clangs. Silence. It clangs again

Seecombe enters and crosses towards the door and pulls it open. Louise Kendall enters. She is a pretty girl of about eighteen, hoydenish, wearing a riding-habit. She is followed by Nicholas Kendall, her father, an attractive man in his fifties. He wears a black arm-band and carries a leather case

Louise (*radiantly*) Seecombe, where is he?

Seecombe Mr Philip came late and went straight to his bed, Miss Louise. He was worn out. Foreign parts is a long way off as I said—and they don't come no foreigner than Italy—on account of the Italians no doubt. I'll tell him you're here, Miss.

Louise Hurry, Seecombe, hurry . . .!

Kendall Don't be so impatient, Louise.

Seecombe goes off upstairs and disappears

Louise (*removing her gloves*) I hope he won't be long—I'm dying to hear . . .

Kendall Louise . . .!

Louise Father?

Kendall You're a sensible girl, Louise. I beg you to be so now . . .

Louise Oh, Father . . .!

Kendall Be careful what you say to Philip. Ambrose Ashley was everything to Philip—the only family he has ever known. He was much more than a cousin to him—he was father, mother, brother, friend. Ambrose's death is a sad thing for all of us—but it is a tragedy for Philip. He may want to talk about it—on the other hand he may not. I beg that you do not rush him. He'll need time to find himself, to put the past eighteen months behind him and realize that he is now master of Barton.

Seecombe comes downstairs

Seecombe Mr Philip will be with you presently.

Kendall Thank you.

Seecombe Some refreshment, sir?

Kendall Not at the moment Seecombe.

Seecombe Miss Louise?

Louise shakes her head

Seecombe exits

Louise How strange it is. Ambrose dead and Philip . . . How strange everything is—Ambrose marrying like that was strange.
Kendall Yes.
Louise Meeting this Cousin Rachel in Florence and marrying her after a few weeks. Oh, I do wonder what she's like!
Kendall Now, Louise!
Louise I expect she's very fascinating.
Kendall Why?
Louise Well she caught an old bachelor like Ambrose—she must be fascinating.
Kendall Ambrose wasn't old. My age.
Louise Well you're hardly a chicken, Father. Never mind, Mary Pascoe said you must have been very fascinating—once.

Kendall snorts

Philip runs down the staircase and greets them

Philip Louise. Uncle Nick.
Kendall Good to see you, Philip. What sort of a journey did you have?
Philip It was very rough in the Bay. Louise, I brought you this. (*He hands her a small package*)
Louise (*delightedly*) Oh Phil! (*She starts to open it*)
Kendall You spoil her.
Philip So do you. By the way did Seecombe offer you any refreshment?
Kendall Yes. But we dined early thank you.
Louise (*displaying a necklace*) Oh Phil—it's beautiful! How clever of you. I love amber. Did you know?
Philip As a matter of fact I asked the man in the shop what a young lady would like. I'm not very good at that sort of thing.
Louise (*disappointedly*) I see.

Short pause

Philip Well Uncle Nick, you'll be wanting to hear my news.
Kendall Yes.
Philip It's difficult to know where to begin.
Kendall You arrived in Florence . . .
Philip Yes, and went straight to the villa. When I got there the butler told me that Ambrose had been dead for three weeks.
Louise It must have been a dreadful shock. Poor Philip.
Philip Yes.
Kendall What then?
Philip I asked for Mrs Ashley.
Kendall Yes?
Philip I was told that she had left Florence immediately after the funeral, taking all Ambrose's possessions with her.
Louise So you didn't see her?
Philip No.
Louise Oh, I *am* disappointed. Ever since Ambrose wrote and said he'd

married his Cousin Rachel, I've longed to know what she was like. I was just saying to Father that I was sure she must be very fascinating or Ambrose would never have married her, wasn't I, Father?

Kendall Stop chattering, Louise. Go on, Philip.

Philip I went to see her man of business, Signor Rainaldi. Ambrose had mentioned him in his letters. I didn't like him. In fact I detested him.

Kendall What was wrong with him?

Philip I can rely on you, Uncle Nick, and you, Louise, can't I?

Kendall I've been your guardian for twenty-four years, Philip.

Philip Did you wonder why I rushed out to Italy so suddenly?

Kendall Ambrose was ill.

Philip takes a letter from his pocket and hands it to Kendall

Philip Read that.

Kendall begins to read it

Aloud. I want Louise to hear.

Kendall (*reading*) "... There is no-one I can trust. She watches me continually. Sometimes I think that money is the only way to her heart. I don't trust Rainaldi, nor the doctor he recommended to me. I shall try to smuggle this letter out of the house. I will beat them yet ... Why must she lie to me all the time? ... Ambrose." Poor Ambrose. Poor fellow. Just like his father.

Philip What do you mean?

Kendall His father died of brain fever, too. In his last days he turned against everyone he loved, particularly his wife.

Philip Ambrose's marriage was a great shock.

Kendall I know. But given time it might have proved a blessing.

Philip A blessing?

Kendall Yes. This house needed a woman. The monastic life you lived here was unnatural.

Philip We were happy.

Kendall You thought you were happy. Go on.

Philip Then Ambrose gets ill and I get that letter. I go to Italy, find he has died very suddenly, find that his wife has disappeared, get no satisfaction out of this Rainaldi fellow, come back yesterday to find a last letter from Ambrose has arrived during my absence. (*He takes out another letter*) It's very short—I'll read it to you. "Come quickly ... she has done for me ... Rachel, my torment ..."

Kendall Well?

Philip Don't you understand? Don't you see what I am implying?

Kendall *Certainly. You are implying that there is something—something* not ... Damn it all, Philip, you are implying that Mrs Ashley had something to do with her husband's death.

Philip Yes.

Kendall You'd better be careful, my boy. If you spread a rumour like this—and it got to her ears ...

Philip I wish it to get to her ears.

Louise Philip!

Kendall You're talking like a madman, Philip. Now, you listen to me. Ambrose, who had not been well, gets a bad attack of Roman fever. It goes to his brain exactly as it did to his father's. He died in Rome when Ambrose was still a child. You have no evidence, no evidence whatever against Mrs Ashley. She had nothing to gain from her husband's death—and everything to lose. I am amazed that we have not heard of any new will drawn up in her favour. As things stand you get everything and she gets nothing. So you be careful, Philip.

Philip Just wait until I find out where she is—that's all.

Kendall *I* can tell you where she is.

Philip *You* can?

Kendall She's in Plymouth. I had a letter from her this morning—she has brought all Ambrose's possessions with her. I am going to ask her to stay with Louise and me while she is in England. She is the widow of my oldest friend.

Louise Oh, Father! How fascinating . . .

Philip In Plymouth . . .

Kendall She has also brought with her a great number of plants and seeds which she and Ambrose had collected. It was their love of gardening that first brought them together.

Philip (*slowly*) The villa had a beautiful garden.

Louise Then I shall see her at last! Oh—I do wonder what she's like.

Kendall I shall write to her tonight conveying the invitation.

Philip No. She is Ambrose's widow. She must come here.

Kendall After what you've just been saying?

Philip It would look very strange if she stayed elsewhere.

Kendall Agreed. But if you are going to accuse her . . .

Philip (*interrupting*) I am not going to accuse her.

Kendall A few moments ago . . .

Philip (*interrupting*) Tell her that Philip Ashley is a plain man and that Barton is a plain man's home—but that she is welcome.

Kendall Can I trust you, Philip, to behave properly towards the poor woman?

Philip I give you my word, Uncle Nick.

Kendall Very well. Now I must go and see old Tamblyn. There's been some trouble with his lease. Louise?

Louise I think I'll stay for a bit, Father. Perhaps Philip will see me home.

Philip Of course.

Kendall makes for the main door. He pauses there

Kendall Philip . . .

Philip It's all right, Uncle Nick.

Kendall goes out

Louise Oh, Phil—isn't it fascinating? We shall see her at last. I'm so excited. What do you think she looks like?

Philip Like a snake.

Louise I don't. I see her tall and stately—a real Roman matron. How old is she?
Philip I've no idea. She has rheumatism—I know that—that's why she and Ambrose didn't come back last winter.
Louise Oh, then she must be quite old. Well on in her thirties. Little and bent and going grey. Phil . . .
Philip Yes.
Louise Do you—do you really think there was something—well, odd about Ambrose's death?
Philip Yes.
Louise But what can you do about it?
Philip I can watch her. I shall know.
Louise If she is—what you think—won't you be a bit frightened?
Philip Frightened? Of a woman?
Louise You don't know any women.
Philip I know you.
Louise I'm only a girl.
Philip I am not in the least frightened of my Cousin Rachel. She should be frightened of *me.*

Louise bursts out laughing

Louise Philip, really!
Philip I mean it.
Louise Of all the pompous . . .
Philip I mean it.

Louise stops laughing abruptly

Louise How peculiar . . .
Philip What is?
Louise To see you looking like that. Like a stranger.
Philip Rubbish.
Louise Do you remember that old gypsy we met at Penhallow Fair?
Philip Vaguely. Why?
Louise She said you were like a sunlit pool—but only on the surface.
Philip What *are* you talking about?
Louise I've known you all my life.
Philip What of it?
Louise For a moment you were a stranger. I think I'd better be going.
Philip As you wish.

There is a pause as Louise picks up her riding-crop

Louise I suppose you'll be going in to Plymouth to meet Mrs Ashley.
Philip No.
Louise But, Philip . . .
Philip I shall send the carriage.
Louise But, Philip, you must go.
Philip Why?
Louise She is your guest—Ambrose's widow.

Philip I am far too busy to waste time going to Plymouth. I shall leave instructions with the servants.
Louise But it's such bad manners.
Philip Don't try to teach me how to behave, Louise.
Louise Why not? Someone should teach you common courtesy.
Philip Someone should teach you to mind your own business.

They stand glaring at each other

Louise breaks away and runs out. Seecombe enters

Seecombe, Mrs Ashley is in England and will be coming to stay here.
Seecombe (*open-mouthed*) Mr Ambrose's wife?
Philip Mr Ashley's widow.
Seecombe Coming here?
Philip Yes. You'd better get the Pink Room ready.
Seecombe The floorboards have gone, sir.
Philip The room over the library then.
Seecombe It's got the woodworm.
Philip Lady Mary's Chamber.
Seecombe She walks most nights.
Philip Damn it, Seecombe, what's wrong with the Oak Room?
Seecombe Mice, Mr Philip.
Philip Get out Seecombe and if a room isn't ready by the time she comes I'll—I'll have you beaten with rods.
Seecombe Very good, sir. Will that be all, sir?
Philip More than enough! (*He roars*) Out, out!

Seecombe goes

Philip shakes himself as if trying to clear his head from bewilderment

Mrs Ashley . . . Coming here . . .

The Lights fade

Scene 3

The same. A few days later. Evening

Seecombe is arranging flowers in a silver rose-bowl. Philip enters by the main door

Philip What on earth are you doing, Seecombe?
Seecombe Ladies like flowers in a room, Mr Philip.
Philip She's come?
Seecombe Madam arrived at four o'clock. She said she would dine in her room. James took her up a tray. At what hour will you dine, sir?
Philip I dined in Bodmin. That will be all, Seecombe.
Seecombe Very good, Mr Philip. Madam asked to be informed when you arrived.
Philip Well, inform her then.

Seecombe inclines his head, goes up the stairs and knocks at a door

Seecombe Mr Philip has returned, madam.
Rachel (*off*) Thank you, Seecombe.

Seecombe comes down the stairs and exits through the servants' door

Philip moves restlessly about, clenching and unclenching his hands

The door upstairs opens and Rachel emerges, carrying a candle which illuminates her face. She is a beautiful woman in her early thirties, tall and slender. She is dressed exquisitely in black. She comes slowly downstairs. At the foot of the stairs, she pauses and looks across at Philip

Ambrose . . . You are so like . . .

Philip moves forward

Philip Welcome to Barton, Cousin Rachel.
Rachel Thank you.
Philip I regret I was not at home to welcome you.
Rachel You are a busy man. Ambrose told me how hard you worked. I quite understand.
Philip I hope the servants have made you quite comfortable.
Rachel Very comfortable, thank you. (*Pause. She sits down in the armchair*) You must be wondering why I came to England. It was on your account—and Ambrose's.
Philip Indeed?
Rachel He thought the world of you. "My Philip"—he would say. I know he would like you to have his personal possessions and he would have wanted the plants and shrubs we had so lovingly collected to find their proper home.
Philip He loved the garden.
Rachel He loved everything about Barton. He used to talk about it by the hour. Bore Town and Borden's Meadow, Kemp Close and Beef Park, Kilmore and Beacon Field, the Twenty Acres and the West Hills.
Philip (*surprised*) You seem to know the names of all the Barton lands.
Rachel He was so looking forward to showing them to me. We would sit in the courtyard at the villa, drinking our tisane, and instead of the sunshine I would see the grey seas breaking over Star Point and hear the seagulls crying.
Philip This is your first visit to England?
Rachel Yes. My first husband, Count Sangaletti used to promise to bring me here for a visit, but he was killed in an accident. From what I have seen of the countryside, Cornwall is very lovely. Very wild and exciting.
Philip (*abruptly*) You know I came to Florence?
Rachel Yes. Signor Rainaldi wrote and told me. It must have been terrible for you. I wish I had known you were coming.
Philip Ambrose wrote and begged me.
Rachel I know he was very anxious to see you.
Philip Did he know how ill he was?
Rachel Possibly. But he was homesick—and you represented home to him.
Philip He died very suddenly.

Rachel He had seemed better, less—less strange.
Philip Strange?
Rachel When he first became ill, nothing I, or the doctors, could do would satisfy him. It was as if we had become his enemies.
Philip Indeed?
Rachel It is often so. Pressure on the brain, the doctors told me. Then he suddenly seemed better—more like the Ambrose I knew and loved. We began to make plans. And then one evening . . .
Philip Yes?
Rachel I was sitting by his bed. He seemed asleep. Then he—he opened his eyes and said: "Rachel" and fell back on the pillows . . . We had only been married eighteen months.

Pause

Philip (*awkwardly*) May I get you a glass of wine?
Rachel Thank you no. Presently Seecombe will bring me some hot water and I will make the tisane that Ambrose and I loved. I asked him . . . Oh, I do hope you don't mind.
Philip Of course not.

Pause

Rachel How lovely this house is.
Philip It's pretty shabby. Ambrose and I always intended doing something about it, but we never did.

Pause

Rachel I have a confession to make.
Philip Oh?
Rachel I have been so jealous of you.
Philip Jealous . . .?
Rachel Your name was always on Ambrose's lips. He told me that when your parents died he brought you up. You were so close. I had such pictures of you. Spoilt, I thought. Priggish, I thought. Did you wonder about me?
Philip Yes.
Rachel And pictured me as a scheming Italian widow.

Philip looks extremely uncomfortable. Rachel bursts out laughing

Philip, I may be Italian, or half Italian, and a widow, but I am far from scheming. How else did you picture me?
Philip Older. Not so . . .
Rachel Not so what?
Philip Not so—easy to talk to.
Rachel Thank you. We should talk easily together, you and I. We have so much in common—Ambrose, Barton, the house and the garden. When will you show me round the estate?
Philip On Monday. Can you ride?
Rachel Not well.

Philip We have a steady horse called Dolabella, who would suit you.
Rachel What a charming name—Dolabella.
Philip It was Ambrose's name for her.
Rachel Cyprian, Angus, Thunderer, Spick and Span . . .
Philip You know all the horses.
Rachel And the dogs, Brimstone, Treacle, Flare, Sammy, Joshua. Why do you look at me like that?
Philip Funny—we've only just met but I feel as if I'd known you a long time.
Rachel Tell me, Philip, were you, perhaps, just a little bit jealous of me, too?

Pause

Philip Yes.
Rachel You had no reason. We shared Ambrose's heart. I never took the part of it that was not mine. Do you think we could be friends? No—it is too early to wonder about that. When I return to Florence next week, perhaps we shall know.
Philip You are going back next week?
Rachel Yes.
Philip There is no need to hurry.
Rachel Ah, but there is. My mission here will be accomplished and I have much to do in Florence. I have to sell the villa, alas.
Philip Must you? Why?
Rachel I can no longer afford to keep it up.
Philip I see.
Rachel Let's not talk about unpleasant things. Perhaps you would ring the bell? Seecombe will have prepared the tisane tray the way I showed him by this time.

Philip pulls a bell-rope

When Ambrose and I were first married he used to drink brandy in the evening, but I soon changed that.
Philip What is tisane?
Rachel There are all kinds. It is a tea made with herbs. I make mine from a receipt given me by my mother. It soothes the nerves and helps you sleep. All through his illness Ambrose could take it when he could take nothing else.

Seecombe enters with a silver tray, with a tea-pot, cups, hot water, etc.

Thank you, Seecombe.

Seecombe places the tray on a table by her side

Philip Where on earth did that tray come from, Seecombe?
Seecombe (*coldly*) There is a great deal of silver in the family, Mr Philip. Will that be all, madam?
Rachel Yes, thank you, Seecombe. Good night.
Seecombe Good night, madam. Good night, Mr. Philip.

Seecombe goes out with dignity

Rachel giggles

Rachel You were snubbed. And rightly. (*She busies herself with the tray*) Tomorrow is Sunday?

Philip Yes.

Rachel Ambrose told me of the great box pew you had, and how naughty little Philip used to let mice loose in it.

Philip Following naughty old Ambrose's example.

Rachel What a couple of children. Here. (*She hands him a cup*) Try it.

He sips

Philip It's—it's a little bitter.

Rachel The next sip will taste less bitter. (*She pours a cup for herself*) I suppose we shall have to go to church.

Philip (*surprised*) You wish to?

Rachel Ambrose would have wished me to. I am a Catholic, but I will be able to follow the service, I think.

Philip You will create a sensation in Barton.

Rachel And after church, Mr Kendall and his daughter, Louise, come to dine—is that not so?

Philip You know everything.

Rachel Miss Louise and you are great friends. She is very pretty, Ambrose said.

Philip She's all right.

Rachel You are not very *gallant*, but perhaps Cornwall is full of pretty girls.

Philip Perhaps. I've always been too busy to bother about things like that.

Rachel You will not always be too busy. (*She puts down her cup and rises*) Good night, Philip, and thank you.

Philip Thank me—for what?

Rachel Making me welcome in your home.

Philip Must you go—it's early.

Rachel I am not a late bird like you and Ambrose. And I am tired. Coming here to Barton for the first time was a slight effort—thank you for making it so easy. Good night, Cousin Philip.

Philip Good night, Cousin Rachel.

Rachel picks up the candle and goes slowly up the stairs. She goes into her room, shutting the door behind her

The Lights fade

Scene 4

The same. About 4.30 in the afternoon

Seecombe bustles in with a silver dish with ratafia biscuits which he puts on a table. He then goes to a cupboard which he opens and takes out some wine

glasses. He is followed on by James carrying another tray with three decanters of port, sherry and madeira

Seecombe Careful with them now: they've only just seen the light o' day!

James lowers the tray on to the sideboard. He sees the dish of biscuits and picks it up curiously

James What're they?
Seecombe You put them back now, this instant.
James But what are they?
Seecombe Comfits.

James looks blank

James What d'you do with 'em?
Seecombe You eat 'em.

James gives a blank look of acknowledgement

Sweetmeats—they're taken with your sherry-madeira-wine and such. Leastways that's what madam says you do wi' 'em.

James Queer folk the gentry. Now what I fancies is a good mug of ale and . . .

There is laughter from beyond the door to the dining-room

Seecombe Never you mind: you make yerself scarce—they're comin' through.

Seecombe goes out. As he does so James takes one of the biscuits and darts out. Rachel enters with Kendall

Kendall Besides which, m'dear, all the congregation, indeed most of the county know that you came from outlandish foreign parts. For all they know Italians may be black. So many people asked me when they will have an opportunity to meet you—officially. I think you can reckon upon engagements every afternoon for at least the next four weeks.

Rachel There is nothing that I would like better, Mr Kendall, but, alas I am only a visitor to Barton and, in the circumstances . . .

Louise and Philip enter

After a brief moment Rachel joins Louise

Miss Kendall, I believe I owe you an apology. Yesterday in my enthusiasm for becoming acquainted with Barton, I unwittingly prevented Philip from calling upon you at Pelyn.

Philip goes to pour drinks

Louise No matter. He had no serious obligation in that respect.

Kendall Philip, your cousin should, by rights undertake certain social commitments as she is in this part of the world. I know that you—and Ambrose—paid little heed to such niceties—but I am sure many people in the county would be honoured to meet your Cousin Rachel.

Philip (*smiling as he hands her sherry*) They would indeed be honoured.
Rachel As I say I am merely a visitor and, in the circumstances, I feel I should leave in the morning.
Kendall So soon? You're hardly an ordinary visitor, m'dear—and had Ambrose lived Barton would have been your home.
Rachel Had Ambrose lived, Mr Kendall, a lot of things would have been otherwise. (*Pause. She changes the conversation deliberately*) Did you know that Ambrose had planned a sunken garden with a fountain—like the one we had at the villa.
Kendall Charming—where was it to be?
Rachel I'll show you—will you come with me. (*She picks up a shawl*) We had planned it down to the last detail. It was to have been the first thing we were going to do when we came back.

Rachel and Kendall go towards the door

Kendall I envy you gardeners your patience. To plant a tree and wait perhaps for years for it to bear fruit.
Rachel Ah, but when it does bear fruit—it is worth the waiting.

Rachel and Kendall go out

Louise *I'm* waiting, Phil.
Philip What for?
Louise What for?
Philip Oh, you mean yesterday afternoon. I'm sorry, but it was impossible to get away. My Cousin Rachel wished to see all the Barton acres.
Louise Oh, don't apologize. I waited about two hours, but it didn't matter.
Philip I'm really very sorry.
Louise I guessed something of the sort had kept you. I'm thankful it was nothing more serious. I thought you might have had some terrible disagreement.
Philip No. We didn't.
Louise Have you really survived so far without a clash? Tell me all.
Philip What do you mean by all?
Louise What did you say to her? How did she take it? Was she very much aghast by all you said, or did she show no sign of guilt at all?
Philip We've really had little time for talking but she is a very different person from the person I expected. You must have seen that from your brief meeting before the service.
Louise She is very beautiful.
Philip Beautiful?
Louise Yes, beautiful! Ask Father. Ask anyone. Didn't you notice how the people stared in church when she put up her veil?
Philip Of course they stared at her. There hasn't been a woman in the Ashley pew for over thirty years.
Louise Her profile is like that on a rare old coin. She makes the rest of us look like country bumpkins—or bumpkinesses—if there is such a word. Has she said much about Ambrose?

Philip Naturally.
Louise What?
Philip Ambrose told her everything.
Louise But those letters—I thought . . .
Philip (*hurriedly*) We must remember they were written when he was very ill.

Pause

Louise (*slowly*) It's not true.
Philip What isn't?
Louise You can't have changed overnight.
Philip I don't know what you're talking about.
Louise Don't you remember what you said about her last week?
Philip Of course I do; it's just that I might have been a trifle hasty. One must give her the benefit of the doubt.

Pause

Louise You've fallen in love with her.
Philip Don't be absurd.
Louise It's the only explanation.
Philip I have *not* fallen in love with her. The thing's ridiculous. She only arrived yesterday.
Louise What about Romeo and Juliet?
Philip What about them?
Louise "Whoever loved that loved not at first sight . . ."
Philip That's schoolgirl nonsense.
Louise It isn't—it's Shakespeare. I suppose it's understandable, really. You've never seen a beautiful woman before.
Philip Oh, do stop about her being beautiful.
Louise I never thought I'd watch you making a fool of yourself over a woman years too old for you.
Philip She's not old.
Louise She's thirty-five at least.
Philip For God's sake, Louise, let's talk about something else.
Louise Very well. (*Pause*) You'll be coming as usual to drive me over to Pascoes tomorrow?
Philip I'm sorry. I can't.
Louise But why? It's all arranged.
Philip I just can't, that's why.
Louise You're going somewhere with her.
Philip If you must know—I'm showing her round the village.
Louise Were you planning to let me know—or were you once more just not going to turn up?
Philip Of course I was going to let you know.
Louise I don't believe you.
Philip All right—don't.
Louise When is she going back to Italy?
Philip I don't know.

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