

Northanger Abbey

By Jane Austen

Chapter one

Our Heroine's Adventures Begin

If you had known Catherine Morland as a young child, you would never have imagined that one day she would be the heroine of a novel filled with adventure, mystery and romance. Her father was a respected clergyman, neither rich nor poor, and her mother was a strong, sensible mother of ten children. The Morlands were often described as a fine family, but that was because there were so many of them, not because any of them were handsome, beautiful or noticeably talented.

For the first ten years of her life, Catherine was as ordinary as the rest of the Morlands. She was thin and clumsy, with dull skin and hair. She spent her time throwing a ball, riding a horse or chasing her brothers and sisters while avoiding any lady-like activities like arranging flowers, nursing a poor injured pet or watering a pretty rose bush.

And certainly Catherine's education could not be described as appropriate for a heroine. In fact, she had an obvious dislike for the classroom and never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; occasionally she even seemed rather stupid. Her mother wanted her to learn music and Catherine was sure that she would like to play the piano, so at eight years old she began lessons. But she soon gave up, and the day on which the music teacher was dismissed was one of the happiest days of her young life. Her drawing ability was also disappointing; although she enjoyed drawing animals, all her pictures, from chickens to horses, looked very similar.

Whatastrange, incomprehensible character! Incomprehensible because, in spite of such clear signs of a difficult nature, Catherine was seldom unpleasant; she rarely quarrelled and was very kind to her six younger brothers and sisters and quite friendly with the three older ones. But it still must be admitted that

she was untidy, noisy and wild and loved nothing better than rolling down her favourite hill at the back of the house.

At fifteen, Catherine's appearance began to improve; her skin was brighter, her hair was shinier and nicely styled, her eyes shone and her figure was pleasing. Her love of dirt was replaced by an interest in the latest fashions and in the possibility of going to a ball. She was quite thrilled one day to hear her father remark on her personal improvement: 'Catherine is almost pretty today.' To be almost pretty is a great prize to a girl who has been plain for fifteen years.

Catherine had never been interested in books full of facts and useful knowledge, but from the age of fifteen she began to read the type of books which heroines must read: stories of romance, adventure and fantasy, set in mysterious foreign places. These supplied her memory with useful instructions about life, death, and especially love. And although she could not write poetry or play the piano or paint a picture - achievements we might expect in a heroine - she began, nevertheless, to admire those skills in others.

At the beginning of our story, Catherine was seventeen and eager for life. But the world around Fullerton, the village in Wiltshire where the Morlands lived, did not offer the kind of adventure and romance that a heroine needs. Luckily for Catherine, Mr Allen, the gentleman who owned most of the property around Fullerton, was required by his doctor to go to the city of Bath for a healthy rest. His wife, a good-natured woman with no children of her own, was very fond of Catherine. She understood that a young lady of seventeen is ready to take her place in society, so she invited our heroine to accompany her and Mr Allen to Bath for the season.

When the time came for Catherine's first trip away from home without her family, you can imagine the excitement and anxiety in the Morland household. Would Mrs Morland warn her daughter about the evils of city life and the dangers of mixing with the wrong sort of gentleman? Would her father generously hand her a blank cheque to cover every need? Would the sister closest to her in age insist that she write to her every day and tell her every detail of her life in Bath?

Well, no. This, after all, was an ordinary family from rural England. Mrs Morland simply said: 'Catherine, please remember to wear your warm scarf around your throat when you are out in the evening.' Mr Morland gave

Catherine a small purse with ten pounds and promised more if it was needed. Catherine's sister, Sarah, shouted goodbye as she ran out to meet a friend. In fact, the family had not realised that Catherine was going to be a heroine. They cheerfully but quietly sent her off without any dramatic speeches, tears or warnings.

The trip to Bath was both calm and safe. The carriage was not stopped by robbers or by stormy weather; nor were the passengers lucky enough to meet a hero before arriving at their destination. But when they arrived in Bath, Catherine felt happy immediately. Her eyes were here, there, everywhere as the carriage drove through the pretty streets. Soon Mr and Mrs Allen and Catherine were settled in comfortable lodgings in Pulteney Street.

And what do we know about Mrs Allen, Catherine's close companion and chaperone for the coming weeks? She was the type of woman who amazes us by finding a husband. Why would any sensible gentleman, like Mr Allen, want a wife without beauty, intelligence, achievements or a pretty manner? Well, she was generally quiet, did not concern herself with his business and agreed with his opinions on every topic. In addition to these qualities, Mrs Allen had two special interests that kept her busy and made her a suitable person to introduce a young lady into society. First, she loved going out and never chose to stay quietly at home. Second, she found endless pleasure in fashion; she would not consider taking Catherine to any of the stylish Rooms in Bath until they had both bought new dresses in the latest style.

When they were ready to attend their first ball, Mrs Allen declared that Catherine looked exactly as she should. Such admiration was always very welcome when it came, but Catherine did not depend on it. Nevertheless, on this evening it made her confident enough to face any crowd of strangers.

When they entered the ballroom, Mr Allen escaped to a side-room to play cards with a group of husbands. Meanwhile, the two ladies looked around a very full ballroom and, with Catherine holding her chaperone's arm rather desperately, they struggled through the crowd. They finally found a place on a balcony at the top of the long room with a good view of the company below them. It was a splendid sight and Catherine began, for the first time that evening, to feel that she was really at a ball. She hoped to dance, but did not know anyone in the room, and Mrs Allen did not see anyone she knew either.

'Surely I should see a familiar face soon. I wish I could find a partner for you,' remarked Mrs Allen.

Catherine had no time to worry about dancing because before long everyone began to move towards the tea tables. But Catherine and Mrs Allen were at a distinct disadvantage without a party of friends to join or a polite gentleman to assist them. After being pushed and squeezed by the crowd, they finally found two empty places at the end of a long table where a large group was already seated. The two ladies were ignored and left with no one to speak to except one another.

'Well, I am very pleased that I have not damaged my new dress in this terrible crowd, I assure you. It would have been shocking to have it torn, wouldn't it?' said Mrs Allen. 'I must say that I have not seen one dress in the whole room that I prefer to mine.'

'It is very uncomfortable with no friends here, don't you think?' whispered Catherine. 'What shall we do? The gentlemen and ladies at this table do not look happy with us here. We seem to be forcing ourselves into their party.'

'Yes, it is very disagreeable,' said Mrs Allen. 'My good friends the Skinners would rescue us if they were here now.'

'Shouldn't we leave? There are no cups or plates for us here, you see,' Catherine said with a worried frown.

'I think we should sit still,' said Mrs Allen. 'We shall be pushed and pulled in every direction if we try to find another place in this crowd. My dress could easily be damaged.'

'Mrs Allen, are you sure there is nobody that you know in this great assembly of people? You must know somebody.'

'Oh, if only I could see a familiar face,' Mrs Allen said. 'Oh, look! There goes a strange-looking woman. What an odd, old-fashioned dress! Look at the back of it. How awful!'

After some time the two ladies received a polite offer of tea from one of their neighbours at the table. They accepted gratefully and enjoyed a little light conversation with the gentleman, but that soon ended and no one else spoke to them during the entire evening.

When the dancing came to an end, Mr Allen found Catherine and his wife. 'Well, Miss Morland,' he said, 'I hope you have had an agreeable ball.'

'Very agreeable indeed,' Catherine replied politely, trying unsuccessfully to hide a great yawn.

As the ballroom began to empty and the crowd grew smaller, our heroine had a better opportunity to be admired. In her hearing, two gentlemen commented on her to one another: 'There is a pretty girl. Where was she all evening?'

Such words had a strong effect; Catherine immediately thought that the evening had been very pleasant. Perhaps an experienced heroine would expect more, but Catherine left the ball perfectly satisfied with her share of public attention.

Chapter two

Extremely Agreeable Introductions

Every morning now brought its regular duties for Catherine and Mrs Allen: visiting shops, exploring Bath, attending the Pump Room, where they walked up and down for an hour, looking at everybody and speaking to no one. Mrs Allen repeated her usual disappointment every morning: 'Oh, my dear, I would very much like to find someone I know in this crowd!'

Then on Friday evening when they arrived in the Lower Rooms, Catherine's fortunes improved. Mr King, whose job was to act as host, introduced Catherine to a young gentleman as her dance partner. Mr Henry Tilney was about twenty-five years old, rather tall, with a pleasing, if not quite handsome, face and, in general, an intelligent and energetic manner. He spoke politely and Catherine felt lucky to have him as a partner. When the two young people retired to the tea table, Catherine discovered that Mr Tilney was very entertaining company. After some polite conversation, he said in a dramatic whisper, 'Miss Morland, I must apologise. I have not asked you how long you have been in Bath; if you have been here before; whether you have been in the Upper Rooms, to the theatre, to a concert. Forgive me and allow me to begin my list of questions immediately.' Then Mr Tilney, with a bow and in an

exaggerated, extremely polite voice asked, 'Have you been in Bath long, madam?'

'About a week, sir,' answered Catherine, trying not to laugh.

'A week! Really!' replied Mr Tilney with excessive surprise.

'Why should you be so surprised, sir?' asked Catherine. She too was now speaking like an actor in the theatre.

'That is a good question!' said Tilney in his normal voice, 'But reacting to your answers with appropriate emotions and gestures is my duty. Now let us continue. Were you ever here before, madam?'

'Never, sir,' replied Catherine, enjoying the game.

'How interesting!' cried Mr Tilney, continuing with his actor's voice. 'Have you been to the Upper Rooms? The theatre? The concert hall? And are you totally pleased with Bath?'

Catherine smiled at her companion and said, 'Yes, I have been everywhere, and I like the city very much.' She turned her head away, not knowing whether she should laugh or not.

'Miss Morland, will you be writing unkind things about me in your journal? I predict you will say: "Friday, went to the Lower Rooms and had to dance with a silly man who bothered me with his strange conversation, delivered in a funny voice."'

'I would never say such a thing,' objected Catherine.

'May I tell you what you ought to say?' asked Mr Tilney.

'Please, sir.'

"I danced with a very agreeable young man. We enjoyed a great deal of pleasant conversation and he seemed a most extraordinary and intelligent person. I hope I get to know him better." That, madam, is what I wish you to write in your journal.'

'But perhaps I do not have a journal.'

'Not have a journal! How will you re-live every dance, every flattering word, every admiring glance? My dear madam, I think writing a journal is delightful and so particularly suited to the talents of young ladies, whose usual writing

style is perfectly faultless except in two areas: a lack of subject, and no attention to the essential rules that govern the English language.'

'You do not have a very high opinion of ladies' talents.'

'Actually, I believe that in every area where good taste is the basis for success, high achievement is quite fairly divided between the sexes,' finished Mr Tilney.

But then this interesting discussion was interrupted by Mrs Allen. 'My dear Catherine, can you look at my dress? Have I torn it? It cost me more than any other dress in my wardrobe.'

'Madam, I can see why it was so expensive,' said Mr Tilney. 'Miss Morland's dress, on the other hand, is pretty but the fabric is too delicate. It will not wash well.'

Catherine began laughing and said, 'Sir, how can you be so...' She almost said, 'strange'.

But Mrs Allen was delighted to talk about her favourite subject, and Mr Tilney was polite enough to continue chatting about fabrics and current fashions for another five minutes.

When Mr Tilney and Catherine returned to the dance floor, he noticed a troubled look on his partner's face.

'What are you thinking of so seriously?' he asked.

Catherine blushed; she had been wondering if Mr Tilney had been too obviously teasing Mrs Allen. But she said, 'I was not thinking of anything.'

'You would not look so serious if something had not upset you. I would prefer to be told at once that you choose not to tell me what you are thinking.'

'Well, then, I choose not to tell you,' replied Catherine with clear determination.

'Thank you,' said her dance partner. 'Now I can tease you about your serious, secret thoughts and opinions whenever we meet. Nothing brings people closer than a bit of teasing.'

They danced again, and when the assembly closed, Catherine, at least, hoped that there would be many more opportunities to continue their friendship. She did not intend to dream of Henry Tilney that night. As a famous writer has

insisted, a young lady must not dream about a gentleman or fall in love with him before the gentleman declares his love for her.

As Catherine's host and protector, Mr Allen enquired about her dance partner. Discovering that Henry Tilney was a clergyman from a very respectable family in Gloucestershire allowed him to feel satisfied that he had done his duty.

With more than usual eagerness, Catherine hurried to the Pump Room the next day. She felt sure that she would see Mr Tilney there and she was ready to meet him with a smile. But unfortunately no smile was required. It seemed that every other creature in Bath arrived in the room during the fashionable hours; only Henry Tilney remained absent.

Mrs Allen once again repeated her usual complaint: 'How pleasant Bath would be if we had some acquaintances here!' This wish had been repeated by Mrs Allen so often that it is not surprising that on this morning she had her reward. When she and Catherine sat down, the woman to their right stared at them for a few seconds before crying, 'Madam, if my eyes do not deceive me, your name is Allen.'

Looking closely at the woman next to her, Mrs Allen cried in delight, 'Mrs Thorpe, my old school friend - it is you, isn't it?' The two ladies had not been in contact for more than fifteen years, and now their joy in meeting again was enormous. They chatted excitedly, talking both at the same time, and each much more interested in giving than receiving information.

Although Mrs Thorpe was a widow, and not a very rich one, she had one great advantage over Mrs Allen: she had three sons and three daughters. Mrs Allen had no children to talk about, but as she listened to all the news about the Thorpe children, she enjoyed noticing that her old friend's costume was quite inferior to anything in her own wardrobe.

'Look! Here are my dear girls,' cried Mrs Thorpe, pointing at three smart-looking females moving towards them. 'The tallest, the most beautiful and most elegant is Isabella, my eldest.'

After Mrs Allen was introduced, she presented Catherine Morland to the Thorpe ladies.

'Miss Morland! You are the picture of your brother!' the Thorpes cried.

They quickly explained that their brother, John, was at Oxford University and was a great friend of James Morland, Catherine's brother, who was studying to be a clergyman like his father. Catherine remembered that James had recently visited a college friend and his family near London. And this was the family. How lovely!

Soon the eldest Thorpe girl, Isabella, invited Catherine to take her arm and walk round the room with her. Catherine was so delighted that she almost forgot Henry Tilney while she was talking to Miss Thorpe. Friendship is certainly the finest medicine for the pain of disappointed love.

Because Miss Isabella Thorpe was four years older, Catherine felt that she could learn a lot about society from her new friend. When they parted, she watched Isabella as she walked away. She admired the older girl's graceful walk, her lovely figure, her fashionable dress, and she felt extremely lucky to have found such a charming companion.

That evening at the theatre and the next morning in the warm sunshine in the Crescent, Catherine enjoyed the sweet pleasure of her new and agreeable friendship with Isabella. She was so much happier than she had been in her first week in Bath, but she desired another meeting with Mr Henry Tilney and could find him nowhere. He must have left Bath, although he had not mentioned his departure on Friday evening. Of course this sort of mysterious behaviour is always attractive in a hero, and it made our heroine anxious to know more about him.

Isabella loved to hear anything with even a hint of romance, and wanted to know everything about Henry Tilney; therefore, he became a regular topic of conversation for the two young ladies. Catherine re-lived every moment that she had spent with the young gentleman, and Isabella analysed the situation and gave advice from her superior experience and wisdom.

'He must be a charming young man, and I am sure he found you equally charming. He must have important business in Gloucestershire and will soon return to Bath. And he is a clergyman! I have a particular liking for clergymen,' Isabella said in a rather dreamy voice.

Not being experienced in the etiquette of romance, Catherine did not demand to know the cause of Isabella's emotional response to clergymen. Perhaps as a good friend she should have insisted that her friend tell her more about her 'particular liking'.

The friendship between the two girls nevertheless continued to grow and to become more and more affectionate. Even if the weather was very poor, the two young ladies walked through mud and rain to sit together and read novels. Yes, novels!

To many people, novels are considered to be nothing more than foolish nonsense. But why? Novels may not be as serious as books about history or science or even art, but novels have humour, mystery, culture and elegance. Do not, therefore, say, 'Oh! It is only a novel!' Read novels and learn everything about human nature in the most delightful language and through the most entertaining plots. Our two young ladies, you will see, had already learned this lesson. Listen to their conversation in the Pump Room after a friendship of only eight or nine days.

'My dear Catherine,' Isabella began, 'I saw the prettiest hat you can imagine in the shop in Milsom Street; I must say that I longed to have it. But, Catherine, what have you been doing all morning? Have you read more Udolpho?'

'Oh, yes!' cried Catherine. 'I am at the part with the black veil.'

'You are desperate to know what is behind the veil, aren't you?'

'Do not tell me! I know it must be Laurentina's bones. Oh, I love Udolpho! I assure you that only a meeting with you could persuade me to come away from it.'

'How charming of you. When you finish Udolpho, I have a list of ten or twelve other Gothic novels that I am certain you will love,' Isabella said.

'But are they all frightening and full of dark secrets and mysterious accidents?' hoped Catherine.

'Of course,' Isabella assured her. 'My friend Miss Andrews has recommended them to me. Miss Andrews is as beautiful as an angel, and I often scold men terribly for not admiring her!'

'Scold them! Do you really scold them for not admiring her?' asked Catherine, who was quite shocked by Isabella.

'Yes, in fact, I told Captain Hunt at a ball this winter that even if he teased me all evening, I would not dance with him unless he admitted that Miss Andrews was beautiful. I am determined to show men that we ladies are capable of real

friendship. For example, if I heard anybody say anything negative about you, I would quickly lose my temper. Of course, that will not happen, because you will always be a great favourite with the men.'

'How can you say that?' Catherine cried, blushing bright red. 'Dear Catherine, Miss Andrews is really quite dull compared to you. I saw a young man watching you yesterday, and I am sure he is in love with you. Don't look embarrassed. I understand perfectly that your heart is attached to another man, who shall remain nameless.'

'But I may never see Mr Tilney again,' said Catherine rather desperately. 'Don't say that I have lost my heart to him. I will not think about him; instead, I shall worry about the black veil.'

'Well, my dear, we will change the subject. Have you decided what you will wear tonight? I am determined to dress exactly like you. The men take notice of that sometimes, you know.'

'Does it mean anything?' asked Catherine innocently.

'Mean anything! I make it a rule to ignore what men notice or what they say. They are often very bold if you do not treat them with spirit and make them keep their distance.'

'Are they bold? Men always behave very politely to me,' said Catherine, feeling quite confused.

'Oh, men think they are so important! But, listen, I have meant to ask you something: do you prefer men with dark or fair hair?'

'I have not really thought about it,' answered Catherine, 'but perhaps neither. Something between the two: a medium brown.'

'That sounds like your description of Mr Tilney's hair, and he has dark brown eyes, if I remember correctly. I actually prefer fair hair and blue eyes better than any other, but do not reveal my preference if you know anyone like that.'

'Why would I do that?' Catherine asked, feeling more confused than ever.

'Catherine, let us drop the subject for now. Let us move to the other end of the room. I believe there are two bold young men near us who have been staring at me for more than half an hour.' The young ladies walked to the book at the front of the room. 'Watch those two young men, dear Catherine. I hope they are not following us. I refuse to take any notice of them.'

'There is nothing to worry about, dear Isabella,' Catherine assured her friend. 'They have left the Pump Room.'

'Which way did they go?' asked Isabella in a rush. 'One was very good-looking.'

'They went towards the church.'

'Well, I am very glad that I have got rid of them!' insisted Isabella. 'Now please accompany me to the hat shop.'

'That would be lovely,' agreed Catherine, 'but we may see those two young men if we go in that direction.'

'I will not take any notice of them. If I did, it would spoil them and make them believe they were important.'

Catherine did not know how to argue against this logic, so she and her friend walked as quickly as possible towards the hat shop, following in the steps of the two young men.

Chapter three

A Complicated Social Life

The young ladies' progress was stopped at the busiest crossroads in Bath. Every day parties of ladies out on important tasks like buying cakes, trying on hats, or even (as in the present case) searching the roads for two young men, were held up by the traffic at this corner.

'We shall be kept here for a terribly long time,' Isabella complained. 'Look at this carriage coming towards us. What dangerous driving!' But Isabella's attitude changed when she looked again. 'How delightful! It is Mr Morland and my brother!'

'Good heavens! It is James!' uttered Catherine when she saw her blond, blue-eyed brother.

John Thorpe and James Morland got out of their carriage, and although Catherine was totally surprised by the arrival of her brother, she greeted him with the most sincere pleasure. James could not say much to his sister for the moment because Miss Thorpe clearly intended to gain his attention with her flirtatious eyes and sweet smiles. James responded to Isabella with a mixture

of joy and embarrassment which, if she had been more of an expert in matters of the heart, might have given Catherine a clue to the reason for her brother's visit.

John Thorpe, a rather fat young man of medium height with a plain face and ungraceful style, immediately claimed everyone's attention. Looking at his watch, he shouted, 'Twenty-five miles from Tetbury to Bath in two and a half hours! We left Tetbury as the town clock struck eleven.'

'You have lost an hour, John,' James Morland corrected him. 'We left the inn at Tetbury at ten o'clock.'

'Miss Morland, your brother is dreaming. My horse could never take over three hours for such a journey. And have you noticed my carriage? I just gave fifty pounds for it to a friend at Oxford. Now, lead the way to Mother's lodgings, Isabella.' Isabella was so happy to take James's arm and when they passed the two offensive young men from the Pump Room, she only looked back at them three times.

Mr Thorpe accompanied Catherine, and no sooner had they begun their walk than he started to talk about his superior carriage again.

'Do you like an open carriage, Miss Morland?'

'Very much, but I have few opportunities of being in one.'

'I shall drive you to Lansdown Hill tomorrow, and I shall take you out in my carriage every day that I am in Bath.'

Catherine was not sure if this was an appropriate arrangement, but she said, 'Thank you, but won't your horse need a rest?'

'Never! That horse has only covered twenty-five miles today. Too much rest ruins a good horse. I am an expert on horses and tomorrow you and I will drive to Lansdown, Miss Morland.' Isabella was listening to her brother and turned and said, 'And what about me?'

'Isabella, I did not come to Bath to drive my sisters around, especially not those two ugly younger ones. Anyway, Morland must take care of you.' And turning towards Catherine, he said, 'Miss Morland, let us be dance partners this evening. It is always good to get these annoying arrangements out of the way.'

After getting her agreement, Mr Thorpe seemed to give up chatting with Catherine. Instead, he made comments to her about the appearance of every

woman they passed. Some he said were pretty, some fat, some old, some almost handsome. Although Catherine was very inexperienced, she doubted if Mr Thorpe was behaving very politely, so she tried to change the direction of his comments.

'Have you ever read Udolpho, Mr Thorpe?'

'Lord, no! There has not been a good novel since Tom Jones.'

'You might like Udolpho; it is so interesting,' said Catherine.

'No, if I read any, it will be one of Mrs Radcliff's; she knows something about real life,' said Mr Thorpe confidently.

Catherine did not want to embarrass Mr Thorpe, but she had to say, 'Udolpho was written by Mrs Radcliff.'

'Was it? Oh, yes,' Mr Thorpe replied. 'I was thinking of that other stupid book by that woman who married a foreigner. Keep away from anything she has written.'

Once again Catherine felt that she had misunderstood the reasoning behind someone's opinions.

When James Morland visited his sister and Mr and Mrs Allen at their lodgings later that afternoon, he asked, 'Well, Catherine, how do you like my friend Thorpe?'

If John Thorpe had had no connection to her brother or to her new friend, and if there had been no invitations for carriage rides and dance partners, Catherine would have said, 'I do not like him at all.' But under the present circumstances, she said, 'I like him very much; he seems very agreeable.'

'He is a good-natured fellow. Perhaps a little too full of opinions sometimes, but you girls like that in a gentleman, don't you? And how do you like the rest of the family?'

'Oh, very much, especially Isabella,' Catherine said happily.

'I am very glad to hear you say that,' said James. 'She has so much good sense and is so friendly and kind. Since I met her, I have wanted you to meet her and now I learn that she already has a very high opinion of you. I am sure you may

be very proud of receiving praise from a girl like Miss Thorpe. And I am sure she is greatly admired in a place like Bath, isn't she?'

'I believe so,' agreed Catherine. 'Mr Allen thinks that she is the prettiest girl in the city.'

'I do not know any man who is a better judge of beauty than Mr Allen. And, dear Catherine, are you pleased to be here?'

'James, I have never been so happy,' admitted Catherine. 'Everything is so exciting, and now I am even more delighted. How good it is of you to come so far to see me.'

The Morland children had been taught not to lie, so James chose his next words carefully. He simply said, 'My sweet Catherine, I love you dearly.'

The Thorpes and the Allens, with Catherine and James Morland, met that evening in the Upper Rooms. Isabella was all smiles when she saw Catherine, and the two girls followed their chaperones into the ballroom, whispering to each other and exchanging affectionate glances.

James was engaged to dance with Miss Thorpe, and invited her to join the sets of dancers when the music began. Catherine, who you will remember was also engaged to dance, could not see her partner anywhere.

'Mr Morland, I cannot possibly begin to dance while my dear friend is without a partner. We will wait here with her until my brother returns,' explained Isabella.

Catherine felt very grateful for this kindness, and she continued to chat with Isabella for another three minutes. But after turning to James Morland on her left, Isabella whispered, 'My dear Catherine, your brother is so impatient to begin. I know you will forgive me for going away, and I am sure John will return in a moment, and then you can come and find me.'

Catherine was too polite to oppose her friend's plan as she watched the couple hurry on to the dance floor, but she was upset and rather cross. Not only did she want to dance, but she also did not want to be pointed out as a young lady in need of a dance partner. Nevertheless, such things happen in a heroine's life; Catherine suffered, but she made no comment about the disappointment caused by John Thorpe's rude behaviour.

After another ten minutes, Catherine was shaken from this angry state by the sight of Mr Henry Tilney, who was walking towards her party with a young woman on his arm. Fortunately he had not seen her yet so she was able, like a true heroine, to hide her blush and sudden smile.

Mr Tilney looked as handsome and as full of life as Catherine remembered as he chatted with the stylish, good-looking young woman at his side. Instead of turning pale and filling her head with tragic thoughts of a possible Mrs Henry Tilney, Catherine correctly guessed that the young lady was the sister who Mr Tilney had mentioned to her and Mrs Allen on Friday.

One of the ladies in the Tilneys' party, a Mrs Hughes, was an acquaintance of Mrs Thorpe's, and as she spoke to Isabella's mother, Mr Tilney saw Catherine and smiled at her in recognition. Catherine returned his smile very prettily and said, 'How nice to see you again, sir. I was afraid you had left Bath.'

'Thank you, Miss Morland, for your fears. I had to leave Bath the morning after I had the pleasure of meeting you.'

'Well, sir, I hope you are happy to be back again. I find Bath an exciting place at this time of year,' responded Catherine.

After a few enjoyable moments of conversation, Mr Tilney asked Catherine to dance with him. This delightful invitation produced terrible anxiety in our heroine; and in giving her refusal, she expressed her genuine sorrow, explaining that she was already engaged to dance with another gentleman.

Just then John Thorpe inconveniently wandered over to the group and claimed Catherine as his partner. As they danced, Mr Thorpe's conversation about buying a good hunting dog allowed Catherine to keep watch on the part of the room where she had left Mr Tilney. She also looked around for Isabella, wanting to point out Henry Tilney to her dear friend, but she seemed cruelly separated from friends and acquaintances.

As Mr Thorpe continued his one-sided conversation, Catherine began to realise a useful lesson: it is not always best to arrange your dance partners before going to a ball. But luckily Catherine's thoughts were interrupted by a light touch on her shoulder from Mrs Hughes.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Morland,' Mrs Hughes began.

'Would you allow Miss Tilney and her partner to join your set?' Catherine could not have been more pleased. She now had the opportunity to chat with Henry's sister, and she welcomed the young lady very warmly and politely.

Miss Tilney was attractive in every way; she was not as fashionable as Miss Isabella Thorpe, but she was more naturally elegant. She was polite to everyone and was capable of being young, beautiful and at a ball without flirting with every man near her, and without becoming over-excited or over-dramatic about insignificant flattery.

At the conclusion of the two dances, Catherine found her arm immediately seized by her dear Isabella, who in an excited voice cried, 'At last I have got you. Why didn't you and John join our set? I have been quite miserable without you. I kept telling your brother to search for you, but he was extremely lazy and would not leave my side. Isn't that right, Mr Morland? I have been scolding him all evening. You would be amazed.' Catherine pulled Isabella away from James and whispered urgently, 'Do you see that young lady with the white ribbons in her hair? It is Mr Tilney's sister.'

'Oh! Let me get a good look at her!' cried Isabella. 'I have never seen anyone half as beautiful! So wonderfully dressed! But where is her famous brother? I am dying to see him.'

'What is all this whispering about?' asked James.

'Men are so much more curious than women,' teased Isabella. 'This is not about you and we will not tell you anything about it.'

'And is that likely to satisfy me?' James asked with a smile.

'Please don't listen,' Isabella smiled back. 'Perhaps we are talking about you and you may hear something disagreeable.' This flirtatious chat continued between Isabella and James for so long that the original topic seemed entirely forgotten. Although Catherine felt a sense of relief to have the subject of Henry Tilney dropped, she was a bit disturbed by Isabella's apparent lack of interest in her news.

When the music began again, James started to lead Isabella to the dance floor.

'Catherine, tell your brother we must change partners after two dances together,' Isabella cried.

'My dear Miss Thorpe,' objected James politely, 'in these public assemblies, we are not required to change partners.'

'You men,' cried Isabella, 'always insist that you are correct about everything! Catherine, tell your brother that everyone, including you, would be shocked if we danced together again.'

'I do not see why anyone would be shocked,' Catherine said innocently, 'but if you think it is wrong, you should, of course, change partners.'

'You see, James, your sister is on my side, but you will not listen to her! Well remember, sir, it is not my fault if all the old ladies start gossiping about us.'

And off she went to dance again with Mr James Morland. Meanwhile, John Thorpe had disappeared again and Catherine had to return to her seat beside Mrs Allen and Mrs Thorpe.

'Oh, my dear, did you see Mr Tilney just now? He was tired of sitting and went off to find a dance partner,' reported Mrs Allen. 'I thought perhaps he would ask you to dance, if he saw you.'

'Where can he be?' said Catherine desperately. She looked round and saw him leading a young lady to the dance floor.

Catherine had missed the most desirable opportunity of the evening and was not in a friendly mood when John Thorpe came up to her and said, 'Well, Miss Morland, I suppose you and I should have another dance together.'

'No, thank you,' Catherine said rather coolly. 'I do not intend to dance again this evening.'

'Oh, really? Well, let us walk around the room and examine everyone. We could start with my two younger sisters and their partners. Did you ever see such silly, unattractive girls?'

Catherine did not enjoy Mr Thorpe's comments and again excused herself from joining him. She sat with the older ladies and found the rest of the evening very dull.

Chapter four

A Shift in Our Heroine's Affections

Catherine's reaction to her disappointing evening in the Upper Rooms was to go to bed and sleep for nine uninterrupted hours. She awoke the next morning perfectly rested, in excellent spirits and with fresh hopes and schemes. She wanted to get to know Miss Tilney better, and with that in mind, she planned to go in the early afternoon to the Pump Room, where any new arrival in Bath was likely to be. And so our heroine happily sat with Mrs Allen that morning, reading her book and smiling at her companion's comments about everything that crossed her mind, from a stain on the carpet to the noise of a carriage in the street.

Then at about half past twelve, an extremely loud knock on the door made both ladies look up suddenly. Before the servant could announce him, Mr John Thorpe came running up the stairs and into Mrs Allen's sitting-room.

'Well, Miss Morland, here we are. Isabella and your brother are waiting outside in their carriage and are in a great hurry to get going. Good morning, Mrs Allen. A terribly good ball last night, wasn't it? Have you seen my fine carriage outside? Far superior to the rented carriage Morland is driving.'

'Mr Thorpe, what is happening?' asked Catherine.

'Miss Morland, what a silly girl you are. You agreed to go for a drive this morning. We are all going up Claverton Hill.'

'I remember that you mentioned a carriage ride, but really I did not expect you,' Catherine explained.

'Not expect me! I wonder how you would have complained if I had not come for you!' shouted John Thorpe.

Catherine did not know what to do and so looked to Mrs Allen for guidance. She wondered if it was proper to go for a drive in Mr Thorpe's carriage without a chaperone. Would Mrs Allen approve since James and Isabella were going too?

'Well, madam, shall I go or not?' asked Catherine.

'Do as you please, my dear,' replied Mrs Allen calmly. She did not seem to understand any of Catherine's anxiety.

A drive in an open carriage with Isabella and James following behind in a second carriage was almost as exciting as the possibility of another meeting with Miss Tilney, and, with Mrs Allen's permission, Catherine was ready to go in two minutes.

As she and Mr Thorpe hurried out of the house, they were greeted by Isabella.

'Catherine! My dearest creature! What a delightful ball we had last night. I have a thousand things to discuss with you. But now I am anxious to begin our adventure.'

John Thorpe helped Catherine into his carriage, saying, 'Don't be frightened, Miss Morland, if my horse shows a bit of spirit. You are in no danger; I am an excellent horseman!'

With this warning, Catherine was surprised when the horse started and continued in the quietest manner imaginable. A silence of several minutes was broken when Mr Thorpe suddenly asked, 'Old Allen is one of the richest men in Wiltshire, isn't he?'

'Oh, do you mean Mr Allen?' asked Catherine, not understanding how this topic of conversation had come up. 'Yes, I believe he is very rich.'

'And no children at all?'

'No, not any.'

'And he is a relative of yours, isn't he?'

'Oh, no. We are not related,'

'But you spend a lot of time with them.'

'Yes, very much.'

After that short exchange, Mr Thorpe talked about more topics that interested him: his horse, the value of his carriage, his skill as a horseman, the expensive wine he served in his Oxford apartment. Catherine had been brought up in a family of plain people who were not in the habit of telling lies or exaggerating their own importance. Mr Thorpe, on the other hand, was obviously accustomed to a type of conversation which always began and ended with praise for himself.

Catherine had little idea of how such young men ought to behave, but she could not rid herself of the conviction that Mr Thorpe was not an agreeable

person. It was a difficult and bold conclusion to come to, since he was her brother's friend and dear Isabella's brother; but in spite of this, when she was in John Thorpe's company Catherine was quickly bored and felt exhausted by his lack of interest in anything but himself.

After what seemed like hours to Catherine, the carriages finally returned to Mrs Allen's door.

'Past three o'clock!' cried Isabella. 'It is impossible! I cannot believe my watch. No two and a half hours have ever gone by so rapidly and so nicely. Don't you agree, dear Catherine?'

Our heroine could not tell a lie even to please Isabella; but she was spared the need to disagree with her friend because Isabella did not wait for her answer.

'I have a thousand things to talk to you about, but now I have to go home,' complained Isabella. And with the gestures of a tragic actress mixed with her satisfied smile and laughing eyes, Isabella called goodbye to Catherine and left her.

Catherine found Mrs Allen in her sitting-room.

'Well, my dear, I hope your afternoon was as pleasant as mine,' began Mrs Allen. 'I went to the Pump Room as soon as you were gone and met Mrs Thorpe there. Then we met Mrs Hughes and Mr Tilney and his sister in the Crescent. They are very agreeable people, and Miss Tilney was wearing a particularly pretty dress. Very expensive, I imagine. Of course the family is very wealthy according to Mrs Hughes.'

'Did you learn anything else about the Tilneys?'

'Quite a lot! They are a very good, very rich family. The mother, Mrs Tilney, was Miss Drummond before her marriage and was at school with Mrs Hughes. She brought a large fortune to her marriage to General Tilney.'

'And are General and Mrs Tilney in Bath?' asked Catherine, hungry for more information.

'Let me think,' said Mrs Allen. 'I believe Mrs Tilney is dead, because Mrs Hughes told me there was a beautiful set of pearls that Mr Drummond gave his daughter on her wedding day, and that Miss Tilney has them now. They were given to her when her mother died. I think that is what Mrs Hughes said.'

'And is Mr Tilney, my dance partner, the only son?'

'I am not sure about that, my dear. I think he is, but anyway he is a very fine young man according to Mrs Hughes, and he has a good future ahead of him.'

Catherine deeply regretted having missed such a meeting with both brother and sister, especially since it had been replaced by a rather unpleasant drive with a rather disagreeable companion.

That evening the Allens, Thorpes and Morlands met at the theatre, and finally Isabella had an opportunity to communicate with Catherine about the thousands of things she had been wishing to discuss with her dear friend.

'Now, Mr Morland,' Isabella began, turning to James Morland on her left, 'I shall not speak another word to you all the rest of the evening, so do not expect it.' Then turning to Catherine on her right, she continued, 'My sweetest Catherine, how lovely you look! You are sure to attract every man in Bath. My brother is already in love with you, and Mr Tilney must have returned to Bath just to see you. Look around and tell me if he is here. I assure you that I can hardly breathe until I have a look at him.'

'I am sorry,' said Catherine, 'I cannot see him anywhere.'

'How horrible! Am I never to make his acquaintance? Do you like my dress? I think it suits me, don't you? Do you know that I am becoming quite sick of Bath; your brother and I were discussing it this morning. It is enjoyable to be here for a few weeks, but we both prefer the country. I imagine that you have some clever comment to make about the ridiculous fact that James and I can find nothing to disagree about.'

'No, it does not sound ridiculous to me.'

'Oh, you would probably like to say that we seem made for each other, or some nonsense of that kind.'

'No, you misjudge me, Isabella. I would never make such an improper remark,' protested Catherine.

Isabella smiled and gave Catherine a look which seemed very significant. Then she turned to her left and talked to James for the rest of the evening.

The next afternoon, Catherine had a similar experience in the Pump Room when she joined her brother James and Isabella Thorpe for a walk around the room. Catherine soon realised that she had no part in either her friend's or her brother's conversation. The two of them constantly laughed and teased each other or playfully argued about some insignificant topic. They often asked for Catherine's opinion, but they never seemed to hear anything she tried to add to the discussion.

Thankfully Catherine was rescued from this situation when she saw Mrs Hughes and Miss Tilney enter the Pump Room. Miss Tilney greeted her very warmly and she and Catherine enjoyed a pleasant conversation, marked by a simple, honest style on both sides.

'Your brother dances very well!' Catherine said innocently. 'And he is so interesting to talk to.'

This surprisingly direct statement amused Miss Tilney. 'Henry!' she replied with a smile. 'Yes, we have often said that he dances very well. And he loves conversation.'

'He must have thought it very odd the other evening when he invited me to dance and I refused. But I really had been engaged the whole day to dance with Mr Thorpe.' Miss Tilney smiled and remained silent. 'I was so surprised to see Mr Tilney. I thought he might have left Bath for good.'

'No, when you first met him, Henry was here for a few days to find lodgings for us,' Miss Tilney explained.

'Oh, I see now. I think the young lady he danced with on Monday was very glad to have such a good partner. Did you think she was very pretty?' asked Catherine.

'Not very,' answered Miss Tilney, who was enjoying her companion's questions.

'I suppose your brother never comes to the Pump Room.'

'He does sometimes. But this morning he has gone riding with our father.'

When the two ladies parted, Catherine was not conscious of having revealed anything about herself, but Miss Tilney was certain that she had discovered something important about her new acquaintance's feelings.

There was a ball the next evening and Catherine dressed carefully, hoping that she would meet Miss Tilney and her brother there. But before the Tilneys arrived, Catherine had to work hard at avoiding the attentions of Mr John Thorpe. She hid herself from his view as much as possible, and when he spoke to her she pretended not to hear him.

When the dancing began, Isabella whispered, 'Don't be shocked, my dear Catherine, but I am going to dance with your brother again. I hope you and John will join us when he returns.'

Catherine started to say something to her friend, but Isabella hurried to the dance floor. Catherine could see John Thorpe approaching, and she worried that all was lost; she might have to dance with him again. But what luck! Mr Tilney appeared and immediately asked her to dance. Not only had she had a lucky escape from John Thorpe, but it seemed that Mr Tilney had sought her out on purpose!

They joined a set and took their positions for the dance. However, Catherine's happiness was disturbed by the arrival of John Thorpe behind her.

'Hello, Miss Morland!' Mr Thorpe shouted. 'I thought we would be dancing together this evening.'

'Mr Thorpe, you did not ask me to dance,' replied Catherine.

'That is a good joke. I asked you as soon as I came into the room. This is a low trick to play on a fellow. I told my friends that I was going to dance with the prettiest girl in the room, and now you have abandoned me. And who is this partner of yours?'

'He is Mr Henry Tilney,' answered Catherine quietly.

'I do not know him. A good-looking man. Does he need a horse? I can get a good one for him from Sam Fletcher. He sold me my last horse, a really good hunter.'

The dance was beginning now and Mr Thorpe was forced to leave the floor.

When Mr Tilney came close to Catherine, he said, 'I was getting very impatient with that gentleman, taking your attention from me. We have agreed to be faithful to each other as dance partners for the evening; and a man who tries to claim the attention of another man's partner is breaking what I consider an

important contract. Neither person should look around and wonder about the advantages of having a different partner. Don't you agree?'

'Yes, of course I agree,' answered Catherine enthusiastically.

'May I come to the conclusion then that if the gentleman who spoke to you just now were to return, or if any other gentleman wanted to talk to you, you would excuse yourself and concentrate your attention on me, your partner?'

'Well, it would be honest to say that I do not want to talk to any other gentleman this evening,' Catherine said prettily.

'I am very satisfied with that guarantee, and I shall continue with courage. Do you find Bath as agreeable as when I had the honour of asking that question before?'

'Yes, quite. Even more so than before.'

'More so! Be careful. The fashionable young ladies always get tired of Bath at the end of six weeks.'

'Well, other people must judge for themselves, but I do not think I would be tired of Bath at the end of six months,' insisted Catherine. 'I do not think I could ever be tired of Bath.'

As the dance progressed, Catherine noticed a handsome older man with a rather noble attitude standing in the crowd and staring at her. Then she saw him whisper something to Henry Tilney, and both men looked at her again before the older man withdrew from the dance floor.

Henry politely approached Catherine and said, 'That gentleman is General Tilney, my father, and he was asking me who you are.' Later that evening, Catherine had a very welcome opportunity for a chat with Henry Tilney and his sister. They discovered that all three of them had a special liking for country walks.

'Shall we have a walk together one morning?' suggested Miss Tilney.

'I would like that better than anything in the world,' Catherine said enthusiastically. 'Shall we go tomorrow?'

The three young people agreed, unless there was rain, to go out for a walk together at twelve o'clock the next day.

And so, although she had seen hardly anything of her good friend Isabella during the entire evening, Catherine travelled home in the carriage with Mr and Mrs Allen in such good spirits that she danced in her seat all the way.

At breakfast the next morning, Catherine looked out at a disappointing sky full of clouds. Then at eleven o'clock, when she was watching the weather with great attention, a few drops of rain hit the sitting-room window.

'Oh, Mrs Allen, do you think the rain will stop before midday?'

'Perhaps it may, my dear,' answered Mrs Allen, 'but then the streets will be very dirty and muddy.'

'I do not mind dirt and mud. I would still be happy to go for a walk. But, oh dear, now I see four raised umbrellas, but I will not give up until half past twelve,' Catherine said. 'That is just the time of day for the weather to change. Oh why can't we have the kind of beautiful weather they had in Udolpho!'

Then just as the clock struck the half hour, the sky really did begin to clear and the rain stopped. In ten more minutes, the sun was shining and it promised to be a fine, bright afternoon. Catherine continued to sit at the window, hoping that the Tilneys would appear for their country walk. But instead of the Tilneys, she was surprised by the arrival of Isabella and John Thorpe, and her own brother, James.

'Be hasty, Miss Morland,' shouted Mr Thorpe as he entered Mrs Allen's sitting-room. 'The carriages are waiting and we are all going to Clifton to dine and then on to Blaize Castle.'

'Thank you, but I cannot go. I am waiting for my friends, Mr and Miss Tilney. I am engaged to go for a walk in the country with them. They promised to come at twelve, but it rained; now, with this fine weather, I expect them here soon.'

'No, they will not be coming,' insisted Mr Thorpe. 'I saw them in a carriage and heard them say that they were going as far as Wicks Rocks. Anyway, it is much too dirty for a country walk.'

'Oh, that is disappointing,' said Catherine. 'But what about this castle? Is it really old? Is it like the castle in Udolpho?'

'It is almost exactly the same,' said Mr Thorpe.

'Then shall I go, Mrs Allen? What do you think?' Catherine asked.

'Well, my dear, I suppose you should go,' said Mrs Allen, and in two minutes the four young people had begun their journey.

Catherine felt upset that she had not heard anything from the Tilneys, but she had to admit that she was excited about seeing a real castle.

The carriages went down Pulteney Street and through Laura Place, and John Thorpe once again talked about his horse and his skills as a driver. Then near Argyle Street, Mr Thorpe said, 'Who is that girl on the pavement who was staring at you as we passed her?'

Catherine looked back and saw Miss Tilney, walking along the pavement, holding her brother's arm, and both of them were looking directly at her.

'Stop, stop, Mr Thorpe,' Catherine cried impatiently. 'It is Miss Tilney and her brother! How could you tell me that they had gone out of town? Stop, stop, I must speak to them.'

But John Thorpe did not stop. In fact, he laughed and encouraged his horse to go faster, and in another minute the Tilneys were out of sight.

Now the carriage was moving so quickly that Catherine could not possibly escape from it, and she felt extremely angry. 'Why did you lie to me, Mr Thorpe? And why didn't you stop when I asked you to? They must think that I am very rude.'

Their drive, even after they had stopped talking about the Tilneys, was not very agreeable. Catherine obviously would have preferred a country walk with the Tilneys, but at least she had a real castle to look forward to.

When they could see the town of Keynsham, James Morland shouted at Mr Thorpe and the two carriages came to a stop.

'We had better go back, Thorpe,' James began. 'Isabella agrees. We left too late to visit Blaize Castle today.'

'It does not matter to me,' said Mr Thorpe, turning his carriage around for the drive back to Bath. As they started again, he said to Catherine, 'Your brother is a fool not to have his own horse and carriage. If he had a good horse like mine, we could easily have reached the castle today.'

'But he could not afford to keep a horse and carriage,' objected Catherine.

'And why can't he afford it?'

'He does not have money for those things,' replied Catherine.

'Well, I think it is a bad practice for people who are rolling in money to be too mean to have a good horse and carriage.' Catherine did not understand what Mr Thorpe was talking about, and she had become less and less willing to listen to anything he had to say. They returned to Pulteney Street without her speaking twenty words.

When she entered Mr and Mrs Allen's house, a servant told Catherine that a young lady and gentleman had called for her a few minutes after she had set off with Mr Thorpe. Thinking about this upsetting news, our heroine walked slowly upstairs to her room, but was stopped by Mr Allen.

'Dear Catherine, I am glad your brother was sensible enough to bring you home in good time. It was a strange, wild scheme.' That night our heroine went to bed feeling confused and unhappy, unable to sleep because she was busy re-living the terrible events of the day.

Chapter five

Seeds of Misunderstanding

'Mrs Allen,' said Catherine the next morning, 'will there be any harm in my visiting Miss Tilney today? I will not be calm until I have explained everything that happened yesterday.'

With Mrs Allen's permission and advice on which dress to wear, our heroine anxiously hurried to the Tilneys' lodgings in Milsom Street.

The door was opened by a servant, who said he would check if Miss Tilney was at home. When he returned to Catherine, the servant said, 'Miss Tilney has gone out.'

Something made Catherine think that Miss Tilney was in the house but was too offended to see her. When she got to the bottom of the street she looked back and saw Miss Tilney and General Tilney himself coming out of the house. Catherine's first reaction was to feel angry, but then she remembered how her own actions might have been misinterpreted and was determined not to judge Miss Tilney unfairly.

Catherine was in a rather thoughtful mood all day, but was persuaded to go to the theatre that night with the Allens and the Thorpes. The comedy, one that she had been looking forward to seeing, almost immediately lifted her mood.

But at the beginning of the fifth act, Catherine saw Mr Henry Tilney and his father join a group of people in the opposite box and all her anxiety and distress returned. She lost interest in the play and watched Mr Tilney. Finally he looked towards her and bowed; but what a cold bow it was! He did not smile and immediately turned his eyes back towards the stage. Catherine's heart raced and she felt miserable and eager for an opportunity to explain herself to him.

The play came to its conclusion, the curtain fell and Catherine's wish came true: Henry Tilney came round to the Allens' box. He greeted the Allens very politely, but Catherine did not wait for him to speak to her.

'Oh! Mr Tilney, I have been quite wild to speak to you to make my apologies. You must have thought me so rude yesterday, but really it was not my fault - was it, Mrs Allen? Mr John Thorpe told me that you and your sister had gone out in your carriage. What could I do? But I would have ten thousand times preferred to be with you, wouldn't I, Mrs Allen?'

'Yes, my dear, but calm down. You will damage my dress,' said Mrs Allen.

'I begged Mr Thorpe to stop his carriage and let me out when I saw you,' Catherine rushed on, 'but he would not even slow down. If he had, I would have jumped out of the carriage and run after you.'

No man could choose not to accept Catherine's sincere apology and explanation, and Henry Tilney smiled politely and told her that she must say no more about it.

'My sister would also like to apologise to you, Miss Morland, for her own behaviour this morning,' Mr Tilney added.

'That is not necessary. It is understandable that she did not want to see me after yesterday's disaster.'

'But Eleanor did not choose to ignore you. My father wanted her to accompany him on his walk. He is not a patient man and told the servant to send you

away, so I would like to apologise for her. And now may I join you for a few minutes? What did you think of tonight's play?'

Catherine chatted with Mr Tilney for some time and they made plans to take their country walk as soon as possible, which made Catherine believe that she was one of the happiest creatures in all the world.

But a new mystery appeared while the two young people were together. Catherine observed with some surprise that John Thorpe was in the opposite box talking to General Tilney and looking over at her from time to time.

'Does Mr Thorpe know your father well?' Catherine asked.

'I did not know that they were acquaintances, but my father is a military man and has a wide circle of friends.'

On Sunday afternoon in the Crescent, Catherine met Henry and Eleanor Tilney by chance and they decided to go for their country walk the next morning. At almost the same time, the Thorpes and James Morland were looking for Catherine to tell her about their plans for another carriage ride into the country, also on Monday morning.

'My dear,' Isabella began when they found Catherine, 'we are going on our trip to Clifton tomorrow morning. You must be ready early so that we have time to see and do everything.'

'I am very sorry, but I cannot go with you tomorrow. I am engaged to go for a walk with Eleanor Tilney and her brother.'

'But we cannot go without you,' complained Isabella. 'Explain that you had forgotten you were engaged to go with us.'

'Don't try to persuade me, Isabella. I will not break my engagement with the Tilneys.'

But the discussion did not end there. 'My dearest, sweetest Catherine, you cannot refuse such a small request from me, a friend who loves you so dearly,' Isabella tried. 'You cannot possibly love Miss Tilney more than you love me. You can go for your country walk another day.'

But Catherine would not change her plans.

'Well, I cannot help feeling jealous when I see that you prefer strangers over me,' answered Isabella, as she wiped away a tear from her cheek.

It seemed to Catherine that Isabella was actually behaving quite selfishly and not considering her feelings at all.

'I am sorry, but I will not change my plans,' Catherine insisted.

'Very well, then that is the end of our party tomorrow. If Catherine does not go, I cannot,' said Isabella through her tears. 'It would be very improper.'

'Why can't Mr Thorpe invite one of his younger sisters? I imagine they would like to go for a carriage ride,' suggested Catherine.

Mr Thorpe, who had left the group for a few minutes, heard this suggestion and shouted, 'Thank you very much, but I did not come to Bath to drive those silly girls around. And anyway, I have solved the problem, and now we may all four go tomorrow with no worries. I have spoken to Miss Tilney and made your excuses. You can go out with them another day.'

'No! I cannot believe you would do such a thing,' cried Catherine.

'I have done it. I told her you had sent me to say that having just remembered a prior engagement of going to Clifton with us tomorrow, you could not walk with her until Tuesday. She said Tuesday was convenient for her, so there is an end to our argument. That was a good idea of mine, wasn't it?'

'No, it was not! I must run after Miss Tilney and explain everything. You had no business inventing a message from me and trying to trick me into doing what I thought was wrong.' As Catherine rushed off to find Miss Tilney, her mind was greatly troubled. She did not like disappointing and displeasing her brother and Isabella, but she would not break a promise that had already been made, and she would not fail to keep an engagement with Miss Tilney and her brother for the second time.

She saw the Tilneys and their father as they entered their lodgings and hurried after them.

'Miss Tilney!' Catherine shouted. 'I told them that I could not go with them. I ran here to explain everything to you.' Although Catherine's speech was not completely clear, the Tilneys understood her and everyone was on friendly terms again. Eleanor introduced Catherine to General Tilney, who welcomed her into their house very politely and invited her to join them for dinner one

evening if the Allens could spare her. After sitting with the three of them for a quarter of an hour, General Tilney accompanied Catherine to the street and said goodbye in the most graceful, friendly manner.

At Pulteney Street, Catherine wondered if she had been unkind to Isabella and James, and mentioned their plan to Mr Allen.

'Were you thinking of going with them?' asked Mr Allen.

'No, sir. I had just agreed to go for a walk with Miss Tilney, so I could not go with them, could I?'

'No, certainly not, and I am glad you would not consider it. I do not approve of young men and women who are not related driving around the country in open carriages, going to inns and public places together! It is not proper, and I am surprised that Mrs Thorpe allows it.'

'I wish Mrs Allen had stopped me on the other occasion,' said Catherine quietly.

'No harm has been done,' Mr Allen replied, 'but I would advise you, my dear, not to go out with Mr Thorpe anymore.'

Monday dawned clear and bright and Catherine was rewarded with a perfect walk in the country with the pleasantest companions: Eleanor and Henry Tilney.

The conversation covered every imaginable topic, ranging from the novels of Mrs Radcliff, which all three were fans of, to an analysis of the current government. Catherine listened with great attention after the talk moved away from the Gothic novels that she loved so much. She was very impressed with how much both Eleanor and Henry knew about history, art, nature and even politics. You may remember that she had never been a very willing student, and this fact actually made her very good company for such clever conversationalists as the Tilneys. Obvious admiration for a young man's superior knowledge is always a great advantage in an attractive young woman.

The whole walk was delightful, and although it ended too soon for Catherine, she was very pleased by its conclusion. When they returned to Pulteney Street, Miss Tilney asked Mrs Allen if they might invite Catherine to join them for dinner on the day after next. No difficulty was made on Mrs Allen's side, and

Catherine's only problem was to hide her excessive pleasure at receiving this kind invitation.

The morning had been so charming, so enjoyable that Catherine had not thought about James or Isabella, but was reminded of them in the afternoon when she happened to meet Miss Anne Thorpe in Bond Street.

'Good afternoon, Anne,' Catherine began. 'Did your sister and brother go for their drive to Clifton this morning?'

'Yes, my other sister, Maria, went with them. I think you had a lucky escape. It must have been a very boring, dull drive, but Maria was excited about going. I decided immediately that I did not want to go with them.'

Catherine doubted that Anne wanted to be left behind, but she was happy to know that the trip had not been cancelled because of her refusal to join it. Before leaving she asked, 'And did Maria enjoy seeing Blaize Castle?'

'Oh, they did not see any castles. They had lunch at the York Hotel in Clifton, and after a walk they had tea there too, before returning to Bath.'

The next morning Catherine hurried to the Thorpes' lodgings, wanting to be certain that she was on good terms with Isabella again. But Isabella seemed to have forgotten that there had been any disagreement between them as she rushed into the sitting-room to greet her dear friend.

'Darling Catherine, from the beginning you understood more about me than I understood about myself. You have seen through everything.'

Catherine could not reply because she did not understand what Isabella was talking about.

'My sweetest, my most precious friend,' continued the older girl, 'you can see that I am amazingly excited. Let us sit down and talk about what you have already guessed. You clever creature! Your brother is the most charming man on earth. I only wish that I deserved him. But what do you think your excellent father and mother will say when he speaks to them? Oh, I am so worried that they will not accept me for their dear son.'

Finally Catherine began to understand what Isabella was talking about.

'Isabella, are you telling me that you and James are in love?'

And soon Catherine had heard the whole story. The young couple had spoken of their love for each other during yesterday's carriage ride. Now Catherine was thrilled to think that her dear friend, Isabella, would one day be her sister-in-law.

'Catherine, you will mean so much more to me than either Anne or Maria; I feel that I will be much more attached to the Morland family than to my own,' Isabella insisted.

This idea astonished Catherine, and she honestly thought it was inappropriate, but she was delighted to hear Isabella's story of how the engagement had happened.

'I remember the first time I met your dear brother,' continued Isabella. 'With me, the first moment settles everything. When he visited us in London, I lost my heart to him immediately. I remember I was wearing my yellow silk dress, and when I came into the sitting-room, I thought I had never seen anybody so handsome as dear James.'

Here Catherine secretly thought about the power of love because, although she was very fond of her brother, she had never once thought that he was handsome.

'Catherine, your brother caused me many sleepless nights. I was sure he would fall in love with someone else. He is such a wonderful man. I knew you understood what was in my heart, especially when I told you that I had a particular liking for clergymen. I was sure that my secret would be safe with you.' Once again Catherine was surprised by what Isabella thought she knew, but she saw no reason to change her friend's mind about the situation. She learned that her brother was already on his way to Fullerton to ask for his parents' permission to become engaged to Miss Isabella Thorpe.

'Will they accept me, dear Catherine? My fortune is very small and your brother could marry anyone he chose.'

Again Catherine thought about the strength of love and said, 'Isabella, you are too humble. The difference between your fortunes will not affect anything.'

'Catherine, not everyone would have such a generous heart as yours. I just wish that the situations were reversed. If I had command of millions and ruled the world, your brother would be my only choice. I need very little in life, and where people are attached by love, poverty itself is not a problem.'

Catherine liked this idea; it sounded like something from one of her novels.

'I will not think of a wedding or a house or anything of that sort until we have your father's answer,' continued Isabella. 'Your dear brother said that he will send me news tomorrow, but I know I will not have courage enough to open his letter.' The two friends spent every moment together that day and the next, talking of nothing except how happy they would be as sisters. Finally, after much anxiety, the post was delivered on the second day and Isabella opened her letter from Fullerton. James wrote:

I have gained the approval of my kind parents, and they promise that everything in their power will be done to guarantee my happiness. The brightest look spread across Isabella's face and she said that she was the happiest woman on earth.

The entire Thorpe family were now very happy and wanted to hear about the details of Mr Morland's promise: What would his income be? Would he be given property by his family? What kind of ring would Isabella receive? What would their carriage and their house be like? Where would they live?

Mr John Thorpe had business in London and now that Isabella had her letter, he prepared to depart.

'Well, Miss Morland,' he said, finding Catherine alone in the sitting-room, 'I have come to say goodbye for the present time.'

'Goodbye, sir. I hope you have a safe journey.'

'What do you think of this marrying idea, Miss Morland?'

'I am sure marriage is a very good thing,' replied Catherine.

'Do you? I am glad you are not an enemy to marriage. By the way, do you know that old song that says, "One wedding brings another"? Perhaps we may find out if that old song has some truth in it at Isabella's wedding.'

'May we?' asked Catherine, feeling quite confused. 'But I never sing, so I would not know. Well, I wish you a good journey. I dine with Miss Tilney today, so I must rush home.'

'Don't hurry away. I will be gone from Bath for a fortnight and it will seem a long time. When will we be together again?'

'Well, we will see you when you return. Goodbye for now,' said Catherine, trying to get away.

'That is very kind of you, Miss Morland. You are probably the nicest person I know. You have so many good qualities.'

'Sir, there are much nicer, better people than me. Good morning to you. I must get home.'

'But Miss Morland, may I visit Fullerton one day soon?'

'My father and mother would be pleased to meet you.'

'And I hope, Miss Morland, that you would be pleased to see me there.'

'It is always nice to have company at our house.'

'I agree with you - give me some cheerful company and I am very happy. I believe you and I agree about most things.'

'That idea has never occurred to me,' said Catherine. 'In fact, I do not know my own mind about most things.'

'I am the same,' cried Mr Thorpe. 'I have a simple idea about most things. Let me have a girl I like and a comfortable house and I would be satisfied. Fortune is nothing. I am sure of a good income of my own, so my wife does not need to have a penny.'

'I am in agreement with you there, sir. If there is a good fortune on one side, there can be no need for any on the other. I hate the idea of one great fortune marrying another. And I think it is very wicked of people to marry for money. Goodbye. We shall be glad to see you in Fullerton one day.'

And having said that, Catherine hurried out of the Thorpes' house without another thought about John Thorpe. She was concentrating on getting ready for her dinner with Miss Tilney.

Mr Thorpe felt very satisfied; he believed that Miss Morland had clearly encouraged his attentions and he intended to pursue her confidently and without hesitation.

Chapter six

A Friend's True Nature Revealed?

Catherine went to the Tilneys' lodgings with high hopes of a particularly pleasurable evening, and of course this could only lead to disappointment. Although General Tilney was extremely polite to her, Eleanor Tilney welcomed her warmly and Henry Tilney was as charming as usual, the happiness that Catherine had expected was not achieved. Somehow the evening did not have the spirit, or perhaps the magic, that Catherine had wished for. On leaving the party, Catherine's conclusion was that nobody was to blame, and that the evening was just one of those unfortunate failures that happen occasionally. But when she described the evening to Isabella, her reaction was very different.

'I blame it on pride. Rude, unbearable pride! The people in that family think they are very grand. I have never heard of such unfriendly behaviour as Miss Tilney's. Hardly even to speak to you, a guest!'

'But, Isabella, you are misinterpreting my words. Miss Tilney was not rude; she was very polite, very proper and correct.'

'Please don't defend her. Or her brother! He had appeared so attached to you and then he hardly looked at you when you were a guest in their house! How rude!'

'No, Isabella. That is not what I said. I simply meant that he did not seem in good spirits.'

'I hate this type of inconstant behaviour in anyone. Never think of him again; he does not deserve your attention.'

'I do not suppose that he ever thinks of me,' said Catherine. 'Do you see how different he is from your brother and from mine? I really believe that John has the most faithful heart.'

'But General Tilney, I assure you, could not have treated me with more attention or with greater politeness. It seemed that his only care was to make me happy.'

'Oh, I do not suspect him of pride. John thinks very highly of him, and I trust my brother's judgement.'

'Well, we will meet again this evening at the Rooms, so I will wait until then to judge their behaviour towards me.'

'And must I go?' asked Isabella.

'Of course, I can refuse you nothing, but you know that my heart is elsewhere. And you know that it is completely out of the question for me to think of dancing, so please do not suggest it, although I know that Charles Hodges will beg me to dance with him.'

Isabella's opinion of the Tilneys did not influence Catherine's view of them. She was certain that they had not meant to be quiet or proud when she dined with them, and that evening she was proved right. Both Miss Tilney and her brother were dearly happy to see her and treated her very kindly throughout the evening, and once again she enjoyed her usual happiness as Henry's dance partner.

At the end of the first dance, a tall, handsome young man approached Eleanor and Henry Tilney, and Catherine learned that this was their older brother, Captain Tilney. After a short, polite conversation, the older brother asked if they knew the pretty young woman sitting with some of the older ladies. Catherine explained that it was her good friend Isabella Thorpe.

'Could you please introduce me to her?' asked Captain Tilney. 'I would like to invite her to dance.'

'I am afraid that she would not dance this evening for any reason in the world, although I think it is very kind of you to think she might wish for a partner,' said Catherine.

When Catherine and Henry were returning to the dance floor, Henry said, 'Thank you for thinking that my brother was being kind in wanting to dance with Miss Thorpe. You allow the rest of the world to have motives that are as good and generous as your own.'

Catherine was lost in thought about Henry's comment when she heard Isabella's voice. She looked up and saw her with Captain Tilney, standing in the set opposite her and Henry. Isabella raised her eyebrows for a second and then smiled.

'How could this happen?' Catherine said to Henry. 'Isabella was so determined not to dance.'

'And has Isabella never changed her mind before?'

'But what about your brother? Why did he invite her to dance after what I said?' asked Catherine, feeling very confused.

'My brother makes his own decisions, but his behaviour does not surprise me. She is very pretty and that would have been enough reason for him to have asked her.'

Catherine had no opportunity to speak to Isabella until the dance had finished and they were walking round the room arm in arm.

'Dear Catherine, I know you are surprised that I danced, and now I am exhausted. But he is very amusing, I must admit, although I would have preferred to sit still all evening.'

'Why didn't you?' asked Catherine, thinking of her brother.

'That would have made me look quite spoiled, and you know how I hate that kind of behaviour. I refused him as long as possible, but he would not give up. He said that he would dance with me or with no one. Such nonsense! Since there would be no peace until I danced with him, and knowing that your dear brother would not want me to sit throughout the evening, I had to accept his invitation. He is such a smart-looking young fellow. Did you see that every eye was upon us?'

'He is a very handsome man,' Catherine agreed quietly.

'Oh, yes, I suppose he is very good-looking, but too proud. I scolded him about that several times in my way.'

Catherine was with Isabella in the sitting-room of the Thorpes' lodgings when her brother James's second letter arrived from Fullerton; it contained a summary of his father's kind arrangements for James and his wife's future happiness. As a clergyman, he would be given his father's living with the salary that went with it, and he would receive a future inheritance of equal value, then doubling his yearly salary.

James wrote how grateful he was to his parents and explained the necessity of waiting between two and three years before he would have his parish and he and Isabella could marry, which is what he had expected. Catherine followed her brother's lead and, feeling very satisfied with her parents' generosity and good wishes for the young couple, congratulated Isabella on having everything so pleasantly settled.

'It is very charming, I am sure,' said Isabella softly.

'Mr Morland has behaved generously, without doubt,' added Mrs Thorpe, looking anxiously at her daughter. 'I am sure that he would do more if he could. I am certain that if his fortunes change, he will do more for you and his son in the future. A clergyman's salary is a small amount to begin on, but you are very modest in your needs, dear Isabella.'

'Well, as you know, I never think of myself,' Isabella began, 'but I do not want to injure my dear James. Such a small income is hardly enough to pay for the essential requirements of life. For myself, that is unimportant; I never think of myself. Anyway, Mr Morland has a right to do what he likes with his own money.' Catherine felt hurt by what Isabella was implying and said, 'I am sure that my father has promised as much as he can afford.' Isabella quickly tried to cover up her true feelings.

'My dear Catherine, you know me well enough to know that I hate money and would be happy with very little, but two or three years is a long time to wait until your brother and I can marry.'

The Allens now began the sixth of their eight weeks in Bath, and Catherine was looking forward to more opportunities to spend time with both Eleanor and Henry Tilney. But on her next visit to Miss Tilney at Milsom Street, she was disappointed to learn that the family would be leaving Bath at the end of the following week.

'I am afraid my father has missed some of his friends who did not come to Bath this year,' explained Miss Tilney.

Catherine was very upset by this news and wanted to ask Miss Tilney to promise to write, but before she could make her request, General Tilney entered the room.

'Well, Miss Morland,' he said to Catherine, 'have you agreed? We leave Bath a week from Saturday, and if you will accompany us to Northanger Abbey, none of us will have any reason to miss this place. We cannot offer you all of the excitement of a place like Bath, but we will do everything we can to make your stay agreeable.' Northanger Abbey! These were thrilling words to Catherine, and it was such a flattering invitation. To have her company so warmly requested! She thought her heart might burst if she tried to speak. A visit to Northanger Abbey held so much promise: a continued friendship with Eleanor, whom she greatly admired, and the possibility of a romance, but that was something she dared not mention to anyone. And in addition to all that, she would be staying in an ancient abbey and would be able to explore every damp cellar, every hidden room, every ruined passage. The decayed walls would speak to her and tell her the stories hidden there.

With a mind so full of excitement about her stay at Northanger Abbey, Catherine was hardly aware that two or three days passed without her seeing Isabella for more than a few minutes at a time. But one afternoon Isabella sought her out in the Pump Room and asked her to sit with her on her favourite bench between two doors, where they could see everybody who entered the room before they were seen.

As the two friends chatted, Catherine noticed that Isabella's eyes continually turned towards the entrance as if she were waiting for someone.

Catherine decided to tease her friend a little and said, 'Don't worry, Isabella. James will be here soon.'

'Catherine, my dear creature, do not think that I always want to keep James at my elbow. It would be awful to always be together. And so you are going to Northanger Abbey. I am very glad for you. I understand that it is one of the finest old places in England, and you must write and tell me all about it.'

'I will do my best. But who are you looking for? Are you expecting your sisters?'

'I am not looking for anybody. My eyes must be somewhere, and you know my eyes wander when my thoughts are a hundred miles away. Tilney says it is always the case with certain types of minds. But forget about that. I have something important to tell you. I have just had a letter from John, and I am sure you can guess what he has written about.'

'No, I cannot. Why could I?' asked Catherine innocently.

'Catherine, don't be naive. You know that he is head over heels in love with you.'

'With me? Dear Isabella, why would you say such a thing?'

'My sweet Catherine, be honest, and don't pretend you are not aware of his feelings. John says in his letter that just before he left Bath he made it clear that he intended to propose marriage to you very soon, and that you encouraged him quite openly.'

'Isabella, I am completely astonished by what you say. I had no idea that your brother was in love with me, and I certainly did not encourage him in any way. I sincerely swear that no talk of his proposing marriage to me ever passed between us. He must have misunderstood me in some way because I never thought nor wished for anything of this kind from him. Please explain to him as properly as possible that I did not intend to deceive him in any way, but if I could think of one man more than any other, he is not that person. Please don't be angry with me, Isabella, because we shall, of course, still be sisters-in-law.'

'Yes, yes,' Isabella said blushing, 'but there are more ways than one of our becoming sisters. But what am I talking about? My mind is wandering again. So you are determined not to accept a proposal from John?'

'I cannot return his love, and I certainly never meant to encourage him,' insisted Catherine.

'I must say, Catherine, that I agree with you. What would you and he live on? He has very little money, and it is no good saying that people can live on love because it is just not possible. I think John cannot have received my last letter.'

'And so you do understand what I have said? I did not mean to encourage your brother.'

'Of course I understand,' said Isabella. 'A little harmless flirtation often leads one person to assume they know another's mind. I assure you that I am the last person in the world to judge you severely in such matters. Circumstances change; what one means one day, one may not mean the next.'

'But my opinion of your brother did not change. You are describing something that did not happen.'

Without listening to Catherine, Isabella continued with her own thoughts. 'Nobody should rush into an engagement before knowing what they are doing. And young men change their opinions so easily. Why should a brother's happiness be more important to me than my friend's? My advice to you, Catherine, is not to be in a hurry. Tilney says people often deceive themselves about the state of their own heart, and I believe that he is right. Oh, look, here he comes, but he will not see us here.'

But Captain Tilney walked directly to their bench and took the seat next to Isabella. The two of them began whispering together, making Catherine very uncomfortable and very jealous for her brother.

Finally she stood and said, 'Isabella, I would like to join Mrs Allen. Will you walk with me?'

'You go without me,' Isabella said. 'I must wait here for my sisters.'

Catherine could do nothing to persuade Isabella to leave the bench, and so she found Mrs Allen and left the Pump Room. It seemed to her that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella and that her friend was unconsciously encouraging him. It had to be an unconscious flirtation because Isabella was engaged to James, but Catherine was left confused and worried by her conversations with Isabella that day. Why had she talked so much about money? Why had she been so obviously pleased at seeing Captain Tilney? And how did John Thorpe come to the conclusion that she had encouraged him to fall in love with her?

A few days passed and Catherine, although not allowing herself to suspect Isabella of improper behaviour, could not help noticing that her friend seemed an altered creature. When she was with Catherine and James in the Allens' or Thorpes' lodgings, she seemed a bit dreamy and not quite as full of spirit and energy as before. That alone would not have troubled Catherine, but when she saw Isabella in the public rooms, she had to admit that she became much livelier and flirtatious when Captain Tilney was in the room. Catherine could see that James was confused and hurt by his fiancée's behaviour, and she thought that Captain Tilney too was being treated badly by Isabella. Surely Isabella had not told him that she was an engaged woman; otherwise, he would not have flattered her with so much attention.

Catherine worried so much about the situation that she finally decided to speak to Henry Tilney about it, describing what she had observed and ending by saying, 'I am certain that your brother must be unaware that Miss Thorpe is engaged to be married to my brother, James.'

'My brother does know that,' replied Mr Tilney.

'Does he?' asked Catherine. 'Then why does he pursue Isabella as if she was unattached? He will have his heart broken if he falls in love with her.'

'I am sure that my brother can look after his own heart,' Henry said with a smile. 'I have told him that Miss Thorpe is engaged, but he is his own master and will do as he pleases.'

'But he is giving great pain and anxiety to my brother.'

'Are you sure that this distress is caused by Frederick? Is it his attentions to Miss Thorpe, or Miss Thorpe's reaction to them that gives pain to your brother?'

'Is it not the same thing?'

'I think your brother would understand the difference. No man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can turn it into a tragedy.'

'Should I warn James? Or can you speak to your brother and advise him to leave Bath?'

'I do not believe that any one of the three people involved in this situation would thank us for our advice. If your brother and Miss Thorpe love each other, as you are certain they do, they will never tease each other beyond what is acceptable to them both. Don't worry. Frederick will not stay long in Bath, and then your brother and his fiancée will laugh about poor Captain Tilney's attachment to the beautiful Isabella.'

Catherine could not argue against Henry's analysis of the situation, and she decided to stop worrying about it. That evening Isabella and James were at the Allens' lodgings to say goodbye to Catherine, and with relief she saw only affectionate behaviour between them.

Chapter seven

Disappointment at First Sight

The next morning Catherine was at the Tilneys' lodgings, ready to begin her journey to Northanger Abbey. She was unusually nervous, wanting to do exactly what was right to maintain her new friends' high opinion of her.

But she had no need to worry. Miss Tilney's good manners and Henry's smile soon drove away any anxious feelings, and General Tilney welcomed her very warmly and looked after her every need. Even Captain Tilney appeared in the sitting-room to wish them all a safe journey, although Catherine heard him whisper to Eleanor, 'How glad I shall be when you are all on your way home.'

Catherine joined Eleanor and a servant inside one carriage; Henry and General Tilney were in the front carriage, with Henry driving. Finally the journey of thirty miles from Bath to Northanger Abbey began. Our heroine relaxed and enjoyed Eleanor's company as she observed a road that was entirely new to her. She looked back at Bath without regret, excited about being with Eleanor and Henry, and about spending time in a real abbey.

After two hours, which flew by for Catherine, the carriages stopped for lunch. Catherine could not help noticing the General's habit of giving orders and dominating every conversation. He gave his opinion about the journey, about the inn at which they had stopped, the service of the waiters, the quality of the food, and even about the weather. Eleanor and Henry spoke very little when their father was part of the group, and Catherine felt a sense of relief when it was time to return to the carriages and get away from General Tilney. But the General delighted her with a surprising suggestion.

'The day is very fine, Miss Morland, and I think you would see more of this beautiful countryside if you took my place with Henry at the top of the front carriage.'

And so Catherine found herself sitting beside Henry, as happy as any girl who ever existed. And Henry drove so well! He did not swear or congratulate himself on his ability with horses, and he seemed to enjoy making conversation with Catherine. Sitting beside him in his carriage was almost as good as dancing with him.

'My sister is very happy that you are coming to Northanger Abbey as her guest. She does not have a true friend in the neighbourhood and is looking forward to this time with you.'

'But you are with her most of the time, aren't you?'

'Northanger is my home for about half of my time. I have my own house in Woodston, which is nearly twenty miles from my father's house, and I must spend some of my time there in my parish. Of course I am always sorry to leave Eleanor.'

'And the Abbey? You must be very fond of the Abbey.' Henry smiled and said, 'You seem to have formed a very positive view of Northanger Abbey.'

'Yes, I think I have. It is a fine old place, isn't it? Like the kind of places one reads about in Mrs Radcliffe's novels?'

'And are you prepared to meet the type of frightening experiences that may occur in such houses? Do you have a brave heart? Are your nerves strong enough for secret rooms and hidden staircases?' said Henry in a low, quiet voice.

'Oh, yes!' cried Catherine. 'But I will not be easily frightened with so many people in the house. We are not returning to it after it has stood empty for years and no one expects us. I have read about that kind of thing happening in novels, and then mysterious and scary things occur.'

'No, that is certainly not the case at Northanger. We shall not have to feel our way along a dark hall with only the dying coals of a distant fire to light our way. Nor will we have to make our beds on the floor of a room without windows, doors or furniture. I am sure you have read about such circumstances too in one of your favourite novels,' suggested Henry.

'Of course, as is the custom in old houses,' he continued in his dramatically low voice, 'you will be in a separate part of the house, away from the rest of the family. And when we go to our warm, familiar rooms at the end of the evening, Dorothy, our ancient servant, will lead you up a different staircase, and then along several dark passages, into an apartment that has not been used since a very old aunt died in it more than twenty years ago. Will that frighten you?'

'Will you be content in your large room with very high ceilings and very little light? The walls in this room are hidden behind dark, heavy tapestries and the bed is covered in material appropriate for a funeral. Will your blood run cold?'

when you enter? Will you be happy to spend the night there alone, with nobody close enough to hear you if you shout, or even scream?'

'But that will not happen to me, I am sure,' said Catherine in a trembling voice. 'You are describing what happens in novels.'

'But what are they based on? Think about the furniture you will find in your apartment. Not tables, wardrobes or drawers, but in a dark corner you might see a broken violin or a tall black cupboard from several centuries ago, and over the fireplace an oil painting of a handsome military man, whose eyes seem to follow you round the room.'

'And Dorothy, before leaving you, tells you that you will be alone in this part of the house, with only the ghosts of the past to keep you company. With these parting words, she disappears down the dark hall, and you listen until you can no longer hear her footsteps. You hurry to the door, wanting to lock it, but there is no lock or key.'

'Oh, Mr Tilney, how frightening! It is like a scene from Udolpho! But it cannot really happen to me. I am sure your housekeeper is not really Dorothy, and there are no ghosts at Northanger Abbey, are there? What else might happen?'

'I think you will feel frightened on your first night, but nothing unusual will happen to you. Not on that night. You will go to bed and get a few hours of disturbed sleep. But on your third night, there will probably be a violent storm. The thunder will be so loud and so frequent that the whole abbey will shake. A terrible wind will accompany the noise, and when the lightning flashes, you will see movement behind the heavy tapestries. Because you are naturally curious, you will get out of bed to investigate and behind a tear in one of the tapestries, you will discover a small, secret door. With your lamp in your hand, you will pass into a small dark room.'

'No, I could not go into the room! I would be too frightened!'

'But you would enter because Dorothy has told you about a secret underground passage between your apartment and the church of St Anthony, less than two miles away. Could you resist such an adventure? No! You will go into the small, dark room, which leads to several more tiny rooms. You will see a sharp knife in one room, drops of blood in another and, in a third, chains and a whip.'

'Finally you find a large, old-fashioned cupboard, and when you unlock its doors, you find drawers, one of which contains many mysterious sheets of paper. You hurry back to your room with this treasure and begin to read:

You have found the diary of Matilda, a poor, unfortunate girl. Have pity on me and... Your lamp suddenly goes out and leaves you in total darkness.'

'Oh, no!' cries Catherine. 'And then what? Please, go on!'

But Henry could not continue telling the story without smiling, and Catherine at last understood that he was amusing himself by frightening her. Catherine felt ashamed of desperately wanting to hear more of the story, and told herself to remember where she was.

'Mr Tilney, you are a good story-teller, but you have not alarmed me. Your sister would never put me in a room like the one you have described. I am not afraid of anything at Northanger Abbey,' insisted our heroine.

Just then the Abbey came into view and Catherine found that she was more than a little disappointed. Parts of the building were very low and she could not even see an ancient chimney. But it was a real abbey, and she was delighted to be there, even when she saw that the hallway and informal sitting-room were very modern and decorated with elegant furniture. She had to admit that this was not what she had wished for. She had dreamed of entering a scene from Udolpho, but instead found herself in a richly decorated, beautiful, comfortable home.

Soon she was taken to her own room by Eleanor, who asked her to be ready for dinner in twenty-five minutes.

This room was nothing like the one that Henry had described. There was pretty paper on the walls and a lovely carpet on the floor. Everything, in fact, was very handsome, comfortable and even cheerful. She was determined to change her clothes quickly and be early for dinner because she did not want to risk upsetting General Tilney. But suddenly she noticed a large wooden chest at one side of the fireplace and she forgot about the General and the need to hurry.

'This is very strange! I did not expect such a sight as this! What an enormous chest! Why is it hidden in this corner, almost out of sight? I should not, but I will look inside. I must do it now while there is still light outside. If I wait until evening my candle may go out.'

Without hesitating, Catherine tried to open the old oak chest, but had trouble with the lock, which was made of ancient looking, dull silver. The handles at each end were broken, perhaps by some awful violence, and in the centre of the lid there was a silver plate with some mysterious writing which she could not understand. Could it say Tilney in a foreign alphabet, or did the chest not originally belong to the family? By what strange events could it have become theirs?

Catherine's curiosity grew by the second and she became more and more determined to open the chest. With trembling hands, she had just managed to turn the lock and lift the heavy lid a few centimetres when a servant knocked on the door. Catherine dropped the lid immediately and it came down with a tremendous bang.

'Miss Tilney has sent me, miss. Do you need any help with dressing for dinner?' asked the servant.

This kind offer brought Catherine to her senses and reminded her of what she should be doing at that moment. She dismissed the servant and rapidly changed her dress, although her eyes kept returning to the chest.

She was ready so quickly that she believed she had time to examine the chest again. She hurried to the corner and, with all her strength, threw back the lid. She was astonished to discover a beautiful, new white blanket, folded neatly and resting at the bottom of the chest, and nothing more.

Catherine was staring at the blanket when Miss Tilney, hoping that her friend would be ready for dinner, entered the room.

'It is an odd old chest, isn't it?' said Miss Tilney, as Catherine hastily closed the chest and turned away from her friend's eyes. Our heroine was blushing and feeling ashamed of her wild imagination.

'It is impossible to say how long that chest has been in our family,' continued Miss Tilney. 'I do not know why it was put in this room, but I have left it here because it is handy for blankets and sheets. And in that corner it is out of the way.'

Catherine could not speak, but made herself calm down and hurry down the stairs with Eleanor to join Henry and General Tilney in the dining-room. The General insisted on punctuality and was looking at his watch as the two young ladies entered the room. He violently pulled the bell beside the fireplace and shouted, 'Dinner to be on the table immediately!'

Catherine felt extremely nervous as she took her place at the table, worried about offending the General and cursing her own interest in old chests. The General scolded his daughter for making their guest hurry down the stairs, and then recovered his politeness. Catherine was distressed at having caused Eleanor any discomfort, but the General was so kind and attentive towards her that, with this and a healthy appetite, Catherine soon recovered her peace of mind and began to enjoy being at Northanger Abbey; she actually felt a very positive sense of happiness.

The dining-room was large and elegant, with a very grand table and a number of servants attending to the diners' needs.

'This is a beautiful room,' Catherine commented.

'It is a good size,' agreed the General. 'I believe that a large dining-room is necessary in a house like this. But I suppose you are used to much grander dining-rooms at home and at Mr Allen's house.'

'No, not at all,' was Catherine's honest answer. 'I have never seen such a large dining-room in my entire life.'

The General's mood brightened when he heard this, but he politely said, 'I am sure that there is more comfort in a smaller dining-room. I am sure that Mr Allen's house has everything in the correct size for perfect happiness.'

Before the party retired for the night, a violent storm started outside, and as Catherine reached the door to her room, she listened to the wind and rain with sensations of wonder. The night made her think of the horrible scenes which Mrs Radcliffe's buildings had witnessed. She knew that in a house like Northanger Abbey, which was so modern in many ways and so securely guarded, she had nothing to fear, and so, after noticing that Eleanor's apartment was very close to hers, she entered her room with a reasonably strong heart and steady nerves.

Catherine looked across the room and saw the window curtains move, and so she forced herself to step boldly forward, and while softly whistling a little

tune, she courageously looked behind each curtain and found nothing unusual. Then she glanced at the chest beside the fireplace and laughed at herself for worrying about anything in this very pleasant room.

'I will take my time getting ready for bed, and I will not worry if the fire goes out.'

Catherine felt satisfied with her own determination to be brave and normal. She happily prepared herself for bed and watched the fire die away, but just as she was ready to climb into bed she spied a tall, old-fashioned black cupboard, which she had not noticed earlier and which looked like the cupboard Henry had described in his fictional room. Had he, in fact, been talking about this particular cupboard?

Catherine took her candle and examined it closely. It was very handsome, black with gold handles, and very old. The key was in the door, inviting her to look inside.

So, placing the candle very cautiously on a chair, she seized the key and tried with all her strength to turn it, but it would not move. Alarmed, but not discouraged, she tried it another way and the key turned in the lock, but the door would not open. She paused a moment, listening to the wind roaring down the chimney and the rain beating against the windows, and everything seemed to warn her not to open this mysterious cupboard. But Catherine knew she would not be able to sleep until she had seen what was hidden within.

She tried the key again, moving it in different directions until the door suddenly opened; Catherine's heart leapt at such a thrilling victory. Now she saw a variety of drawers of different sizes, and she bravely began to open them and examine the interiors; each was equally empty! But Catherine had read enough novels to know that such cupboards often had secret, hidden sections, and so her search continued, and she was successful. By opening a door behind the first set of drawers, Catherine discovered a roll of papers that had been pushed back into the furthest part of the cupboard.

Her heart trembled, her knees shook and her cheek grew pale. With an unsteady hand she seized the precious treasure and was determined to read every line before she attempted to rest. Could it be the diary of Matilda, the young woman Henry had told her about?

But then something horrible happened: Catherine's candle was blown out by the wind from the chimney, and she was left in total darkness. She heard footsteps outside her room and a door banged shut. By now there was a cold sweat on Catherine's forehead and she was trembling from head to foot; the papers fell from her hand as she jumped into her bed and hid beneath the blankets.

To close her eyes in sleep was impossible; her thoughts were going in every direction: Had Henry intended her to find Matilda's diary? How long had it been hidden in the cupboard? Would she be the first person to discover its secrets? She was determined to read the diary, which she was sure she had found, as soon as there was enough sunlight to see.

Hour after hour passed and Catherine could do nothing but listen to the terrible storm, which seemed to be warning her of hidden dangers, and pray that morning would come quickly.

A servant entered Catherine's bedroom at eight o'clock the next morning and opened the curtains. As soon as she was alone again, Catherine leapt from her bed and gathered up the sheets of paper she had left on the floor. Then she jumped back into bed to enjoy the luxury of discovering Matilda's secrets while resting on her pillow.

Her greedy eyes glanced rapidly over one of the pages. She was surprised by what she found and quickly looked at several more pages. All of them contained household lists of laundry items: shirts, socks, underwear, gloves, ties; or lists of household purchases: writing paper, pens, hair powder, shoes and string. These lists and nothing more were the secret documents that had filled her with excitement and robbed her of half her night's rest! She blushed to think that she had learned nothing from her experience with the chest beside the fireplace. How could she imagine that she would find a family secret in a guest bedroom?

Catherine hurried to get ready for breakfast, hoping that Henry Tilney would never know that she had spent her first day at Northanger Abbey behaving like a fool.

Chapter eight

A Gothic Interpretation of Reality

Catherine was extremely impressed by the elegant breakfast table, and she made a pretty comment about the beautiful plates and cups.

'I am pleased that you approve of my choice,' General Tilney responded. 'These dishes were manufactured in this county, and I believe the set is as fine as anything from the continent. In fact, I hope that soon I will have the opportunity of selecting another set of dishes from the same company, although this time not for my own dining-room.'

Catherine was probably the only one of the party who did not understand what the General was hinting at.

Soon after breakfast Henry left them for a three-day visit to Woodston, where he had parish work to do.

As the other three watched him go, Catherine asked his father, 'Is Woodston a pretty place?'

'Over the last few years, I have tried to make the house and gardens a suitable place for my son,' General Tilney explained. 'It is a family living, and I want Henry to be happy there. Of course, his clergyman's salary is not important, although he could easily live on it. What is important for any son is to have a job, to be employed in worthwhile work. Even Frederick, my eldest son, who will inherit one of the largest pieces of private property in the country, has his profession. I am sure that your father, Miss Morland, would agree with me.'

Catherine could not answer for her father, but she was very impressed with everything General Tilney had just said.

'Now, last night you mentioned that you would like to see the rest of Northanger Abbey. It would be my privilege to show you the house and the gardens if you can be ready to go out in five minutes. I will wait for you young ladies at the front door.' Catherine would have preferred to go around the house with only Eleanor, and her disappointment showed on her face.

'I hope you do not mind joining my father,' said Eleanor, almost apologetically. 'He always walks out at this time of day.' Catherine thought it was odd that the General always took his walk so early. Neither her father nor Mr Allen did so. It

made her wonder about her host. She certainly wanted to see the house, but she had to admit that she was not very interested in seeing the gardens.

Nevertheless, when Catherine was outside, being guided around the exterior of the Abbey, she was more impressed than she could ever have predicted. She admired the size, the design, the beauty of the buildings, as well as the wonderful gardens. General Tilney considered her reaction and all of her comments both pleasing and appropriate, especially when she made it clear that nothing in Fullerton, not even on Mr Allen's land, could compare to what she was seeing at Northanger Abbey.

Finally the General said, 'Here is a handy door. I think you young ladies are probably ready to go inside and get warm.'

'But I will take our guest down this narrow path,' said Eleanor. 'It is my favourite walk. Will you join us, Father?'

'No, Eleanor, it is cold and damp along that path. I will go across the park and meet you later, but don't show our guest around the inside of the house until I join you.'

As the young ladies walked along, Miss Tilney said, 'This was my mother's favourite walk and brings back memories of her.'

'I am surprised, then, that the General would not enter it. Your mother's death must have caused great grief and distress.'

'Yes, and it causes more pain every year. I was only thirteen when she died, too young to understand that I had lost a constant friend whose love and advice I could rely on.'

Catherine wanted to know more about Mrs Tilney and eagerly asked many questions: 'Was your mother a charming woman? Is there a picture of her in the Abbey? Did this dark path reflect something sad in her?'

As Catherine listened to Eleanor's answers, she came to the conclusion that General and Mrs Tilney had had an unhappy marriage. He did not love her favourite path, so how could he have loved her? And there was something in his handsome face that told Catherine he had not behaved well to his wife.

'Is the picture of her in your father's room?' was Catherine's final question.

'No,' answered Eleanor quietly. 'My father was never satisfied with the picture and would not hang it in the sitting-room or in his apartment. After Mother's

death, I found it and hung it in my bedroom. I will show it to you if you would like to see it.'

Catherine believed this was one more proof that the General did not love his wife and must have been extremely cruel to her! She knew this kind of selfish, unfeeling man from her novels, and as he led her around the house, she came to the conclusion that General Tilney was the type of man that Mrs Radcliffe often wrote about - someone with dark, dangerous secrets, a man who lived by his own rules.

The General proudly pointed out the many modern improvements he had made to Northanger Abbey as they walked through the living rooms, the kitchens, the offices and the storerooms. Everything had been done to make the house both comfortable and efficient to run. But Catherine wondered if there was anything left of the original fifteenth-century building. Had every ancient treasure been swept away for the sake of domestic economy?

They finally returned to the chief staircase and walked up to examine three large guest rooms which had been decorated in the last five years.

'We hope to have other guests from Fullerton staying here in the future,' said the General, and Catherine was pleased by this kind thought for her family.

At the end of this grand hall, they reached a set of large doors which Eleanor began to open. 'No, Eleanor. Miss Morland has seen enough. There is nothing else worthy of her notice. We will retire to the library for a cup of tea after so much exercise.'

Catherine watched as the heavy doors were closed and believed that the General had excluded her from the most interesting part of the house. When she was alone with Eleanor, Catherine learned that the room in which Mrs Tilney had died was behind those doors. She imagined that the General's guilt, not grief, kept him away from that room.

'Has the room been kept as it was when your mother died?' asked Catherine eagerly.

'Yes,' answered Eleanor, 'even after nine years it is still exactly as she left it.'

'I suppose that you were with her when she died?'

'No,' said Eleanor sadly, 'I was unfortunately away from home. Her illness was sudden and short. It had ended before I could return.'

Horrible pictures came into Catherine's head. Could Henry's father have caused his wife's death?

That evening ended quietly and as the young ladies retired, General Tilney said that he had to spend several hours in his office looking over some important papers. Catherine would not let herself believe that the General had business to take care of; she thought there was a deeper reason for his late hours, something that could only be done when the rest of the household was asleep.

Catherine analysed what she believed were the facts: Mrs Tilney's illness was very sudden; her daughter was away from home at the time, and probably her sons were too; General Tilney was a jealous and cruel man. What was her conclusion? Perhaps Mrs Tilney was alive, shut up for unknown reasons, and receiving a nightly supply of coarse food from a husband who had never loved her. The poor woman must be a prisoner in the oldest part of the Abbey, the part that Catherine was not permitted to see. She worried that her conclusions were too bold, but then she persuaded herself that all the evidence supported her opinion.

Catherine was determined to find out more about the tragic life of Mrs Tilney, and she watched for an opportunity to visit the mysterious rooms that the General did not want her to see. Unfortunately Sunday was a busy day and Catherine had to accompany the Tilneys to church.

She sat with the family in their usual seats near the front of the church and stared directly at a very elegant monument which had been built in memory of Mrs Tilney, although Catherine did not accept this as proof of the poor woman's death.

Our heroine's eyes filled with tears as she read the words recorded on the monument, which described Mrs Tilney as a wonderful mother, a loyal friend, a generous neighbour, and, especially, as a loving and much-loved wife. She looked to her left and was not surprised to see that General Tilney remained unmoved; this unemotional attitude, and the proud look on his face, strengthened Catherine's belief that he had in some way been his wife's destroyer. She knew this type of man. She could remember dozens of such cruel animals from her novels - men who went from one crime to another, murdering whoever they chose, without any feelings of guilt or regret.

On the next day, Catherine had some time alone. Henry would not return until Tuesday, and both General Tilney and Eleanor were busy with their household duties, giving Catherine time to carry out her plan. She would go through the forbidden doors alone and search for proof of the General's cruelty. She was sure she would find something: perhaps the veil Mrs Tilney had worn to cover her desperate sadness or the last few paragraphs in her journal, which she had written in a trembling hand.

Catherine knew the way and walked quickly and quietly through the heavy doors and on to Mrs Tilney's room. She turned the key, opened the door and was in the room. But it was several minutes before she could take another step. What kind of horrible scene did she face? What surprise took her breath away? It was a clean, beautiful, modern, lady's bedroom. It was filled with handsome furniture, and the bright afternoon sun poured through two large windows which looked out on the most attractive flower gardens. Catherine's common sense told her that this had been a cheerful place; she was filled with shame. How could she have assumed so much? She was sick of exploring and analysing; she only wanted to return quickly and safely to her own bedroom and to keep all her suspicions to herself. But just as she stepped towards the door, she heard footsteps, and as she entered the hall again, she found herself face to face with Henry Tilney.

'Mr Tilney!' Catherine cried. 'Why did you come up that staircase?'

'I always use that staircase. It is the easiest route from the stables to my apartment. And why shouldn't I use it? But may I ask why you were using that staircase? It does not connect with the passage to your room.'

'I have been to see your mother's room,' Catherine explained, blushing deeply.

'Really? Is there anything extraordinary to see there?'

'No, nothing at all,' said Catherine. Then she quickly added, 'I thought you were not coming back until tomorrow.'

'I finished my business earlier than expected. You look pale. Did I alarm you by running so fast up those stairs?'

'Oh, no. And did you have good weather for your ride?'

'Well, yes. But has Eleanor ignored you and left you to find your way into all the rooms in the house by yourself?'

'Oh, no, don't say that. She showed me most of the house on Saturday, and we were coming into these rooms, but then,' whispered Catherine, 'then your father stopped us.'

'Have you looked into all of the rooms in this part of the house?'

'No, I only wanted to see... Isn't it late? I must hurry and get dressed for dinner,' said Catherine nervously.

'It is only a quarter past four,' said Henry as they walked along the passage. For the first time in their acquaintance, Catherine wished to leave him, but he continued chatting. 'My mother's room is very attractive, isn't it? Large and cheerful, with such a wonderful view. I am surprised that Eleanor does not use it for herself. She sent you to look at it, I suppose.'

'No,' said Catherine without adding any explanation.

'So it was your own decision to visit my mother's room. Since there is nothing out of the ordinary there, I assume you went there to honour my mother's memory. I am sure that Eleanor has told you that the world never saw a better woman... but I still cannot understand the reason for your visit. What else did my sister say to make you curious about Mother's room?'

Slowly and with some hesitation, Catherine said, 'She said that her dying was very sudden, and that none of you were at home at the time, and I thought, perhaps, your father had not been very fond of her.'

'And from this little information, you have come to the conclusion that my mother was badly treated in some way?' He continued, with cold eyes fixed on Catherine, 'My mother's illness, which ended in her death, was sudden, but she had suffered from the same illness for years. Her doctors, very respected, capable medical men, were called and looked after her until she died on the fifth day. Frederick and I were at home and visited her repeatedly; she received every possible attention which we could offer.'

'But was your father,' said Catherine, 'equally attentive during her illness? Was he full of grief and sorrow when she died?'

'Miss Morland, you have misjudged my father. He loved my mother as well as he could, and although I know that he was not the easiest man to live with, he valued her highly and sincerely, and he was truly, if not permanently, affected by her death.'

'I am very glad to hear that,' Catherine began. 'It would have been very shocking otherwise!'

'If I understand what you are implying, you had come to a conclusion that is too horrible for me to put into words. What have you been basing your wild suspicions on? Do we not live in a civilised society where laws and customs guide us? Do you not know us well enough to accept us as part of that society? We are not characters in a Gothic novel, Miss Morland.'

They had reached the end of the passage, and with tears of shame our heroine ran off to her own room. She hid there, considering every disappointment that she now might have to face. She was terribly humbled and she cried bitter tears. Would General Tilney learn what she had imagined? Would she lose Eleanor's friendship and possibly Henry's love? She hated herself more than she could express, but when the clock struck five, she knew that she had to appear for dinner although both her heart and spirit were broken.

Henry was more polite than ever, seeming to know that Catherine was in need of a kind word and careful attention. Gradually Catherine began to feel better, and she started to hope that her foolishness had not cost her all of Henry's friendship.

She had arrived at Northanger Abbey hoping to be frightened, and she had willingly turned what she saw and heard into a tragedy which could be traced back to the pages of the Gothic novels she loved to read. Charming as Mrs Radcliffe's books were, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the middle counties of England, could be looked for and understood. Maybe Mrs Radcliffe and her fellow novelists understood the character of the people beside the lakes and in the pine forests of the continent, but in the central part of England murders were uncommon, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping pills could be bought at a local chemist's, like potatoes at a grocer's. She now believed that there was a mixture of good and evil in the English character rather than the black and white described in her Gothic novels.

With these thoughts in mind, Catherine decided that she would use her good sense in the future, and because of Henry's continued kindness and his unwillingness to refer to what had happened, she was able to be happy again. She listened to Henry with the greatest attention, knowing that she would be improved by what she learned from him. She still trembled when she glanced

at the chest or the black cupboard in her bedroom, but she admitted that these reminders of her past foolishness were probably good for her.

Chapter nine

Distressing Letters

When Catherine was completely calm again at Northanger Abbey, she began to wonder why she had not heard anything from Isabella. She was impatient for news from Bath, and she wanted to know that her friend and her brother, James, continued on the best possible terms. Isabella had promised to write and had assured Catherine that she was always strict about carrying out her promises. This, Catherine thought, made it very strange that she had not received a letter from Isabella.

Then, on her tenth morning at the Abbey, Catherine found a letter beside her place at the breakfast table. She opened it and found that it was from James:

Dear Catherine,

This is not a letter that I want to write, but I think it is my duty to tell you that everything is at an end between Miss Thorpe and me. I left her and Bath yesterday, and will never see either of them again. You will learn the details from a different source, but I hope you will trust that my only mistake was to believe that my love was returned. Thank God I learned the truth in time. She has made me miserable forever.

I hope that your visit to Northanger Abbey finishes before Captain Tilney and Isabella announce their engagement. I have been a fool, believing her words rather than the evidence in front of my eyes. I wish that I had never met her. Dearest Catherine, be careful how you give your heart.

Catherine sat at the breakfast table with tears running down her cheeks, and with Eleanor and Henry wondering how they could help her. Fortunately, General Tilney was hidden behind his newspaper and took no notice of his guest that morning. Unable to eat, Catherine hurried off to the sitting-room to be alone as soon as it was politely possible.

Eleanor and Henry recognised that their friend was distressed and were very concerned for her, and so, after half an hour, they quietly approached her.

'I hope you have not had bad news from Fullerton. Is your family all well?' Eleanor asked gently.

'They are all well, thank you. The letter was from my brother at Oxford.'

Everyone was quiet for a few minutes, but then Catherine cried, 'I do not think I shall ever wish for a letter again! Poor James is so unhappy, and you will soon know why.'

'I am sure he is glad to have such a kind, affectionate sister. You will be a comfort to him if he is in any distress,' replied Henry kindly.

'I have one favour to beg,' Catherine said in a troubled voice. 'If your brother, Captain Tilney, is coming here, could you please give me notice so that I may go away.'

'Frederick? Has this anything to do with your friend, Miss Thorpe?' asked Henry.

'How quickly you have guessed,' cried Catherine. 'And now I understand why she has not written to me, but please read what my brother has written.'

Both Henry and Eleanor read James Morland's letter, and Henry said, 'I am very sorry that anyone you love is unhappy, but I cannot believe that Frederick ever intended to propose marriage to Miss Thorpe.'

Then Eleanor asked, 'What can you tell me about Miss Thorpe's family? Does she have any fortune?'

'Her mother seems a good sort of person, and her father is dead. They are not a wealthy family, and I believe Isabella has no fortune at all, but that would not matter to your family. Your father told me the other day that he only valued money because it allowed him to guarantee the happiness of his children.'

Henry and Eleanor exchanged a look. Then Eleanor said, 'I can imagine Frederick flirting with a girl like Miss Thorpe, but he would not respect her for treating her own fiance so badly. He has never found a woman good enough to love, and this situation would not make him love Miss Thorpe.'

'You might be wrong this time, my dear sister,' said Henry. 'Surely Miss Thorpe would not break off her engagement to Mr Morland before securing a promise from the other gentleman. You may delight in such a sister-in-law: open, honest, lively, with strong affections and nothing artificial about her emotions.'

'That kind of sister-in-law would be delightful,' said Eleanor, smiling at her brother.

'But perhaps,' observed Catherine, 'although she has behaved so badly to my family, she may behave better to yours. Now that she has got the man she really likes and wanted, she may learn to be faithful.'

'I trust she will be faithful to our brother,' replied Henry, 'unless she meets someone with more charm, or even a better fortune. I think that is Frederick's only chance of escape.'

'You are right. I think ambition was her only motive when falling in love. I remember when she found out what my father would do for her and James, she was so obviously disappointed. I have never been so deceived by anyone in my entire life, but that does not compare to poor James's feelings towards her.'

'We must pity your brother at present,' Henry said, 'but we must not underestimate your loss. You no longer have a close friend to open your heart to, to depend on, to learn from. You will feel the loss greatly, won't you?'

Catherine thought for a moment and then said, 'No, to tell the truth, I am hurt and cannot still love her. I will never hear from her or see her again, but I do not feel such grief as I would have thought.' To Catherine's surprise, this conversation greatly lifted her spirits.

From this time, the subject of the affair between Isabella Thorpe and Captain Frederick Tilney was frequently discussed and analysed by the three young people at Northanger Abbey. Catherine learned, with some surprise, that Eleanor and Henry were in perfect agreement about one thing: their father may not approve of Isabella's behaviour, but his greatest objection to her as a wife for his elder son would be that she was not socially well connected and she had no money. Such thoughts made Catherine think with some alarm about herself. She was as socially insignificant and as poor as Isabella, and if the heir to the Tilney fortune could not propose to a woman without money, would his younger brother ever gain his father's permission to marry someone like her? This worried Catherine, but she thought about General Tilney's generous attitude towards her and the special attention she always received

from him. Added to this, more than once she had heard him dismiss the idea that money was the most important thing in the world.

During one of their discussions, Catherine said, 'Mr Tilney, shouldn't you tell your father how Isabella has behaved towards my brother? Then he will be able to judge her by her character rather than by her situation in life.'

'No,' replied Henry. 'Frederick must tell his own story if he asks my father for permission to marry Miss Thorpe. But I must emphasise to you that I do not believe that will ever happen.' The household went about its business with no news from Captain Tilney, and so the General, who knew nothing about his elder son's connection to Miss Thorpe, was able to spend his time and energy making Catherine's time at Northanger pass pleasantly. He often expressed his anxiety about this task, worrying that she would be bored with the quiet life they led. He wished that there were more young people in the area, or more types of entertainment. He talked about hosting a large dinner party or even a ball, but it was a dead time of year and many of their friends were not at present in the neighbourhood. His worries ended one morning, at last, when he told Henry that he would bring Eleanor and Miss Morland to dinner at his son's house the next time Henry was at Woodston.

'And when do you think, sir, I may look forward to this pleasure?' asked Henry. 'I am going to Woodston on Monday and will have business there for at least two or three days.'

'Well, we will take our chances on one of those days,' General Tilney answered. 'There is no need to make a firm date. We do not expect anything fancy, just whatever you have in the house will be enough. We know that a single man cannot be expected to produce anything grand. What about Wednesday? Yes, you may expect us early on Wednesday.'

A ball itself could not have pleased Catherine more than a visit to Henry's house in Woodston, and her heart was full of joy with the idea of becoming acquainted with the place. Nevertheless she was both surprised and a little sad when Henry found her and Eleanor in the sitting-room an hour later and said, 'I am here, young ladies, to say that our pleasures in this world must always be paid for. Look at me at this moment. Because I look forward to seeing you both in my own house on Wednesday, I must leave now, two days before I had intended to go, and I would much rather stay.'

'But must you go?' Catherine asked with a very sad face.

'Yes, I must! My old cook will be frightened half to death about preparing a dinner for my father. She will need as much time as possible to prepare everything.'

'But the General told you not to give yourself any trouble,' said Catherine.

Henry only smiled, and as he left he said, 'I wish I could reason like you.'

Catherine always doubted her judgement and agreed with Henry's, so she had to think about this. How could people understand each other if they said one thing so positively and meant something else? Only Henry and Eleanor could interpret what their father's words really meant.

The hours from Saturday to Wednesday passed very slowly for Catherine. Everything was quieter, even rather dull, without Henry. Then she worried that Captain Tilney might arrive, and she could not imagine acting politely towards him. She thought a lot about her brother, and felt sad at having lost Isabella's friendship. Her only feeling towards Northanger Abbey itself was now one of embarrassment, and the idea of a country parish with a comfortable house was much more attractive to her.

Finally Wednesday arrived and by ten o'clock the carriage left the Abbey with General Tilney, Eleanor and Catherine inside, and after an agreeable drive of about twenty miles they entered Woodston, a large village in pleasant countryside. Catherine looked around and believed that she preferred it to any place she had ever seen.

They drove through the village, looking at the neat houses, charming shops and tidy gardens until they reached Henry's house at the far end of the main street. It was a newly built, large stone house, and as they drove up to the door, Henry, with three or four energetic dogs, waited at the door to welcome them.

When they were inside, the General, who seemed to think that Catherine would be disappointed by the house, began to defend it.

'We are not calling it a good house. It does not compare to Northanger or to Fullerton, but we feel that it is decent, and not inferior to the houses round here. I believe that there are very few clergymen in England with a house half so good.'

When the party entered the sitting-room, which was still without furniture, Catherine was delighted and her comments satisfied even the General.

'What a prettily shaped room!' she cried. 'It is the nicest room I have ever seen. And it has a beautiful view. You must decorate it soon, Mr Tilney, and enjoy it.'

'I believe it needs a lady's touch,' said the General with a satisfied smile.

'Well, if it were my house, I would always sit in this room,' Catherine declared.

Henry entertained his guests with a wander round his garden, a look at the stables, and then a walk through the village. At four they returned to the house for a delicious meal of many courses, which the General seemed extremely pleased by.

At six o'clock, after General Tilney had had his coffee, the carriage was waiting at the front door for the return trip to Northanger Abbey. Catherine felt certain that she could not possibly misinterpret the General's behaviour that day. It seemed clear that he expected her to become his daughter-in-law; she only wished that she could feel as confident about his son's plans.

The next morning brought the following unexpected letter from Isabella:

Bath, April

My dearest Catherine,

I was delighted to receive your two kind letters and I have a thousand apologies to make for not answering them sooner. I am quite ashamed at being so idle, but in this horrible place, one can find time for nothing. Thank God we leave here tomorrow, so please direct your next letter to me at my home, and write to me soon!

I have not found any pleasure in Bath since you left. There is so much dust in the air, and everyone that I care about has left. I believe that if I could see you, I could put up with everything else because you are more precious to me than anybody can imagine.

I am worried about your dear brother, who I have not heard from since his return to Oxford. I fear that there has been some misunderstanding between

us, and I am confident that you will make my position plain to him: he is the only man I ever did or ever could love. I trust you to make that perfectly clear to him.

The spring fashions are in the shops, and the hats are simply the most awful you can imagine. I hope you are having a nice time at Northanger Abbey, but I am afraid you never think of me. I will not say anything against the family you are with, although I could if I wanted to be spiteful or ungenerous. I have learned that young men change their minds from one day to the next, and I am happy to say that the young man whom I dislike more than all others has left Bath. You will guess that I mean Captain Tilney, who, as you remember, was constantly following me and teasing me in the most flirtatious manner. But I know men too well to be fooled by him. He returned to his duties in the army two days ago, and I hope that I will never be bothered by him again. In the last two days he was in Bath he was always flirting with Charlotte Davis, a rather plain girl. I refused to take any notice of him when I saw him on the street after that. What a contrast there is between him and your brother!

Please send me news of dear James. He seemed so unhappy when he left Bath, perhaps he had a cold or something else that made him feel unwell. I would write to him myself but I have lost his address in Oxford and I worry that he misinterpreted my behaviour in some way. Ask him to write to me and we will sort everything out.

I have not been going out in the evenings, except that I went to the theatre last night with the Hodges, after they teased me about staying in night after night. I had to show them that I was not staying in because Captain Tilney had gone. I went out to show everyone that I have a good spirit of my own. Do you remember Anne Mitchell? She was wearing a hat like the one I bought with you, but it did not suit her. I suppose it went with my odd face, at least Tilney told me so at the time and said every eye was looking at me. But, of course, he is the last man whose opinion I would take any notice of. I wear purple all the time now. I know it is not the best colour for me, but it is your dear brother's favourite colour.

Lose no time, my dearest, sweetest Catherine, in writing to him and to me.

Your friend forever...

How could anyone be so false, so dishonest? Not even kind-hearted Catherine could be fooled by so many lies and so much self-interest. In fact, Catherine

was ashamed of Isabella and ashamed of ever having loved her. Her excuses for her treatment of James were empty, and Catherine could not believe that she had been asked to write to her brother on Isabella's behalf. He had suffered enough and would never hear Isabella's name mentioned by his sister. Never again!

When Henry returned from Woodston, Catherine told him and Eleanor about the letter.

'Your own brother has had a lucky escape,' Catherine said sincerely. 'And for me, I wish that I had never met Isabella Thorpe. I can see that she never had any true feelings for either James or for me.'

'It will soon seem that you never had met,' Henry said.

'But please explain one more thing for me,' Catherine replied. 'She was obviously pursuing your brother but did not succeed. But I do not understand Captain Tilney's behaviour in this affair. Why did he flirt with her and make her quarrel with my brother, and then walk away from her?'

'I cannot explain my brother's motives, but like Miss Thorpe, he thinks very highly of himself. Until this time, he has not been hurt by his flirtations,' explained Henry. 'I believe that he never really cared for your friend.'

'Well, I disapprove of this sort of behaviour,' Catherine said quite angrily, 'and I must say that I do not like Captain Tilney at all. I suppose that no great harm has been done to me or to my brother, but what would have happened if Isabella had lost her heart to him?'

'But we must first assume that Isabella had a heart to lose, which would make her a different young woman, and so she would have received very different treatment from my brother,' replied Henry.

'It is good that you defend your brother,' said Catherine.

'And you must defend your brother's position and understand that he should not feel sad about losing Miss Thorpe. He has had a lucky escape. Your own sense of what is right and wrong is so strong that you have not even thought of revenge against your friend. I admire you very much for that.'

Henry's admiration was enough to make Catherine feel better in any situation. She was determined not to think that Captain Tilney was completely evil; she

decided she would never answer Isabella's letter, and she tried not to think about what had happened in Bath between those two ever again.

Chapter ten

A Perfect Visit Ends in Disaster

A few days later, the General announced that he had to go to London on business for a week. As he was leaving, he said, 'Miss Morland, more than anything, I regret that I will be robbed of your charming company for a whole week. I have instructed Eleanor and Henry to look after you, and I hope you will tell them if there is anything they can do to make your stay more amusing or more comfortable.'

The General's departure gave Catherine her first understanding of the principle that a loss may sometimes be a gain. The three young people had much more fun without General Tilney in control of their lives. Every meal was a scene of enjoyment and ease, and every day was spent as the three wished. These delightful days made our heroine love the place and the people more and more.

Catherine was now in the fourth week of her visit and had never been happier. But the fact that she had been there for almost a month made her wonder whether it was polite to stay any longer, or whether she should suggest choosing a date for her return to Fullerton. Although it was an unpleasant subject, Catherine took the first opportunity to speak to Eleanor about it.

'Dear Eleanor, I think I must return home soon.'

'Oh, Catherine,' Eleanor began with feeling, 'I had hoped for the pleasure of your company for a much longer time. If your parents knew how much we enjoyed having you here, do you think they might allow you to stay a bit longer?'

'Oh, my parents are in no hurry to have me at home. They are always satisfied if I am happy.'

'Then why are you in such a hurry to leave us?' asked Eleanor with a worried look on her face.

'But I have been here so long!' Catherine cried.

'If you have grown tired of being here, I cannot urge you to stay,' Eleanor said sadly.

'Oh, no, you misunderstand me! For my own pleasure, I would be very happy to stay another four weeks, but I do not wish to become a nuisance.'

'Catherine, it is settled then. You must not think of leaving us. Henry and I will be very sad to lose you, so you must stay as long as possible.'

Eleanor's desire for her to stay longer at Northanger Abbey was so sincere that it confirmed Catherine's secret belief that the Tilneys hoped she would belong to their family one day.

Henry's obligations at Woodston took him away during his father's absence, but Catherine continued to be happy because it gave her time to get to know Eleanor better and to enjoy her company. On the evening of Henry's departure, the young ladies were still sitting and chatting at the dinner table at eleven o'clock, a rather late hour at the Abbey. Then as they walked to their bedrooms, they heard a carriage arrive outside, and in the next moment they heard the loud noise of the doorbell.

'Who could that be at this late hour?' wondered Eleanor. 'It must be Frederick. I will say good night, dear Catherine, and go downstairs to welcome him.'

Catherine went into her room, thinking about meeting Captain Tilney the next morning at breakfast. She hoped that he would not mention Isabella's name, or the part he had played in her brother's unhappiness. She thought she could be polite to him as long as no one talked about Bath.

Half an hour later, Catherine heard someone come up the stairs and then her door opened very gently. Eleanor came into her room, looking pale and quite nervous. Catherine worried that Captain Tilney was in some kind of trouble and made Eleanor sit down.

After a minute or two of silence, Miss Tilney said, 'My dear Catherine, I have come to you with bad news. And I do not know how to tell you about it. Oh, how shall I tell you?'

'Has something happened to Henry? Is there a messenger from Woodston downstairs?'

'No, it is not anyone from Woodston. My father himself has arrived.' Eleanor's voice shook and she looked at the carpet when she said, 'my father'.

Catherine was disappointed to know that General Tilney had returned early, but she waited for Eleanor to explain more.

'You are so good and kind, a friend who will understand how difficult this is for me, especially after we had happily agreed that you would stay for another four weeks. I am an unwilling messenger who has to tell you that we must part. My father has remembered that we accepted an invitation to go to Lord Longtown's house, near Hereford, for a fortnight. We leave on Monday. Explanation and apology are equally impossible. My heart is too heavy to attempt either.'

'My dear Eleanor, don't be distressed. I am very, very sorry that we must part so soon, but I am not offended. An earlier engagement must take priority, and I can finish my visit later, or you can come to me at Fullerton after Hereford.'

'It will not be in my power to do that,' Eleanor said quietly. 'Come to Fullerton when you can, then.'

Eleanor did not respond to this suggestion, and Catherine continued, 'Monday is very soon. And are you all going? Don't worry, Eleanor, I can be ready to go on Monday morning. We can be together until it is time for you to depart. It will not bother my parents if I show up unannounced on Monday evening. The General will send a servant with me, I imagine, for half the trip, and then I will be at Salisbury and only nine miles from home.'

'Catherine, I wish I could tell you that those were the arrangements. But - what can I say? You must leave us tomorrow morning; the carriage has been ordered to be waiting for you at seven o'clock and no servant will accompany you.'

Catherine sank into a chair, unable to breathe or to speak. 'Dear Catherine,' Eleanor continued, 'I could hardly believe my senses when I was told. No disappointment or anger on your part could be greater than my own. What will your father and mother say after we took you away from the Allens, your true friends, and brought you here, so far from your home? And now you are cruelly driven out of the house without the smallest consideration for your comfort or safety. Dear, dear Catherine, I had to deliver the message, but you know that I have no real power in this house. I think you know who is responsible for this insult.'

'Have I offended the General?' Catherine asked weakly.

'I can think of nothing that you have done to offend him, but I have never seen him so angry.'

Catherine struggled to speak for Eleanor's sake. 'I am very sorry if I have upset him; it is the last thing I would do on purpose. But don't be unhappy, Eleanor. You must go to Hereford and keep your engagement. I am only sorry that the trip was not remembered sooner so I could have written home. But it will not matter to my family. They will be happy to see me.'

'But you should not have to make the journey alone!'

'The journey is nothing. It is less than seventy miles. Don't think about that. I can be ready at seven. Please ask your servant to call me in time.'

After Eleanor left, Catherine burst into tears. She was being thrown out! With no reasonable explanation nor apology from General Tilney, she was being rudely sent home. She could not even say goodbye to Henry, and what about her hopes? Would she ever see him again?

How could a man who had been so polite and kind to her, who had treated her fondly throughout her time at Northanger Abbey, now act so rudely towards her? She must have offended him in some way and given him reasons for treating her so badly. Seven o'clock! He wanted her out of the house before he left his bedroom in the morning.

Catherine spent another sleepless night at Northanger Abbey, but this time she was not frightened by imagined ghosts and mysterious chests and cupboards. This time her anxiety had a basis in fact, and neither the wind nor the darkness bothered her. Instead, she lay awake wondering how things had gone so badly wrong.

By the time Eleanor came to her room at six in the morning Catherine had finished her packing, and she was almost dressed and ready to depart. Both young women remained silent, neither knowing how to improve the situation.

At the breakfast table, Catherine could not eat, but she thought about breakfast the day before. Happy, happy breakfast! Henry had been there and the three of them had chatted, enjoying everything present, and fearing nothing in the future except Henry's visit to Woodston for a few days. Henry had sat beside her and helped her to food, and so Catherine now lost herself in

this memory. Then she heard the carriage arrive outside and remembered what was happening.

Eleanor now felt the need to speak and hurried to say, 'You must write to me, Catherine, as soon as possible. You must tell me you are safe at home and have found your family well. I will not expect more. Please send a letter to me at Lord Longtown's, but address it to his daughter, my friend Alice.'

'No, Eleanor,' Catherine answered quietly, 'if you are not allowed to receive a letter from me, I think I had better not write. I will have no trouble getting home safely.'

'I am not surprised by your feelings, dear Catherine, and will not urge you to do something you are unhappy about,' Eleanor answered sadly, with tears in her eyes.

'Oh, Eleanor, I will write to you. Please don't worry.'

'Thank you, Catherine, and there is one more thing. You have been so long away from home that I wonder if you have any money left for the journey.'

Catherine quickly looked into her purse and said, 'I had not thought about money, but you are right. I cannot pay for the journey to Fullerton.'

Eleanor gave Catherine money from her own purse. Soon the carriage was announced to be ready; and Catherine and Eleanor's silent, sad looks expressed more than any words could.

They hurried to the door, and Catherine was soon climbing into the carriage. But she could not leave until she had asked Eleanor with trembling lips to give her kind regards to her absent friend. But by almost mentioning his name, Catherine's tears began again and she found her seat and covered her face with her handkerchief.

Chapter eleven

Reliable Family Life

Catherine felt too unhappy to be frightened by the journey to Fullerton, and began it without worrying about its length or about being alone. Leaning back in the corner of the carriage, crying and feeling cruelly treated, she had gone a number of miles beyond the walls of Northanger Abbey before she raised her head and looked out of the window. She recognised the road as the same one that had taken her to Woodston only ten days earlier, and she suffered even more as she thought about the difference between that trip and this one. Every mile, as it brought her nearer Woodston, added to her grief.

When the carriage passed the road that led directly to Woodston, Catherine thought of Henry and the day that she had spent at his house there. It had been one of the happiest days of her life. On that occasion the General had given her the impression that he actually wished for Henry to marry her. Yes, only ten days ago she had felt so happy about the future, and now, what had she done or not done to deserve such a change in the General's opinion of her?

The only offence against General Tilney that Catherine could accuse herself of was her shocking suspicions about what had happened to his wife. But Catherine trusted that her secret was safe with Henry; he would not have betrayed her. It was impossible for the General to know that she once wondered if he might have murdered his wife or made her a prisoner in her own home. Of course if he did know about her suspicions, he would have a good reason to ask her to leave, but she believed in Henry and was certain that her secret was safe with him.

But more than anything, Catherine was anxious about Henry's feelings when he returned to the Abbey and found that she had been sent away. Would he accept his father's reasons for throwing her out? Or would he regret that she was gone and hate his father for sending her home? Would he argue with his father or remain obedient and talk only to Eleanor about his true feelings?

While thinking over many questions and struggling with doubts about herself, Catherine hardly noticed the hours and miles flying by. How would she explain to her family the circumstances surrounding her sudden return to Fullerton? Would there be any pleasure in returning home with such a story to tell? How

could she make it clear to them that Henry and Eleanor were the finest, most interesting and most reliable friends she had ever known? How could she separate them from General Tilney in her family's opinion? It would break her heart if her family judged her friends unfairly.

Finally, after a journey which had taken more than eleven hours without accident or alarm, Catherine reached Fullerton just after six thirty in the evening. We would expect a heroine to return to her native village after achieving great things, with many stories of success to be proud of. But this homecoming was very different from what you or she might have hoped for. Our heroine was returning home disappointed, alone and without hope or joy. Therefore, her carriage passed quickly through the village and Catherine hurried into her house, unwilling to meet the questioning eyes of friends and neighbours.

But you must remember that the Morland family would not have high expectations of any great achievements or successes for Catherine. Instead, although they would be surprised by her unexpected arrival, they would simply be very happy to have her at home again. The two youngest children, a boy and girl of six and four years old, looked out when they heard the carriage stop at their gate, expecting, as usual, to see a brother or sister arrive home. But when they saw that it was Catherine returning after an absence of eleven weeks, they jumped for joy, shouted for their parents and ran out to greet their older sister.

The warm, affectionate welcome that Catherine received from her parents and brothers and sisters awakened the best feelings in her heart, and she found her troubled spirit calmed; she even, at first, felt happy! But Mrs Morland noticed that the poor traveller looked pale and tired, and soon had the family seated round the tea-table. With cups of tea and sandwiches in front of them, everyone was eager to hear about Catherine's adventures and to find out why she had come home without warning.

Quite slowly, and with much hesitation, Catherine tried to explain what had happened the night before, and although her parents were usually unwilling to criticise other people, they felt unable to pardon this insult to their daughter. They believed that General Tilney had acted neither honourably nor kindly as a gentleman or as a parent. What could have made him treat a guest so badly? Like Catherine, they could see no reason for his rude behaviour, especially after he had treated her so well for the past four weeks.

Finally, Mrs Morland ended the conversation by saying, 'It is a strange business and General Tilney must be a strange man, but you are home now, safe and secure. It is not worth troubling yourself any further about that man's reasons.'

'But why couldn't he send Catherine home in the proper manner if he had to leave for Hereford?' asked Sarah, the eldest of Catherine's sisters.

'I do not think we will discover his reasons,' answered Mrs Morland. 'I feel sorry for his own children, who must have a difficult time with him as their father. But you managed well on your long trip, Catherine, and I am very proud of you. I believe you have grown up quite a lot in the last eleven weeks. I am glad I did not know of your journey while it was happening, but now it has ended perhaps there is no great harm done. You are not the same little girl that we said goodbye to eleven weeks ago. You have grown up and can take care of yourself now.'

Catherine hoped that her mother was right about that, but her spirits were quite worn down and she longed to be silent and alone. She was happy to agree to her mother's suggestion that she should go to bed early and gain the benefit of a good night's rest. Her parents knew she was tired and disappointed, but they had not guessed that she was also suffering from a broken heart. Perhaps it is odd that with a young daughter of seventeen just returning from her first adventure away from home, they had not thought of that.

As soon as breakfast had ended the next morning, Catherine sat down to write the promised letter to her friend at Northanger Abbey. She regretted the cold manner in which she had left Eleanor Tilney, and the fact that she had never valued her kindness and character enough. But most of all, she worried about leaving Eleanor to deal with General Tilney and his difficult nature. She wanted her letter to say how grateful she was without reminding Eleanor of how the visit had ended. She wanted to be careful without being cold, honest without placing blame. She did not want to cause Eleanor any pain, and she did not want to embarrass herself in case Henry saw the letter. In the end, Catherine wrote a very short note in which she expressed her grateful thanks and her affectionate good wishes for Eleanor and her brother, and in which she returned the money Eleanor had given her for her journey.

'This is a very strange friendship,' said Mrs Morland when Catherine had finished her letter. 'Soon made and soon ended. I am sorry that you were disappointed, because Mrs Allen had only good things to say about the Tilney children. And you were so unlucky with your friend Isabella too. And poor James! Well, we must live and learn; I hope your next new friends will be more worth keeping.'

Catherine's cheeks went red as she warmly answered, 'No friend can be more worth keeping than Eleanor.'

'If that is true, Catherine, I hope that you and she will meet again some time in the next few years. It is very likely to happen - imagine what a pleasure it will be to see her again.'

But Catherine was not thinking only of Eleanor as she listened to her mother's kind, but painful words. What would happen to Henry Tilney if she did not meet him for a few years? Her eyes filled with tears as she imagined such a meeting. He might have forgotten her and have met another young woman who attracted him. The next time she saw him, he might be a married man with a family of his own - he might not even recognise her!

Mrs Morland was disturbed by her daughter's tears and proposed a visit to Mrs Allen. And so mother and daughter began the walk to their neighbour's house, which was less than a quarter of a mile distant. As they walked, Mrs Morland gave Catherine her opinion of James's broken engagement.

'Of course we are sorry for James, but it is good that the engagement has ended, and there is no harm done in the end. We did not know Miss Thorpe, and she had no personal fortune. And now, after such improper behaviour, we have a very poor opinion of her. James will recover, and I am sure that he will use better judgement next time.'

Her mother's thoughts made Catherine reflect on the changes in her own circumstances. Three months ago she had been full of happy expectations and had run between her home and the Allens' house ten times a day with a light heart and an independent spirit, looking forward to new pleasures and without a care in the world. She could picture herself three months ago, and now what a different young woman she was!

The Allens were surprised, but very glad, to see Catherine, and they too were very angry and displeased on learning how she had been treated by General Tilney.

'Catherine surprised us yesterday evening,' reported Mrs Morland. 'She travelled all the way in a carriage by herself and knew nothing about her journey until late Saturday night. General Tilney returned home with the strange idea that he was tired of having her in his house. He must be a very odd man, very unfriendly certainly, but we are so glad to have Catherine with us again. And it is a great comfort to find that she is not a poor helpless creature, but can manage very well for herself.'

Mrs Allen was shocked. She filled every pause in the conversation by saying, 'I really have no patience with the General.' But she did not allow for many pauses. 'Bath is a nice place, Catherine, after all,' she said brightly. 'I did not like the idea of leaving. Did I tell you that I tore my blue dress? I had it mended before we left Bath and you cannot see the tear. And Mrs Thorpe was such a comfort to us, wasn't she? You know, you and I were quite lonely at first.'

'Yes, but that did not last long,' Catherine replied brightly, enjoying thoughts of Bath and happier days.

'Very true. Then we met Mrs Thorpe and were always busy. My dear, do you think these silk gloves still look well? I wore them for the first time in Bath. Do you remember that evening?'

'Oh, yes, perfectly,' answered Catherine.

'It was very agreeable, wasn't it? Mr Tilney drank tea with us that evening, and I thought he was an excellent addition to our little society. He is a kind gentleman, isn't he? I think you probably danced with him that evening. I am not certain, but I was wearing my most expensive dress, do you remember? And Mr Tilney admired it very much.'

Catherine felt too emotional to answer, but Mrs Allen continued, 'I really have no patience with the General. He seemed such an admirable gentleman when we met him. Do you know, Catherine, that his lodgings were rented by another family the day after he and his children left? But no wonder - it was such a desirable address.'

As they walked home again, Mrs Morland said, 'You must be grateful for your old friends. They have loved you and been concerned for your happiness for

many years. Having the affection and good opinion of friends like Mr and Mrs Allen is much more important than your recent unhappy experience.'

Catherine knew that these were wise words, but at that moment they meant little to her. Her present happiness did not depend on old friends, but on the behaviour of her newest friends. Mrs Morland continued encouraging her daughter to forget about the people she had met at Bath as they walked towards home.

Catherine listened politely to her mother, but she was silently reflecting that now Henry must have arrived at Northanger; now he must have heard about her departure; and now, perhaps, the family were leaving the Abbey for Hereford.

The following day, Mrs Morland sat with Catherine and Sarah, her two eldest daughters, as they worked at their various jobs. Catherine had never been hard-working, nor had she liked sitting indoors for very long, but Mrs Morland noticed that her bad habits had become even worse. The seventeen-year-old could not sit still, nor concentrate on a piece of work for even ten minutes at a time. She regularly stood up and walked around the room or wandered into the garden. Sitting quietly seemed impossible.

But worst of all to her mother was Catherine's lack of energy and spirit. She knew her daughter had never been a good worker, but silence and sadness were unusual for her. What had happened to her old, cheerful personality?

For two days Mrs Morland allowed this behaviour to pass without a hint of criticism, but when a third night's rest still had not returned Catherine to her old self, she decided to have a serious talk with her daughter.

'My dear Catherine, I am afraid you have become too grand for your own family. Should your father mend his own shirts? Look how steadily your sister is working, while your head is still in Bath. You must remember that there is a time for everything. Now is not the time for balls and theatre; now is the time for you to be useful to me and to your family.'

Catherine picked up her sewing basket and sadly replied, 'I do not think about Bath. At least, not very much.'

'Then you must still be upset about General Tilney, and that is very silly of you. You probably will never see him again. You should not worry about things you

cannot change.' After a short silence, she continued, 'I hope you have not found your home disappointing because it is not as elegant as Northanger Abbey. That would be turning your visit into something evil. Wherever you are, but especially in your own home, you should learn to be content. I was not happy to hear you at breakfast talking so much about the French bread and the beautiful plates at Northanger.'

'I am sure I do not care about any of that,' said Catherine quietly.

'I have a book,' Mrs Morland said, 'with a very clever essay about young ladies who have been spoiled by making friends with people who are much grander than their own families. I will find it for you later. I am sure it will do you good.'

Catherine tried to get on with her work, but after a few minutes Mrs Morland saw her staring out of the window again. She came to the conclusion that her daughter was suffering, and she hastily left the room to find her book of clever essays.

Chapter twelve

Happily Ever After... Eventually

It took at least fifteen minutes for Mrs Morland to find her book of essays, and then she had a few other tasks to complete before she could return to her daughter. And when she was able to return, she was surprised to find a visitor there, someone whom she had never seen before.

With a look of much respect, the young man immediately rose, and Catherine introduced Mr Henry Tilney to her mother.

Mr Tilney quickly began to apologise to Mrs Morland. 'I am sorry to arrive here without an invitation. I know that you cannot welcome a visitor from Northanger Abbey after what happened to Miss Morland there, but I was impatient to know that she had arrived home safely.'

Mrs Morland had never blamed Henry or his sister for their father's rude behaviour, and now she was very pleased by this young man's appearance and by his sincere apology.

'Thank you, Mr Tilney, for your kind treatment of Catherine. I believe you have nothing to apologise for. You, and any friends of our children, are always welcome to visit us at Fullerton.' Then she continued with a list of polite questions about Mr Tilney's journey, the weather and the condition of the roads.

Meanwhile Catherine remained silent, but her mother could see from her bright eyes and rosy cheeks that she was very pleased by Mr Tilney's presence, and Mrs Morland slipped the book of essays into a convenient drawer for a future hour.

Eventually Mrs Morland exhausted her supply of polite questions, and Henry turned to Catherine for the first time since her mother's entrance and asked, 'Are Mr and Mrs Allen now at Fullerton?'

Catherine struggled to calm her nerves and answer sensibly, but finally made it clear that the Allens were at home.

'I would like to pay my respects to them,' Mr Tilney said. His face was now almost as red as Catherine's. 'I wonder if you would be kind enough to show me the way to their house, Miss Morland?'

'You can see it from that window,' interrupted Sarah, who continued to sew quietly but was keeping an eye on what was happening.

Mr Tilney bowed politely, but Mrs Morland gave her younger daughter a silencing nod. They both understood that seeing the Allens was not the primary purpose of Mr Tilney's invitation. Mrs Morland thought that he might want to explain his father's behaviour to Catherine in private, and she did not intend to put any barriers in the way of that conversation; she encouraged Catherine to walk to the Allens' house with Mr Tilney.

Mrs Morland was correct: Henry Tilney did want to explain his father's rudeness - a difficult task for a son - but that was not his primary reason for wanting to talk to Catherine. Above all, he wanted to explain himself, and before they reached the Allens' house he had done that extremely well. In fact it was a speech that Catherine thought could not be repeated too often. Henry assured her of his affection, and asked if he could hope that she also loved him - something that you will have no doubts about by this time.

Henry was sincerely and completely attached to our heroine; he was delighted by her character and truly loved spending all his time with her. But you must understand that his love and affection for Catherine had its origin in something quite simple; he had recognised that she seemed to admire everything about him, and for this he was very grateful. So on this basis, although Henry would not have been able to explain his reasons to himself, he proposed marriage to Miss Catherine Morland.

The visit to Mr and Mrs Allen's house was very short.

Both Catherine and Henry were thinking of something much more important than chatting about Bath. Henry was polite, Catherine scarcely said a word, and soon the young couple were happily walking along the path together again, with nothing to do except think of their future life together.

Can you imagine the joy that filled our heroine's heart? She floated along beside Mr Tilney in a cloud of happiness, as he talked about this and that. But she listened carefully when her dear Henry said that he did not have his father's permission to approach her. On his return from Woodston, two days earlier, he had been met near the Abbey by his impatient father. In very angry terms the General had insisted that Henry should never think of Miss Catherine Morland again.

This information shocked Catherine, but more important was the fact that Henry wanted to marry her. Knowing that she was loved gave her the courage to try to understand the motives for General Tilney's actions and for his disapproval of her.

As Henry's story unfolded, her curiosity turned to delight. His father had found no reason to criticise Catherine's behaviour or her character; he was, instead, disappointed by his own actions and ashamed of having been misled by Mr John Thorpe. Catherine, it seemed, was guilty of only one thing in the General's opinion: she was less rich than he had supposed her to be.

The General had been deceived by John Thorpe at their first meeting, at the theatre in Bath. On that occasion, Henry had been talking to Catherine and the General had asked Mr Thorpe if he knew the young lady. John Thorpe had a misleading, and even dangerous, habit of exaggerating the importance and wealth of his friends and acquaintances; he seemed to think that this made him more important in the eyes of the world. When he had become friends with James Morland, he had reported to his family that he had met a young man from a very grand family; then, introducing James to Isabella, he had doubled the amount of his friend's living, multiplied his private fortune by three or four times, invented a rich aunt for him, and forgot about half of James's brothers and sisters.

John Thorpe had continued with this practice of exaggeration when telling General Tilney about the Morland family. He had invented a large private income for Catherine, whom he himself had decided to marry, as well as the promise that she would one day receive an enormous inheritance from the Allens.

With this information, which he had no reason to doubt, General Tilney had decided to welcome Miss Morland to Northanger Abbey and to encourage his son to consider Miss Catherine Morland as a possible bride. Henry and Eleanor knew nothing about their father's conversation with John Thorpe; they were astonished by the kind, friendly attention he showed towards Catherine, and the clear signals he gave Henry that he approved of her as his son's future wife.

But on his visit to London, the General had met Mr John Thorpe again. The younger man was by that time suffering from what he considered to be ill treatment by both James and Catherine Morland: she had refused his proposal of marriage and James would not accept Isabella's apologies. Now he was

eager to change the General's good opinion of the whole Morland family. This time he gave a more accurate account of how many Morland children there were and the amount of money and possessions the parents had; in fact, he mentioned too many of one and too few of the other. And the Allens? Their entire fortune would be inherited by one of Mr Allen's nephews.

Angry with almost everyone in the world except himself, the General had returned to the Abbey, where you have seen how he behaved towards our heroine.

Having heard all this, Catherine forgave herself for thinking that General Tilney could either have murdered or imprisoned his wife. Now she understood how cruel he could be in reality.

Poor Henry was blushing with shame while telling Catherine this story. He had had an angry conversation with his father at Northanger Abbey, and had shocked the General by refusing to agree with his judgement of Catherine. He felt tied to Catherine as much by honour as affection; he would not dismiss her from his heart or from his life. He refused to accompany Eleanor and his father to Herefordshire, and declared his intention of asking Miss Morland to marry him.

General Tilney had been angrier than he had ever been with his son, and the two had parted without speaking to each other again. Henry had returned to Woodston, and had begun his journey to Fullerton on the following afternoon.

Mr and Mrs Morland were quite astonished to be asked by Mr Henry Tilney for permission to marry their daughter. They had not suspected a connection between the two young people, but they believed Catherine was worth loving and they soon happily accepted the situation. They had no reason to object to the marriage, not having heard anything negative about Henry and liking his pleasing manners and good sense. Mrs Morland's only additional comment was, 'I am sure Catherine will make a poor housekeeper, but practice is a good teacher.'

Nevertheless, even with everyone celebrating the proposal, Mr and Mrs Morland could not approve of the engagement. They had mild tempers, but their principles were strong; they did not expect heartfelt approval from the General, but they required his agreement, at least. They assured the pair that

they would be happy for them to marry when that agreement was obtained, but not before, and they trusted that it would not be denied for long. There need be no expectation of money from the father, since his son's present income already made him independent and comfortable, their daughter could not hope for more.

The young people were not surprised by this decision. They were, of course, upset, but they parted from each other with the hope that the General's opinion could be changed very soon. Henry returned to what was now his only home, at Woodston, to look after his parish and to make improvements to his house for his future wife; Catherine remained at Fullerton to cry rather dramatically and to look forward to regular letters from Henry. We need not enquire whether the difficulties of absence were made easier by such secret communication. Mr and Mrs Morland never did - they had been too kind to demand promises and whenever Catherine received a letter, which happened quite often, they always looked the other way.

As we approach the last of these pages, you will have guessed that a happy ending is promised very soon. The only doubt can be the way in which perfect happiness was achieved. What circumstance could possibly change the General's opinion of a marriage between his son and Miss Morland?

The answer was another marriage. In the course of the summer, Eleanor Tilney married a young man with a large fortune and a very respectable position in society. Such an addition to his own importance threw the General into a good mood for months, and Eleanor insisted that he must forgive Henry and accept Catherine as his future daughter-in-law.

Everyone who knows Eleanor Tilney will, I am sure, congratulate her and wish her well in the home and with the man of her choice, away from the strict discipline of Northanger Abbey. My own joy on the occasion is very sincere. I know of no one who, after all her suffering, deserves happiness more.

And her husband was a young man who truly deserved her: he was not only rich and important, but also affectionate and charming. Eleanor had known him for years, but General Tilney had approved of him as little as he approved of Catherine, and for the same reason: he came from a respectable family with no money. But then this young man inherited an enormous fortune as well as a title, and the General's opinion changed immediately. Suddenly he too could

see that Eleanor's future husband was the most charming young man in the world. And I should add that this was the same gentleman whose careless servant left the laundry lists in a drawer at Northanger Abbey and involved our heroine in one of her most alarming adventures.

Eleanor and her delightful, rich husband used their influence to persuade the General that Henry should be allowed to marry Catherine Morland. In fact, they explained that Catherine was not, in fact, poor and would have an income of her own of three thousand pounds a year, and that her father was much wealthier than John Thorpe had reported during his second meeting with General Tilney. As a result of this happy news, the General soon permitted his son to return to Northanger Abbey and wrote to Mr Morland, politely giving his agreement to the marriage of his younger son and the Morlands' eldest daughter.

The event which the General's letter permitted soon followed: Henry and Catherine were married, the church bells rang and everybody celebrated. The wedding took place less than twelve months after the young couple had met, so the General's cruelty did not hurt them very much or for very long. To begin perfect happiness at twenty-six and eighteen is to do quite well. I should add, moreover, that perhaps the General added to this happiness by delaying the marriage and giving them time to improve their knowledge of each other and to strengthen their attachment.

I leave it for you to make a final judgement on this question: Is the purpose of this story to recommend parental cruelty, or to reward a son's disobedience?

- THE END -