

Northanger Abbey  
**A play by Tim Luscombe**  
**Adapted from the Novel by Jane Austen**

(Draft 6: The published version, amended for production in Salisbury, 2007)

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The play can be performed with as few as 8 actors, or by as many as you like.  
If 8 actors are performing it, the parts are allotted as follows:

Catherine Morland  
Isabella Thorpe, Dorothy, Alice, Maid  
Mrs Allen, Mrs Morland  
St. Aubert, General Tilney  
Emily St Aubert, Eleanor  
Valancourt, Henry Tilney  
John Thorpe, Count Morano  
James Morland, Captain Frederick Tilney, Bride Groom

(The Company also play Dancers at Balls and Bath crowd etc)

There's one interval, which happens after Act Two

The action of the play takes place in the late 1790s, Winter to Spring

## ACT ONE

*(Isabella enters, 21-years-old, dressed, according to the 1790s, fashionably, even flashily. She reads from a book, wrapt up in the story she tells, girlishly excited by the gothic atmosphere she creates)*

**Isabella** On the banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood the château of Monsieur St. Aubert. One daughter was now St. Aubert's only surviving child. Emily.

*(Emily enters)*

**Isabella** As Emily advanced in youth, she discovered an uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence.

*(St Aubert wheels on in a 'coach' – see Production Notes – and helps Emily up into it)*

**Isabella** Shortly after his wife's death, Monsieur St Aubert's health began visibly to decline. His physician ordered him to travel, prescribing the air of Languedoc and Provence; and St. Aubert determined, therefore, to travel with Emily through the gloomy Pyrenees to the shores of the Mediterranean.

*(St Aubert and Emily sit side by side in their coach, ready to begin their journey. The coach jogs up and down, indicating movement. Immediately, a second coach wheels on, in which Mrs Allen and Catherine sit. Catherine is a quite pretty young woman of 17. Mrs Allen is middle-aged and rich. Catherine is reading from a book, one identical to that of Isabella. Emily and St Aubert are the characters in Catherine's book, too)*

**Mrs Allen** What are you reading?

**Catherine** It's only a novel!

**Mrs Allen** *(Lying)* Oh, I seldom look into novels. And you shall certainly be sick if you read that book in the coach, my dear.

**Catherine** I think, anyway, there's not enough light.

**Mrs Allen** You like to read that kind of book?

**Catherine** Provided they're all story and no tedious reflection.

**Mrs Allen** Now you're seventeen, Catherine, you should see and be seen. Fullerton has nothing in it for a girl your age. There's not one Lord in the neighbourhood – no, not even a Baronet – to attract your attention.

**Catherine** I'm so very excited. I've never been further than Salisbury.

**Mrs Allen** Well, if adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad. And you're grown quite a good-looking girl, Catherine. You're almost pretty.

**Catherine** (*Thrilled*) Thank you, Mrs Allen.

**Mrs Allen** Naturally, we shall have to get you some new dresses and hats. But Bath has everything we need.

**Catherine** Oh, I haven't enough money for dresses and hats. Papa gave me ten guineas, and that's to last me the entire six weeks!

**Mrs Allen** Nonsense. Mr Allen shall not want you in the same dress day in and day out.

**Catherine** But –

**Mrs Allen** Shhupp! There's nothing I like more than looking at muslin. And the balls can wait for us.

**Catherine** (*Disappointed*) Oh.

**Mrs A** I believe I shall doze.

*(Mrs Allen dozes. Catherine returns avidly to her book. Immediately, her eyes leave the page and she gazes at Emily's coach, as Isabella tells the story, and Emily and St Aubert act it out)*

**Isabella** On turning the angle of a mountain, a light appeared at a distance, that illumined the rocks and the horizon to a great extent. It was evidently a large fire, but whether accidental, or otherwise, there were no means of knowing. Emily was terrified almost to fainting.

*(Emily and her father are terrified)*

**Isabella** St Aubert thought the fire was probably kindled by some of the numerous *banditti* that infested the Pyrenees. He had a pistol with him, which might afford some protection, though certainly a very unequal one against a band of robbers, so desperate too as they usually were who haunted those wild regions. And now a voice shouting from the road behind! Horses' feet were heard. A man rode up to the carriage, shouting orders for the driver to stop.

*(Valancourt appears upstage, signalling desperately for Emily's coach to stop)*

**Isabella** St Aubert was, with difficulty, able to prepare for his defence, when the man's hand was upon the door of the chaise!

*(St Aubert, who has been preparing a pistol, now shoots! Valancourt, having run forward, falls, shot, and Emily faints)*

**Mrs Allen** (*Waking up from a reverie*) My clogs! My clogs! I left my clogs at the inn! Oh, no, now I remember. They're in the second to smallest bag. Oh my dear, what a relief.

*(The two coaches are taken swiftly off. Valancourt exits. Dancers at a Bath Ball enter – see Production Notes. Music. A Ball in the Lower Rooms. Catherine and Mrs Allen work their way through the crowd, finding a vantage point from which to watch the dance)*

**Catherine** (*Nervous and excited*) Here is a comprehensive view of all the assembly. We can see from here more than just the tops of the ladies' tall feathers. I have so longed to be at a proper Ball, and here we are at last!

**Mrs Allen** (*Preoccupied with the safety of her dress*) At least I have preserved my gown from injury. It would have been very shocking to have it torn, wouldn't it? It's such a delicate muslin. I've not seen anything I like so well in the whole room.

**Catherine** But how uncomfortable it is not to have a partner to dance with!

**Mrs Allen** I was so tired of being continually pressed against. Their faces possess nothing to interest, and with all I am wholly unacquainted.

**Catherine** What shall we do? It's very awkward to have no party to join.

**Mrs Allen** And no acquaintance to claim.

**Catherine** Or no gentleman to assist us.

**Mrs Allen** Aye, it's very disagreeable to have nobody to speak to except each other. I wish we had a large acquaintance here.

**Catherine** I wish we had any – it'd be somebody to go to.

**Mrs Allen** How is my head, my dear? Somebody gave me a push that has hurt it, I'm afraid.

**Catherine** No, indeed, it looks very nice.

**Mrs Allen** There goes a strange looking woman! What an odd gown she's got on!

**Catherine** (*After stifling a yawn*) We shall do better another evening, I hope.

**Mrs Allen** If only you could dance. If only we could get a partner for you. Oh, I long for a large acquaintance! (*Exits*)

**Isabella** (*Appearing magically, with her book*) The man staggered and groaned pitifully. St Aubert's horror may be imagined, when in the next instant he thought he heard the faint voice of Valancourt! It was Valancourt!

*(Catherine remains onstage, wearied by Mrs Allen's protestations and the lack of a partner. Valancourt, now wounded, staggers on, and collapses to his knees in front of Catherine but unaware of her. The dancers disperse. Catherine's desire for a partner, along with the influence exerted on her by the books she reads, allows her to conjure up a romantic hero in the middle of a Ball in this way!)*

**Isabella** Valancourt! The handsome stranger they had met on their travels! He had been riding towards them to warn them of the dangers that lay ahead. Valancourt: who had given the book of poetry to Emily; who had walked with her in the forest, and charmed her at every step. How brave! How noble! How altogether pleasing is Valancourt!

*(The Bath public re-enter as the Pump Room fills up the next morning, and Catherine's daydream of the wounded Valancourt comes to an abrupt end. Valancourt exits. Catherine is alone. She looks at every new face, dejected and ignored. Mrs Allen brings up the rear)*

**Catherine** Oh Mrs Allen, there you are.

**Mrs Allen** I have a surprise for you!

**Catherine** There are plenty of young men, but I cannot talk to any of them because they do not talk to me!

**Mrs Allen** My dear! I have found an acquaintance at last!

**Catherine** Truly?

**Mrs Allen** As I was sitting underneath the big clock, I recognised a former schoolfellow! What a pleasure it is to see such a friend here, where we've had no acquaintance these last three weeks!

**Catherine** Where is she now?

**Mrs Allen** She's downstairs still, with her youngest daughters. I cannot remember how many children she has and what they are about –

**Catherine** Are any of the boys here with her? Might I meet them?

**Mrs Allen** No, no, only her daughters.

**Catherine** Oh.

**Mrs Allen** I did notice, while she was talking, that the lace on her pelisse was not nearly so handsome as that on my own. Ah, here comes her eldest! I long to introduce you. This young lady, my dear, is Isabella Thorpe.

*(Isabella has approached)*

**Mrs Allen** Miss Thorpe, may I introduce you to Miss Morland.

**Isabella** I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Morland.

**Catherine** I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Thorpe.

**Mrs Allen** I'm sure you two will become good friends.

**Isabella** But how excessively like your brother you are, Miss Morland! I should have known you anywhere for his sister!

**Catherine** I beg your pardon, Miss Thorpe; do you know one of my brothers?

**Isabella** Isn't your brother's name James, and doesn't he have a friend called Thorpe?

**Catherine** Of course! James's newest friend at University is called Thorpe! Yes, now I remember, James has told us many things of you and your sisters.

**Mrs Allen** What a delightful chance! I shall rejoin your mother, my dear.

*(Mrs Allen exits)*

**Isabella** We must be better acquainted with each other as soon as possible

**Catherine** I'd be happy indeed to know you better, Miss Thorpe

**Isabella** I consider you already a friend, through the friendship of our brothers. Would you be kind enough to give me your arm, and we shall take a turn about the room.

*(They process around the room, Isabella surreptitiously clocking men)*

**Isabella** How are you enjoying Bath, Miss Morland?

**Catherine** I like it very much, Miss Thorpe. Though half our six weeks stay has gone by already and you are the first new person I've met! And I'm yet to find anyone to dance with.

**Isabella** But you're so pretty! You're far prettier than me! We shall walk around and I shall tell you who is engaged and who is not.

**Catherine** But how can you tell?

**Isabella** I've only been here two days, but I already perceive it's more lively than Tunbridge at this time of year.

**Catherine** (*Impressed*) Have you visited Tunbridge?

**Isabella** On many occasions. And London, of course. I judge the fashions in London this winter to be excessively charming. Here there's so much worn that does not please.

**Catherine** (*Overwhelmed*) Do you go often to London?

**Isabella** We're there as often as anything. But I am not to be satisfied with half a dozen turns with you, Miss Morland. When we quit the Pump Room, may I accompany you to Mr Allen's house?

**Catherine** I'd be very glad if you would!

**Isabella** And at night, might we not see each other across the theatre?

**Catherine** Indeed, we'll be at the theatre this evening!

**Isabella** And tomorrow, let's say our prayers in the same chapel.

**Catherine** How delightful!

**Isabella** And if it rains in the afternoon we can meet in my room and read books together!

**Catherine** (*Gasps*) Have you read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*?

**Isabella** It's my favourite novel!

**Catherine** (*At a high pinnacle of ecstasy*) Oh, mine too!

*(A flash of lightning, a clap of thunder and the sound of a downpour of rain. Everyone, except Catherine and Isabella, scatters into the wings, as if caught in the rain. The two women fall to the ground with books and cushions. We are in Isabella's private room in Edgar's Buildings. It's a dull afternoon outside, but the girls are not bored. They have been reading for hours)*

**Catherine** The entire purpose of coming to Bath was to meet a gentleman. That, and to cure Mr Allen's gouty leg. I must be very ugly. Other girls have partners.

**Isabella** Have you settled what to wear on your head tonight? I'm determined at all events to be dressed exactly like you. The men take notice of that sometimes, you know.

**Catherine** Do they?

**Isabella** Of course, I make it a rule never to mind what they say. They're very often amazingly impertinent if you don't treat them with spirit.

**Catherine** Are they? I never observed that.

**Isabella** And they think us incapable of real friendship, you know. But if I were to hear anybody speak slightly of you, I should fire up in an instant. But that's not at all likely, for you're just the kind of girl to be a great favourite with the men.

**Catherine** If I were Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* they would stare at me with rapturous wonder on beholding me. A whisper of eager enquiry would run round the room when I entered it. In *Udolpho*, people refer to Emily as a divinity! No one's even offered me a cup of tea! I just visit shops for ribbon and lace, or get muddy in the streets with Mrs Allen. Oh, if only a Valancourt would appear!

*(Valancourt enters, visible only to Catherine. He holds his wounded arm behind him. We appear to be in Catherine's literary daydream again, but as Valancourt approaches her, he brings his arm out in front of him, and reveals that he is not wounded at all, but that he is carrying a cup of tea. He is Henry Tilney. 25 years old; tall, dark, and very nearly handsome; intelligent, spirited and arch. Isabella disappears with her cushions. We are back in the Pump Room. Catherine and Henry cautiously approach each other, but as he is about to speak to her, Mrs Allen enters, talking, and Henry walks away)*

**Mrs Allen** My dear Catherine, do take this pin out of my sleeve. It's torn a frightful great rent, and it's my best Mechlin dress. I'm quite sorry for it's a favourite gown though it cost but nine shillings a yard.

**Henry** *(Interposing himself in their conversation)* That's exactly what I should have guessed it, madam.

**Mrs Allen** *(Staggered and pleased)* Do you understand muslins, sir?

**Henry** 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, and it was pronounced to be a prodigious bargain.

**Mrs Allen** *(Amazed)* Men commonly take so little notice of those things. I can never get Mr Allen to know one of my gowns from another. Bath is a charming place, sir. Not that we don't have very good shops in Salisbury, but it's so far to go from Fullerton. Eight miles is a long way, and it's such a fag. I come back tired to death.

**Henry** Tilney, madam. Henry Tilney.

**Mrs Allen** How do you do, sir? And pray, Mr Tilney, what do you think of Miss Morland's gown?

**Henry** (*Scientifically*) It's very pretty, madam, but I don't think it'll wash well; I am afraid it'll fray.

**Mrs Allen** I'm quite of your opinion, sir. And so I told Miss Morland when I bought it for her.

**Henry** But then you know, madam, muslin always turns to some account or other; Miss Morland'll get enough out of it for a handkerchief, or even a cap.

**Catherine** (*Laughing*) How can you be so strange? (puts her hand to her mouth)

**Henry** (*Pretending to be hurt*) I see what you think of me.

*(Catherine looks away, to hide a smirk)*

**Henry** I shall make but a poor figure in your journal tomorrow.

**Catherine** My journal?

**Henry** Yes, I know exactly what you'll say: Friday, went to the Lower Rooms; wore my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings – appeared to much advantage; but was strangely harassed by a queer, half-witted man, who would talk of muslins and gowns.

**Catherine** Indeed, I shall say no such thing.

**Mrs Allen** I'll leave you with Miss Morland. She's staying with Mr Allen and myself. (*Exits*)

*(Henry and Catherine are left alone. Against all the expectations one might have of a romantic hero, Henry is not immediately entranced by Catherine)*

**Henry** Shall I tell you what you ought to say?

**Catherine** If you please.

**Henry** I danced with a very agreeable young man –

**Catherine** Danced?

**Henry** Indeed.

**Catherine** But you haven't asked me to dance.

**Henry** Had a great deal of conversation with him – seems a most extraordinary genius – hope I may know more of him.

**Catherine** But perhaps I keep no journal.

**Henry** Not keep a journal! You amaze me.

**Catherine** Well, I sometimes write down my thoughts.

**Henry** I'm glad to hear it. How else are your various dresses to be remembered, or the tenor of your life understood by your poor absent cousins?

**Catherine** I have no cousins.

**Henry** Well, sisters then.

**Catherine** Oh yes, I have lots of sisters, and brothers too!

**Henry** Dear madam, I'm not so ignorant of young ladies' ways. It's this delightful habit of journaling which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated.

**Catherine** I've sometimes thought whether ladies do write so much better letters than gentlemen.

**Henry** As far as I've 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?

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

**Catherine** Upon my word! You don't think highly of us after all.

**Henry** (*Seriously*) I should no more lay it down as a general rule that women write better letters than men, than that they sing better duets, or draw better landscapes. In every power, of which taste is the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes.

*(Catherine is silenced by this)*

**Henry** Now, Miss Morland...a dance, I think, don't you?

**Catherine** Yes, Mr Tilney. A dance would be delightful!

*(But Catherine and Henry actually dance away from each other, glancing back to catch a glimpse as they go. Isabella appears, reintroducing us to her rooms)*

**Isabella** (*Reading*) This is a very promising young man, thought St Aubert. Impetuous, wild and somewhat romantic. They set off at last, and, as Emily

looked back upon the road they had passed, Valancourt was seen, at the door of the little inn, following them with his eyes.

*(Henry is looking back at Catherine. He wiggles his fingers "goodbye" at her mischievously. Catherine blushes, very pleased, and looks away. Thunder again. Catherine and Isabella settle down to read together. Henry has gone)*

**Isabella** *(Reading)* Having opened the book with impatient pleasure, and observed the lines of his pencil drawn along the various passages he had read aloud, the conviction that he loved her came at length to Emily's mind.

*(Catherine dances dreamily around the room)*

**Catherine** *(Dancing)* Oh, she is beloved, Isabella!

**Isabella** You're not thinking of Emily and her Valancourt! You're thinking of your Mr Tilney, your famous dancing partner.

**Catherine** He's not *my* Mr Tilney, and I'm not thinking of him.

**Isabella** It's only natural, my dear. Where the heart is really attached, everything else is so insipid, so uninteresting, that doesn't relate to the beloved object!

**Catherine** 'Beloved object'! In any case, there's little point in thinking of him, for he's disappeared from Bath entirely, and I shall never see him again.

**Isabella** Yes, that's very mysterious. Are you sure he's gone?

**Catherine** The Crescent, the Theatre, the Pump Room; he's nowhere to be found! His name hasn't been in the book since the day we met. I've only two weeks left. I'll never find another partner now, and then I'll return to Fullerton and die an old maid.

**Isabella** This sort of mysteriousness is most becoming. Does it not spur on your imagination, and increase your anxiety to know more of him?

**Catherine** Isabella... he's a very strange man!

**Isabella** How so?

**Catherine** He's nothing like Valancourt. He talked of muslins a great deal, and Mr Allen has discovered that he's a clergyman.

**Isabella** I like him even better for being a clergyman, for I must confess myself very partial to the profession. *(Sighs)* A clergyman! No, my dear, Catherine, I am certain, wherever he has gone, he will be thinking of no-one but you and will therefore shortly return to Bath. D'you know, I saw the prettiest hat you can imagine yesterday, in a shop window in Milsom Street – very like yours you wore yesterday, only with coquelicot ribbons instead of

green; I quite longed for it. What say you to going to Milsom Street with me now, and looking at it?

**Catherine** I'd be glad to.

*(They get hats)*

**Isabella** It'll put Mr Tilney out of your mind for a while at least.

**Catherine** Oh, Mr Tilney! Mr Henry Tilney!

**Isabella** Come along! Quickly!

*(Over the last few speeches, the scene has been changing to the street. Sound of horse-drawn-carts etc. People walk about. Immediately, Catherine and Isabella run straight into two men. John Thorpe is a stout young man of average height, with a plain face, an ungraceful form and an abrasive manner. James Morland is a nice enough looking young man)*

**Isabella** Delightful! Mr Morland and my brother!

**John** Damn me!

**Catherine** Good heaven! 'Tis James!

*(They all speak at once)*

**James** Catherine, my dear Catherine!

**Catherine** I'm amazed to see you!

**James** How are you finding Bath?

**Catherine** I'm enjoying it immensely!

**John** Ah, Isabella! How do you do? *(Shakes her hand perfunctorily)*

**Isabella** Hello, John!

**John** Here's Morland and I come to stay a few days with you.

**Isabella** How are you?

**John** Never better! How are my other sisters? Still ugly?

**James** And Miss Thorpe!

*(Isabella and James greet each other with joy and embarrassment, but Catherine is too excited to notice)*

**Isabella** It's very good to see you again, Mr Morland.

**James** You two have become friends! This is my sister, John. Catherine Morland.

**John** (*Giving her a proper bow*) I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Morland.

**Catherine** I'm very much obliged to you, sir.

**James** I needn't ask you whether you're happy here, my dear Catherine; with such a companion and friend as Miss Thorpe, it would be impossible for you to be otherwise; and the Allens, I'm sure, are very kind to you?

**Catherine** Yes, very kind; I never was so happy before; and now you're here it'll be more delightful than ever; how good it is of you to come so far on purpose to see me.

**James** (*Who has actually come to see Isabella*) Indeed, Catherine, I love you dearly.

**John** Are you fond of an open carriage, Miss Morland?

**Catherine** Yes, very; I've hardly ever an opportunity of being in one; but I'm particularly fond of it.

**John** I'm glad of it; I will drive you out in mine every day.

**Catherine** (*Doubtful about whether this is an acceptable offer*) Thank you.

**John** I'll drive you up Lansdown Hill tomorrow.

**Isabella** How delightful that will be! My dearest Catherine, I quite envy you; but I'm afraid, brother, you'll not have room for a third.

**John** A third indeed! No, no; I didn't come to Bath to drive my sisters about; that'd be a good joke, faith! Morland must take care of you.

**James** In which direction are you set?

**Isabella** We were on our way to look at a hat.

**John** Good thing too. That quiz of a thing on your head makes you look like a witch!

(*Catherine gasps*)

**James** Why don't we accompany you to Edgar's Buildings and pay our respects to Mrs Thorpe?

**John** Splendid idea. Let's all go together. (*As he whisks Catherine off*) And you, Miss Morland, will do me the honour of being engaged to dance with me at the Ball this evening!

**Catherine** (*Being taken offstage quite fast*) Thank you, sir, I'm much obliged!

(*Isabella and James are left onstage for a moment. He kisses her hand. Catherine, Isabella, John, James and Mrs Allen – and the company – all converge from various parts of the stage into the Octagon Room, for the beginning of the evening's Ball*)

**Mrs Allen** I thought we would never arrive. My tailor was late, and I was desperate for him to have a good look at my old muff and tippet! Now, where am I to sit?

(*A chair is provided for Mrs Allen, and two others for Isabella and Catherine*)

**Isabella** You spent some time with mother today, Mrs Allen?

**Mrs Allen** Indeed I did. I went to the Pump Room, and we had a great deal of talk together. She says there was hardly any veal to be got at market this morning, it's so uncommonly scarce.

**Isabella** (*Turning to Catherine*) You look delightfully. You really have done your hair in a more heavenly style than ever; you mischievous creature, do you want to attract *everybody*? How do you like my gown? I think it doesn't look amiss; the sleeves were entirely my own thought.

**Catherine** You look perfect, Isabella. I'm so excited to have a partner guaranteed, and avoid the horror felt by all the other young ladies who want one.

**Isabella** How do you like my brother?

**Catherine** In the absence of Henry Tilney, I'm obliged to him for engaging me to dance so early.

**Isabella** John thinks you're the most charming girl in the world!

**Catherine** Does he? Oh! I nearly forgot! Father is dead!

**Isabella** Yours?

**Catherine** Emily's.

**Isabella** Oh, thank heaven! How far have you gone on?

**Catherine** I'm got to the black veil.

**Isabella** How delightful! I wouldn't tell you what is behind it for the world! Aren't you wild to know?

**Catherine** Yes, quite! But do not tell me – I wouldn't be told upon any account. I know it must be a skeleton, I'm sure it is Laurentina's skeleton. Oh! I'm delighted with the book! As I'm never to be happy in love, I should like to spend my whole life in reading it.

**Isabella** And when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read *The Italian* together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you.

**Catherine** What are they all?

**Isabella** I'll read you some of their names directly. (*Gets out her pocketbook*) Here they are. *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Horrid Mysteries* and *Necromancer of the Black Forest*. Those will last us some time.

**Catherine** Yes, pretty well; but are they all horrid, are you sure they're all horrid?

(*John interrupts them*)

**John** Are you not ready to gallop round the place with your partner, Miss Morland? I'm impatient to begin!

**Catherine** Have you ever read *Udolpho*, Mr Thorpe?

**John** *Udolpho*! Lord! Not I. Men never read novels; I have something else to do.

(*Isabella seeks out James, leaving Catherine with John*)

**Catherine** Oh, I am sorry for –

**John** Novels are so full of nonsense and stuff; they're the stupidest things in creation.

**Catherine** I think you must like *Udolpho*, if you were to read it; it is so very interesting.

**John** Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs Radcliffe's; her novels are amusing enough; some fun in them.

**Catherine** (*Hesitantly*) *Udolpho* was written by Mrs Radcliffe.

**John** No! Was it? Aye, so it was. Ah, there goes Thompson. I want a word with him about a horse.

(*John leaves, and immediately the music starts. Isabella approaches*)

**Isabella** Where's John gone?

**Catherine** To speak to a friend.

**Isabella** But the music's started.

**James** (*As he enters*) Come, Miss Thorpe. We must join the set.

**Isabella** But Catherine can't dance without a partner.

**James** I'm not asking Catherine, I'm asking you!

**Isabella** My dear Mr Morland, you are sly! Nothing will induce me to join the set before my dear Catherine can join it too. I assure you; on that matter I am resolute.

**Catherine** I'm very grateful to you, dear friend!

**James** Isabella, come now, this is the gallop, and I especially wanted to dance it with you.

**Isabella** I told you, I would not stand up without your dear sister for all the world; for if I did we should certainly be separated the whole evening.

**James** Catherine won't mind.

**Isabella** (*Whispering to Catherine*) My dear creature, I'm afraid I must leave you, your brother is so amazingly impatient to begin; I know you won't mind my going away, and I dare say John'll be back in a moment, and then you may easily find me out.

*(Catherine is left alone, miserable, and surprised at Isabella abandoning her. She imagines herself at Udolpho. The other stage action freezes)*

**Catherine** To withdraw her thoughts from the subject of her misfortunes, she attempted to read, but her attention wandered from the page, and at length, she threw aside the book, and determined to explore the adjoining chambers of the Castle of Udolpho.

**Mrs Allen** Has the wind taken my hair, my dear?

**Catherine** Her imagination was pleased with the view of ancient grandeur, and an emotion of melancholy awe awakened all its powers, as she walked through rooms obscure and desolate, where no footsteps had passed probably for many years.

*(The lights and music revert to normal as, out of the blue, Henry approaches. His sister, Eleanor, is with him. Catherine is delighted and hardly disguises her feelings. She stands up, and immediately sits down again. Henry bows)*

**Henry** Good evening Mrs Allen, Miss Morland.

**Catherine** Good evening, sir.

**Mrs Allen** Ah, Mr Tilney. I was afraid you'd left Bath.

**Henry** Thank you for your concern. I quitted it the very morning after I had the pleasure of meeting you.

**Mrs Allen** Well, sir, I dare say you are not sorry to be back again, for it is just the place for young people – and indeed for everybody else too. I tell Mr Allen, when he talks of being sick of it. A neighbour of ours, Dr. Skinner, was here for his health last winter, and came away quite stout.

**Henry** That circumstance must give great encouragement. This is my sister, Eleanor. Mrs Allen and Miss Morland.

*(They shake hands. Eleanor is elegantly stylish, beautiful, and, unlike all the other young women, calm, open and mature for her age)*

**Henry** I wonder, madam, whether I might ask Miss Morland to dance?

**Mrs Allen** Miss Morland must do as she pleases!

**Catherine** *(Tortured)* Oh, sir, I am grateful for the compliment and I'm so very sorry to have to decline your request, but I'm engaged for this dance.

**Henry** Oh, I see.

**Catherine** Yes. He is not here now, which is (...*Looking around...*) very vexing, but I assure you, sir, I'm engaged to someone else.

**Henry** I hope he'll show himself soon.

**Catherine** Yes, indeed sir. And I long to be dancing, and I'm so flattered and pleased that you should ask me.

**Henry** Well, perhaps later.

**Catherine** Oh, indeed sir, later. Oh yes, later. Oh yes.

*(Henry and Eleanor go)*

**Catherine** *(Calling after him)* I'm delighted you've returned to Bath, sir!

*(Henry bows and goes. Eleanor stays on stage to talk to a group of people)*

**Catherine** I am mortified.

**Mrs Allen** They're very good kind of people, you know, the Tilneys. And very rich, Mrs Thorpe told me.

**Catherine** Does she know if their parents are still living?

**Mrs Allen** The poor Thorpes, though, can hardly survive. Mrs Thorpe must scrimp to send her John to University. John, of course, behaves as if he owns the world, but she's worn the same gown for three days now –

**Catherine** But the Tilneys...

**Mrs Allen** The Tilneys? I have a notion they're both dead; at least the mother is. Mrs Hughes told me something of it.

**Catherine** Oh, dear Mrs Allen, do try and remember!

**Mrs Allen** Yes, I am sure Mrs Tilney is dead, because –

*(John bustles up)*

**John** Come on, Miss Morland! There is no point in sitting around!

**Catherine** But it's too late, Mr Thorpe! The dance has begun.

**John** Nonsense. *(Dragging Catherine away from Mrs Allen)* I had to talk to Thompson from Teddy Hall about his cattle and his hounds. He's had his eye on one of my horses, see you? Damn me, if he can't go less than ten miles an hour! Tie his legs, he'll get on! How much do you think I ask for it?

**Catherine** I'm sure I can't guess at all.

**John** Fifty guineas. I dare say I could've got more, but I hate haggling, and he had cash.

**Catherine** That was very good-natured of you.

**John** Yes. He's looking out for someone to take half a dozen terriers off his hands. Asking incredible sums. *(After making sure Mrs Allen isn't listening)* Old Allen is as rich as a Pasha, isn't he?

**Catherine** Oh, Mr Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe, he's very rich.

**John** And no children at all?

**Catherine** No, not any.

**John** A famous thing for his next heirs. He's your godfather, isn't he?

**Catherine** My godfather? No.

**John** But you're always very much with them.

**Catherine** Yes, very much.

**John** Aye, that's what I meant. He seems a good kind of old fellow enough, and has lived very well in his time, I dare say; he's not gouty for nothing. Does he drink his bottle a day now?

**Catherine** His bottle a day! No!

**John** I'm sure if everybody was to drink their bottle a day, there wouldn't be half the disorders in the world there are now.

**Catherine** I can't believe it.

**John** Oh, Lord, it would be the saving of thousands. Our foggy climate wants help.

**Catherine** I've heard that there's a great deal of wine drunk at the University.

**John** University! Nobody drinks there! You'd hardly meet with a man who goes beyond his four pints of wine a day at the utmost. Now then, are we ready to throw ourselves round the room like wiry whippets?

*(The dance unfortunately finishes at this moment)*

**John** Damn me! It's over!

*(John wanders off. Catherine, deserted again, is joined by James and Isabella)*

**Isabella** My beloved Catherine, I've been looking for you this hour –

**Catherine** Henry Tilney is here! –

**Isabella** I've been quite wretched without you. *(Turning to James)* Now, Mr Morland, I shall not speak another word to you all the rest of the evening.

**Catherine** Henry is here!

**Isabella** Tilney?

**Catherine** And look at that young lady with the white beads round her head. It's his sister!

**Isabella** Oh, heavens! You don't say so! Then it's a settled thing – even your modesty cannot doubt his attachment now; his coming back to Bath makes it too plain. What a delightful girl! I never saw anything half so beautiful! But where is her all-conquering brother? Is he in the room? Point him out to me this instant, if he is. I die to see him. I really am quite wild with impatience.

Look about, for heaven's sake! Mr Morland, you're not to listen. We are not talking about you.

**James** But what's all this whispering about? What's going on?

**Isabella** There now, I knew how it would be. You men have such restless curiosity! Talk of the curiosity of women! 'Tis nothing! But be satisfied: you're not to know anything at all of the matter.

**James** And is that likely to satisfy me, do you think?

**Isabella** Well, I declare I never knew anything like you. Perhaps we are talking about you; therefore I would advise you not to listen, or you may happen to hear something not very agreeable.

*(Music starts)*

**Catherine** Shall we look for Henry Tilney together, Isabella?

**Isabella** What's that, my dear?

*(Catherine and James are pulling Isabella in opposite directions)*

**James** Come, Isabella, another dance, if you please.

**Isabella** Absolutely not, Mr Morland!

**Catherine** Shall we go together to look for –

**James** Come! It's a country jig!

**Isabella** I tell you, Mr Morland, I wouldn't dance with you again for all the world. How can you be so teasing?!

*(Catherine is a tiny bit suspicious that her friend is not as interested in Henry as she pretends to be)*

**Isabella** Only conceive, my dear Catherine, what your brother wants me to do. To dance with him again, though it's entirely against the rules.

**James** Upon my honour, in these public assemblies, it's as often done as not.

**Isabella** How can you say so? My sweet Catherine, do support me; persuade your brother it would quite shock you to see me do such a thing, wouldn't it?

**Catherine** No, not at all; but if you think it wrong, you'd much better not.

**Isabella** (*Confidently illogical*) There, you hear what your sister says, and yet you won't mind her. Well, remember that it's not my fault, if we set all the old ladies in Bath in a bustle.

*(And off they go to dance, leaving Catherine alone again and dejected by her friend's lack of interest. Eleanor approaches)*

**Eleanor** Are you enjoying Bath, Miss Morland?

**Catherine** I am delighted with it, Miss Tilney. You cannot think how surprised I was to see your brother.

**Eleanor** When Henry had the pleasure of seeing you before, he was in Bath but for a couple of days, to engage lodgings for us.

**Catherine** That never occurred to me; and of course, not seeing him anywhere, I thought he must be gone. We're here another two weeks. I expect you're staying longer.

**Eleanor** Oh, no, we're here only a few days.

**Catherine** A few days! But – But that's not long enough!

**Eleanor** For what?

**Catherine** To improve our acquaintance!

*(John interrupts them)*

**John** Well, Miss Morland, I suppose you and I are to stand up and jig it together again.

**Catherine** Oh, no; I'm much obliged to you, our dance is over.

**John** Then let's walk about and quiz people. I'll show you the four greatest quizzers in the room; my two younger sisters and their partners. I've been laughing at them this half hour.

**Catherine** No thank you, Mr Thorpe.

**John** Come along!

*(The dance music suddenly morphs into Udolpho music. Lights change. Catherine and John adopt melodramatic poses, victim and seducer respectively, John becoming Count Morano!)*

**Catherine** (*Cowering from Count Morano melodramatically*) Lamp in hand, the terrifying form advanced towards her bed. And Emily saw the face of – Count Morano!

**John** (*As Count Morano, towering above Catherine*) Fly! Fly from this gloomy prison, with a lover, who adores you! I have bribed a servant of the castle to open the gates, and, before tomorrow's dawn, you shall be far on the way to Venice!

**Catherine** Count Morano! You have misplaced your love. I never could return the affection with which you honour me, and certainly have never encouraged it. Leave then, leave the castle, while you may, with safety!

**John** Yes, I will leave the castle; but it shall not be alone! I have trifled too long. Since my prayers and sufferings cannot prevail, force shall! I have people in waiting, who shall convey you to my carriage. Your voice will bring no succour; it cannot be heard from this remote part of the castle; submit, therefore, in silence, to go with me!

*(And as abruptly, the scene reverts to normal)*

**Catherine** Please forgive me, Mr Thorpe, if I rest here a few minutes.

**John** Very well, I'll go and quiz them myself. *(Exits)*

**Eleanor** Who was that gentleman? Is he a friend of yours?

**Catherine** You know, Miss Tilney, I'm beginning to realise something.

**Eleanor** What's that, Miss Morland?

**Catherine** That to go previously engaged to a Ball isn't necessarily a good thing for a young lady.

*(Eleanor smiles at Catherine with sympathy. The country jig music ends. The cotillion music strikes up)*

**Eleanor** Are you excited about the cotillions?

**Catherine** Yes, though I'm not in the least sure of the steps.

**Eleanor** Here's my brother!

*(Henry approaches)*

**Catherine** *(At the very peak of happiness)* Oh, delightful!

**Henry** Might I be luckier this time, Miss Morland?

**Catherine** Oh, yes indeed sir!

**Eleanor** I'll go and find father, Henry. Where've you left him?

**Henry** In the card room, comparing accounts with the Reverend Chapman.

*(Eleanor leaves them. Henry offers Catherine his hand. She takes it. They begin their walk to the dance when John Thorpe arrives again. Catherine does her best to hide behind her fan. Mrs Allen has exited by now)*

**John** Heyday, Miss Morland! What's the meaning of this? Here have I been telling all my acquaintance that I was going to dance with the prettiest girl in the room; and when they see you standing up with somebody else, they'll quiz me famously.

**Catherine** Oh, no; they'll never think of me, after such a description as that.

**John** By heavens, if they don't, I'll kick them out of the room for blockheads. *(Taking Catherine away from Tilney)* What chap have you there?

**Catherine** Mr Tilney.

**John** Tilney. Hmm. I don't know him. A good figure of a man; well put together. Does he want a horse?

*(A string of ladies troop past, fluttering their fans, and John, drawn like a magnet to metal, trails after them)*

**John** Excuse me.

**Henry** *(Rejoining Catherine)* That gentleman would have put me out of patience, had he stayed with you half a minute longer. He has no business to withdraw the attention of my partner from me.

*(Catherine and Henry join the dance. As they dance, they talk, catching each other's eyes with increasing confidence)*

**Henry** We've entered into a contract of mutual agreeableness for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time. I consider a cotillion as an emblem of marriage.

**Catherine** But they're such very different things!

**Henry** – That you think they can't be compared together.

**Catherine** To be sure not. People that marry can never part, but must go and keep house together. People that dance only stand opposite each other in a long room for half an hour.

**Henry** But you will allow that in both matrimony and dancing man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, and when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other till the moment of its dissolution; that in both, it's in their best interest to keep their imaginations from wandering towards the perfections of their neighbours, or fancying that they should have been better off with anyone else. You will allow all this?

**Catherine** But I can't look upon them at all in the same light, nor think the same duties belong to them.

**Henry** This is rather alarming. May I not thence infer that your notions of the duties of the dancing state aren't so strict as your partner might wish? Have I not reason to fear that if the gentleman who spoke to you just now were to return, or if any other gentleman were to address you, there'd be nothing to restrain you from conversing with him as long as you chose?

**Catherine** Mr Thorpe's such a very particular friend of my brother's, that if he talks to me, I must talk to him again. But there are hardly three young men in the room besides him that I've any acquaintance with.

**Henry** And is that to be my only security? Alas, alas!

**Catherine** Nay, I'm sure you cannot have a better; for if I don't know anybody, it's impossible for me to talk to them.

*(Henry is downcast)*

**Catherine** And, besides, I don't want to talk to anybody else.

**Henry** *(Smiling)* Now you've given me a security worth having; and I shall proceed with courage.

*(The dance ends)*

**Catherine** But, Mr Tilney, your sister tells me you're here for as little as a week.

**Henry** You'd have me enjoy Bath longer? Take care, or you'll forget to be tired of it at the proper time.

**Catherine** Oh, but I, who live in a small, retired village in the country, could never be tired of it

**Henry** But then you spend your time so much more rationally in the country.

**Catherine** Do I?

**Henry** Do you not?

**Catherine** I don't believe there's much difference.

**Henry** Here you are in pursuit only of amusement all day long.

**Catherine** And so I am at home – but there I can only go and call on Mrs Allen.

**Henry** (*Amused*) Only go and call on Mrs Allen! What a picture of intellectual poverty! However, when you sink into this abyss again, you will have more to say.

*(Eleanor and General Tilney, her father, appear at the back)*

**Catherine** Oh, yes, I'll never be in want of something to talk of again to Mrs Allen, or anybody else. If I could but have Papa and Mamma and the rest of them here, I suppose I'd be too happy! James's coming – my eldest brother – is quite delightful, and especially as it turns out that the very family we're just got so intimate with are his intimate friends already. Oh, who can ever be tired of Bath?

**Henry** (*Sincerely and tenderly*) Not those who bring such fresh feelings of every sort to it as you do.

*(Catherine and Henry are enchanted with each other. The General, who has merely come to inspect Catherine, retreats, bored. Eleanor joins Henry and Catherine)*

**Eleanor** How were the steps?

**Catherine** My feet seemed to know which way to go by themselves!

**Eleanor** Father is anxious to leave early for home, Henry.

**Henry** Very well.

**Eleanor** I hope you've been able to take some walks in the country.

**Catherine** No, sadly, I haven't. Neither Mr nor Mrs Allen is much in the way of a walker.

**Eleanor** The country's enchanting. I know all the paths around these parts.

**Catherine** I long to see it! But I fear I might not find anybody to accompany me when you've gone.

**Henry** We must join in a walk before we leave, must we not, Eleanor?

**Catherine** I shall like it beyond anything in the world. You're here such a short time more, don't let's put it off – let's go tomorrow.

**Henry** Very well, tomorrow it is!

**Catherine** Tomorrow.

**Eleanor** Tomorrow, then. Provided only that it doesn't rain.

**Catherine** Oh, I'm sure it will not!

**Eleanor** We shall call for you in Pulteney Street at noon.

**Catherine** I'll be waiting.

**Eleanor** Remember – twelve o'clock.

*(Eleanor and Henry leave, and Catherine remains dancing, ecstatically, alone on stage)*

## **ACT TWO**

*(The action may continue uninterrupted. Catherine is dancing around Mrs Allen's room the next morning. Catherine moves to the 'window', concerned with the weather. Mrs Allen enters and sits down to sew)*

**Catherine** Do you think it'll rain again, Mrs Allen?

**Mrs Allen** I've no doubt in the world of its being a very fine day, if the clouds would only go off, and the sun keep out.

**Catherine** Oh no! Specks of rain again! Oh dear, I do believe it will be wet for hours.

**Mrs Allen** I thought how it would be.

*(The clock begins to strike twelve)*

**Catherine** Twelve! Oh, that we had such weather here as they have at Udolpho. The night that poor St. Aubert died! Such beautiful weather!

*(A timid shaft of sun breaks through the window)*

**Catherine** Look! Sunshine!

**Mrs Allen** I always thought it would clear up.

**Catherine** But do you think there's been too much rain already for them to venture? It may be too dirty now. *(Spying a carriage through the 'window')* Oh! Isabella, my brother, and Mr Thorpe, I declare! They are coming for me perhaps, but I shan't go, for you know Miss Tilney may still call.

**Mrs Allen** Indeed, you must not go with them.

*(Knocking offstage)*

**John** *(Offstage, breathless)* Make haste! Put on your hat this moment! There's no time to be lost! We're going to Bristol!

**Catherine** Bristol! Isn't that a great way off?

**John** (*Entering*) How d'ye do, Mrs Allen? A famous bag last night, wasn't it? Come, Miss Morland, be quick, for the others are in a confounded hurry to be off. They want to get their tumble over.

**Catherine** But I can't go with you today. I expect some friends every moment.

**John** That's no reason! You can see them another day, isn't that so, Mrs Allen?

(*Isabella and James enter*)

**Isabella** My sweetest Catherine, isn't this delightful? We shall have a most heavenly drive. You're to thank your brother and me for the scheme; it darted into our heads at breakfast-time, I verily believe at the same instant. Oh, I'm in such ecstasies! I'm heartedly sick of Bath. We both are. But we think alike on everything.

**Catherine** I cannot go.

**Isabella** My beloved creature, what do you mean?

**Catherine** I expect Miss Tilney and her brother to call on me to take a country walk. (*Conspiratorially to Isabella*) He only stays a week, Isabella. I cannot miss this opportunity, and they will be here this minute.

**John** Not they! For does he not drive a phaeton with bright chestnuts?

**Catherine** I don't know.

**John** Yes, he does! I saw him. You're talking of the man you danced with last night, aren't you?

**Catherine** Yes.

**John** Well, I saw him at that moment turn up the Lansdown Road, heading out of Bath, driving a smart looking girl.

**Catherine** Did you in truth?

**John** Did, upon my soul. He seemed to have got some very pretty cattle too.

**Catherine** It's very odd! But I suppose they thought it would be too dirty.

**John** And well they might! Walk! You could no more walk than you could fly! It's ankle deep everywhere.

**Isabella** My dearest Catherine, you can't form an idea of the dirt; you must come with us. We shall drive directly to Clifton and dine there; and then go on to Kingsweston.

**James** I doubt our being able to do so much.

**John** You croaking fellow! We'll be able to do ten times more. Weston! Aye, and Blaize Castle too!

**Catherine** (*Alert*) Blaize Castle? What's Blaize Castle?

**James** The finest place in England. Worth going fifty miles at any time to see.

**Catherine** What, is it really a castle, an old castle?

**Isabella** The oldest in the kingdom.

**Catherine** But is it like in *Udolpho*? In Italy?

**Isabella** Exactly. The very same.

**Catherine** Then I should like to see it; but I can't. I can't go.

**John** Make yourself easy for I heard Tilney hallooing to a man who was just passing by on horseback, that they were going as far as Wick Rocks.

**Catherine** (*Disappointed*) Really? Wick Rocks? Shall I go then, Mrs Allen?

**Mrs Allen** Well, my dear, why shouldn't you go?

**Catherine** (*Incredulous at Mrs Allen's duplicity*) Mrs Allen!

**Isabella** Don't be dull, Catherine. Just think: Blaize Castle!

**Catherine** Very well, I will go with you!

*(Two carriages wheel on and the four young people begin to mount them. Mrs Allen withdraws)*

**Catherine** Isabella, can you imagine? Long suites of lofty rooms...

**Isabella** The remains of magnificent furniture...

**Catherine** And then we might come suddenly upon narrow, winding vaults –

**Isabella** Or a low, grated door!

**Catherine** And what if a sudden gust of wind extinguishes our lamp?

**Isabella** We'll be left in total darkness!

**Catherine** Oh, Isabella, I can't wait to be there!

**John and James** Get on! Hup! Hup! Hup!

*(They set off. The coaches jog up and down as before, indicating movement)*

**John** *(To Catherine)* What do you think of my gig, Miss Morland? Well hung, isn't it?

**Catherine** Oh, yes, I'm sure.

**John** I'd say altogether that I have the most complete equipage of its kind in the whole of the country. And poor old James has got the most tip-uppy little thing you ever did see in your entire life!

*(Henry and Eleanor appear, arm in arm)*

**John** Who's that girl who looked at you so hard as she went by?

**Catherine** Who? Where?

**John** On the right-hand pavement. She must be almost out of sight now.

**Catherine** Stop, stop, Mr Thorpe! It's Miss Tilney! And she's with her brother. They're looking back at us! How could you tell me they were gone? Stop! Stop! I'll get down this moment and go to them.

**John** *(Lashing his 'horse' into a brisker trot)* Hup, hup!

*(The coaches change angle and the Tilneys move offstage)*

**Catherine** Pray stop, Mr Thorpe! I can't go on! I must go back to them!

**John** *(Laughing and smacking his whip)* Hup! Up! Up! Get on!

**Catherine** Mr Thorpe! Will you not let me down?

*(But, laughing, John ignores Catherine)*

**Catherine** How could you deceive me so? I would not have had it happen for the world. They must think it so strange, so rude of me! How could you say you saw them driving out in a phaeton?

**John** I did!

**Catherine** But you couldn't!

**John** I'm sure it was Tilney.

**Catherine** But how can it have been?

*(John is amused. Catherine slumps into her seat and grudgingly gives up. The coaches leave the stage, and six chairs are placed in three groups of two, facing the audience, to signify Theatre Boxes. Catherine and Mrs Allen enter*

*the Centre Box, while John and Isabella walk into the one Stage Left. They all observe an imaginary 'stage' as if a play is in full swing)*

**Isabella** Of course when you've seen the theatre in London, anything else is really quite horrid.

**John** Shhh. This is a funny bit.

**Isabella** How do you know?

**John** I saw it on Wednesday. (*Laughs inordinately at what is transpiring on the 'stage'*)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE REST OF THIS PLAY PLEASE CONTACT  
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