



NORTHANGER ABBEY by Jane Austen

Adapted by John-Robert Partridge

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CHARACTERS

Catherine Morland

Mrs Morland

Mrs Thorpe

Eleanor Tilney

Mr Allen

Mrs Allen

General Tilney

Sarah Morland

Isabella Thorpe

Henry Tilney

John Thorpe

James Morland

Captain Tilney

Northanger Abbey

By Jane Austen adapted by John-Robert Partridge

PROLOGUE

CHORUS #1

No-one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, and her own person and disposition, were all equally against her.

CHORUS #2

A family of ten children, of course, will always be called a fine family, where there are heads and arms and legs enough for the number.

CHORUS #3

But the Morlands were, in general, very plain, and Catherine, for many years of her life, as plain as any.

CHORUS #4

Neither was it very wonderful that Catherine, who had, by nature, nothing heroic about her, should prefer cricket and baseball to dolls and books. But by the age of 15, appearances were mending.

CHORUS #5

Catherine Morland was in training for a heroine.

CATHERINE (Reading)

He was interrupted by a noise in the passage leading to the room. It approached. The door was unlocked. A man entered, dragging behind him a beautiful girl, her features bathed in tears and suffering the utmost distress.

VOICE #1

Take her!

VOICE #2

My lord?

VOICE #1

You are wholly in our power, no assistance can reach you. If you wish to save your life. Swear that you will convey this girl where I may never see her more.

CATHERINE (Reading)

He found it impossible to contemplate the beauty and distress of the object before him with indifference

VOICE #1

I have a horse ready to take you from hence, and I will direct you over the heath. If you return within an hour you die. Convey her where I shall never see her more!

SARAH MORLAND

Cathy! What are you doing?

CATHERINE

Nothing. What do you want, anyway?

SARAH MORLAND

Mr and Mrs Allen are here. Mother says you have to come straight away.

SCENE 1 – FULLERTON HOUSE

MRS MORLAND

It is such a kind invitation Mr Allen

MR ALLEN

Please think nothing of it, it would be a great pleasure to have young Catherine accompany us to Bath

MRS ALLEN

Indeed Mrs Morland, it would do her good to spend time in such an excellent situation. I was saying to Mrs Dashwood only the other day over tea how tremendous it would be for a young lady to experience society

MR ALLEN

Chaperoned of course.

MRS ALLEN

Oh yes indeed, one must not spend time in society without the accompaniment of one whom society has no draw or interest like Mr Allen.

MR ALLEN

I see no reason for such exuberant frivolity

MRS MORLAND

May I ask Mr Allen why you go so far

MR ALLEN

My health Mrs Morland, my health

MRS ALLEN

No, said Dr Malleson, no other place will do so well for a gouty constitution like Mr Allen's.

MR ALLEN

No other place will do so well for squandering money

MRS ALLEN

Oh, fie, Mr Allen! You know you love to see me happy.

MR ALLEN

How would you say Miss Morland will take to the idea?

MRS MORLAND

Oh very well I shouldn't wander. She is a curious girl but our Catherine has turned out rather well. She's quite a good-looking girl. Well, she is almost pretty today and she has grown very fond of reading of late.

MR ALLEN

I wonder if it can be good for her, my dear, to read quite so many novels?

MRS ALLEN

Why ever not? What could be a more innocent or harmless pastime for a young girl than reading?

Entre CATHERINE

MR ALLEN

Why, Catherine, how you've grown!

MRS ALLEN

Quite the young lady, isn't she, Mr Allen?

MRS MORLAND

Mr and Mrs Allen come with an invitation, Catherine.

CATHERINE

An invitation Mama?

MR ALLEN

Yes my dear, I have the great pleasure to invite you to....

MRS ALLEN

We would like you to accompany us to Bath for a time.

CATHERINE

To Bath? Oh goodness how wonderful.

MRS MORLAND

Now my dear, please pay close attention to Mr and Mrs Allen.

CATHERINE

I will Mama

MR ALLEN

We'll go along and get ready my dear, we leave within the hour.

They leave and CATHERINE goes to her room, picks up a book and begins to read.

SCENE change 1.5 into a carriage.

CATHERINE (reading)

A tumult of emotions stirred in the bosom of Adeline. Fear gripped her heart, that, at any moment, ruffians would fly upon the carriage and return her to the ignominy of her captive state.

VOICE #1

Stand and Deliver

MR ALLEN

My God, Mrs Allen! Stand back for I will save you.

MRS ALLEN

Please be careful my dear.

VOICE #1

Come sir.

They fight and MR ALLEN is injured, MRS ALLEN faints onto a chaise and CATHERINE is kissed by the highwayman who turns into the footman

SCENE 2 – PULTENEY STREET

VOICE #1 > SERVANT

Give me your case.

CATHERINE

I'm sorry?

SERVANT

If you would give me your case Miss.

CATHERINE

Oh, yes of course.

MRS ALLEN

Catherine, Catherine, pay attention. As I was saying, Pulteney Street is not quite the smartest address, but, for myself, I love to be at the centre of things.

CATHERINE

So do I! So many people! I wonder who they can be, and what their stories are.

MR ALLEN

Hardly worth knowing, I should say, if they choose to roam the streets when they could be sitting at home by a good fire.

MRS ALLEN

Oh! Mr Allen is so droll. He always says the opposite of what he means, for he loves good company

CATHERINE

When shall we go into society, Mrs Allen? I suppose it is too late this evening?

MRS ALLEN

Bless you, my child, we neither of us have a stitch to wear.

CATHERINE

I did bring my best frock, and my pink muslin is not too bad, I think

MRS ALLEN

No, no, no! Would you have us laughed out of Bath?

CATHERINE

It is all I have Mrs Allen

MRS ALLEN

Fear not my dear

MR ALLEN

Resign yourself, Catherine. Shops must be visited. Money must be spent. Do you think you could bear it?

CATHERINE

Very easily, sir.

SCENE 3 SHOPPING

Lines of servants enter with boxes, hat boxes and trunks and then Catherine changes behind the screen.

SCENE 4 – PULTENEY STREET

MRS ALLEN

Mr Allen, do hurry. How is it looking Catherine?

CATHERINE

Very well Mrs Allen. It was so kind of you to purchase such an outfit

MRS ALLEN

Nonsense Catherine, when attending the rooms we must look our best.

MR ALLEN

Now my dear are you ready?

MRS ALLEN

Did you ever see anything prettier, Mr Allen?

MR ALLEN

Other than yourself, do you mean, my dear?

MRS ALLEN

Oh, fie, Mr Allen! I mean dearest Catherine!

MR ALLEN

Ah, she looks just as she should. Now...might we make our way, do you think? I entertain high hopes of our arriving at the rooms by midnight.

MRS ALLEN

How he teases us, Catherine. Midnight, indeed!

SCENE 5 – THE PUMP ROOMS

MR ALLEN

Come along, ladies.

MRS ALLEN

Ah, good day sir, if I might just...

MR ALLEN

Card room, I think.

MRS ALLEN

Mr Allen!

MR ALLEN

Excuse me Miss Morland, see you later, my love.

MRS ALLEN

Mr Allen! Mr Allen! Come this way, Catherine.

CATHERINE

How uncomfortable it is, not to have a single acquaintance here!

MRS ALLEN

Yes, my dear, it is very uncomfortable indeed. The Skinners were here last year--I wish they were here now.

CATHERINE

My dear Mrs. Allen, are you sure there is nobody you know in all this multitude of people? I think you must know somebody

MRS ALLEN

I don't, upon my word--I wish I did. There goes a strange-looking woman! What an odd gown she has got on! How old-fashioned it is! Look at the back! Ooh! Have a care, sir!

MR TILNEY

A thousand apologies, ma'am

MRS ALLEN

Catherine, do take this pin out of my sleeve. It was not your fault, sir.

MR TILNEY

Allow me, ma'am.

MRS ALLEN

Thank you kindly, sir. Though I'm afraid it's torn a hole already. I shall be sorry if it has, for it's a favourite gown.

Though it cost but nine shillings a yard.

CATHERINE

Nine shillings?

MR TILNEY

That is exactly what I should have guessed.

MRS ALLEN

Do you understand muslins, sir?

MR TILNEY

Particularly well; I always buy my own cravats, and am allowed to be an excellent judge; and my sister has often trusted me in the choice of a gown. I bought one for her the other day a true Indian muslin.

MRS ALLEN

Men commonly take so little notice of those things. And pray, sir, what do you think of Miss Morland's gown?

MR TILNEY

It is very pretty, madam, but I do not think it will wash well; I am afraid it will fray.

CATHERINE

How can you, be so--

MRS ALLEN

I am quite of your opinion, sir, and so I told Miss Morland when she bought it.

MR TILNEY

You must allow me to make amends, Mrs Allen for we have not been formally introduced. If you will excuse me one moment.

MRS ALLEN

Really, I shouldn't have allowed you to speak to him, as a stranger. But he had such an understanding of muslin.

CATHERINE

I wonder where he's gone.

MRS ALLEN

Here he comes again. And he has brought Mr King with him. The Master of Ceremonies himself!

MR KING

Mrs Allen. Miss Morland. Allow me to present to you Mr Henry Tilney, just lately arrived in Bath.

MR TILNEY

Mrs Allen, Miss Morland. Delighted to make your acquaintance. Now we may talk to one another.

CATHERINE

But we've already been talking.

MR TILNEY

You mustn't allow anyone to hear you say such things, or we shall all be expelled from polite society. And now, if your card is not already full, Miss Morland, might I request the pleasure of the next dance with you?

CATHERINE

With me? Thank you.

MR TILNEY

I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent--but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars?

CATHERINE

You need not give yourself that trouble, sir.

MR TILNEY

No trouble, I assure you, madam. Have you been long in Bath, madam?

CATHERINE

About a week, sir

MR TILNEY

Really!

CATHERINE

Why should you be surprised, sir?

MR TILNEY

Why, indeed! But some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable than any other. Now let us go on. Were you never here before, madam?

CATHERINE

Never, sir

MR TILNEY

Indeed! Have you yet honoured the Upper Rooms?

CATHERINE

Yes, sir, I was there last Monday.

MR TILNEY

Have you been to the theatre?

CATHERINE

Yes, sir, I was at the play on Tuesday.

MR TILNEY

To the concert?

CATHERINE

Yes, sir, on Wednesday.

MR TILNEY

And are you altogether pleased with Bath?

CATHERINE

Yes--I like it very well.

MR TILNEY

Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again. I see what you think of me, I shall make but a poor figure in your journal tomorrow.

CATHERINE

My journal!

MR TILNEY

Yes, I know exactly what you will say: Friday, went to the Lower Rooms; wore my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings--plain black shoes--appeared to much advantage; but was strangely harassed by a queer, half-witted man, who would make me dance with him, and distressed me by his nonsense.

CATHERINE

Indeed I shall say no such thing.

MR TILNEY

Shall I tell you what you ought to say?

CATHERINE

If you please.

MR TILNEY

I danced with a very agreeable young man, introduced by Mr. King; had a great deal of conversation with him--seems a most extraordinary genius--hope I may know more of him. That, madam, is what I wish you to say.

CATHERINE

But, perhaps, I keep no journal.

MR TILNEY

Not keep a journal! How are your various dresses to be remembered, and the particular state of your complexion, and curl of your hair to be described in all their diversities, without having constant recourse to a journal? My dear madam, I am not so ignorant of young ladies' ways as you wish to believe me; it is this delightful habit of journaling which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated

CATHERINE

I have sometimes thought, whether ladies do write so much better letters than gentlemen! That is--I should not think the superiority was always on our side.

MR TILNEY

As far as I have had opportunity of judging, it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars.

CATHERINE

And what are they?

MR TILNEY

A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar.

MRS THORPE

I think, madam, I cannot be mistaken; it is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you, but is not your name Allen?

MRS ALLEN

Indeed I am madam?

MRS THORPE

Do you not recognise me?

MRS ALLEN

Goodness, my dear Mrs Thorpe, my old school friend

MRS THORPE

What brings you to Bath?

MRS ALLEN

We are here for my husband. And have brought with us the delightful Miss Morland to enjoy the season here in Bath

MRS THORPE

Miss Morland? Is that the sister of Mr James Morland

MRS ALLEN

The very same. Are you familiar with the Morland family?

MRS THORPE

James came to stay with us over the winter and made such an impression on my family

MRS ALLEN

Are you here with your family?

MRS THORPE

Indeed. My son John is away in Oxford for the time being and here comes my dear daughter, Isabella, is my eldest; is not she a fine young woman? The others are very much admired too, but I believe Isabella is the handsomest.

ISABELLA

Mama! There you are

MRS THORPE

Ah my dear. May I introduce my old school friend Mrs Allen. Mrs Allen this is my daughter Miss Isabella Thorpe.

MRS ALLEN

Miss Thorpe!

MRS THORPE

Mrs Allen is here with Miss Morland, James's sister

ISABELLA

Is she really? Well how wonderful. We are all immensely fond of James, where is Miss Morland

MRS ALLEN

Ah here she is!

ISABELLA

How excessively like her brother Miss Morland is!

MRS THORPE

The very picture of him indeed! I should have known her anywhere for his sister!

MRS ALLEN

Catherine this is Mrs Thorpe my old school friend and her daughter Miss Isabella Thorpe.

CATHERINE

Good evening ladies

ISABELLA

Miss Morland I have so longed to meet you. Your brother has spoken of you most affectionately

CATHERINE

James?

ISABELLA

Indeed, he came to stay with us over the winter

CATHERINE

How wonderful

ISABELLA

You must come to our house tomorrow for tea

CATHERINE

That is extremely kind thank you

ISABELLA

I am sure we are going to be the best of friends!

A gentleman comes and offers Isabella his hand to dance and she readily accepts. On that Mrs Thorpe exits with her daughter leaving Mrs Allen and Catherine alone

MRS ALLEN

How glad I am we have met with Mrs. Thorpe!

CATHERINE

And I

MRS ALLEN

How agreeable Bath is now we have made some acquaintance

MR ALLEN

I trust you have had an enjoyable time?

CATHERINE

Oh yes Mr Allen

MRS ALLEN

Catherine danced with a Mr Tilney.

MR ALLEN

Tilney?

MRS ALLEN

A most agreeable young man. Was he not, Catherine?

CATHERINE

Yes. He was very kind, and very amusing. I liked him very much.

MRS ALLEN

Well, Mr Allen?

CATHERINE

No, I, I didn't mean anything like that. He can't have thought of me like that, he is much too. He is quite grown-up.

MR ALLEN

Catherine, I feel I should warn you that Bath attracts all manner of scoundrels and adventurers, and one cannot be too careful when making new acquaintances.

MRS ALLEN

Mr Tilney, a scoundrel? Mr Tilney, an adventurer? He understands muslin, Mr Allen. He has a sister.

MR ALLEN

Well I do know that Mr Tilney is a young man of very good family, and a clergyman to boot.

CATHERINE

A clergyman?

MR ALLEN

No doubt you'd prefer him to be a brigand? His father's a man of consequence, though. General Tilney, of Northanger Abbey.

CATHERINE

Northanger Abbey? Is it haunted?

MR ALLEN

No doubt, no doubt. These abbeys usually are.