

## Summaries of Jane Austen's six novels

### **6. *NORTHANGER ABBEY***

**(Written 1798(?); published posthumously 1818)**

The Allens, family friends of the Morlands, offer to take Catherine Morland with them to Bath, and the seventeen year old Catherine eagerly accepts the invitation. Catherine's life has been relatively sheltered, so Bath is an exciting new world for her. Catherine is soon introduced to Henry Tilney, a young clergyman who impresses Catherine with his wit and warmth of personality. Catherine swiftly falls in love with Henry, but they do not meet again for some time. She makes other connections during this period, including young Isabella Thorpe who soon becomes a constant companion, providing useful information about balls, dances, fashion, and gossip.

James Morland, Catherine's brother, and John Thorpe, Isabella's brother, who are university friends, arrive in Bath. Isabella flirts with James, and John tries to impress Catherine, asking her to be his dance partner. However, when Catherine next sees Henry Tilney she much prefers him to John because Henry attracts her in many ways, not least because he is modest and sensitive in conversation.

Catherine has an opportunity to become friends with Eleanor Tilney, Henry's sister, since Isabella is preoccupied with James. Eleanor privately

senses that Catherine has feelings for Henry and retains this impression, even after John's presumptuous behavior causes Catherine to appear dismissive of an arranged walk with Eleanor and Henry. An upset Catherine makes her apologies and another walk is planned. Yet another hitch occurs when Catherine's brother and the Thorpes try to persuade Catherine into an alternative outing which clashes with the new walk promised to the Tilneys. Catherine firmly refuses this time and joins Eleanor and Henry in a cliff-side amble where the three young people share their love of reading with one another.

Henry's older brother, Captain Frederick Tilney, arrives in town and Isabella turns her attentions to him, as she has now discovered that her fiancé James is a man of modest means. With her father's encouragement, Eleanor invites Catherine to visit the Tilney's estate, Northanger Abbey, and a delighted Catherine immediately accepts the invitation. She is glad to escape the amorous attentions of John Thorpe and also the painful observation that Isabella and Frederick are flirting openly and thus wounding her poor brother James.

Catherine leaves with the Tilneys for Northanger Abbey. On the way, Catherine and Henry entertain one another with Gothic imaginings, setting these scenes in Northanger Abbey itself. Unfortunately, this conversation adds fuel to the fire of Catherine's already fertile imagination and once established in the Abbey, she proceeds to seek for evidence of murderous deeds in secret locations. Henry soon catches her in the act and is taken

aback to realise she thinks his father must have been the murderer of his long-dead mother. He rebukes Catherine mildly but she accepts the scolding in abject shame.

Things move from bad to worse when Catherine learns that Isabella has broken off her engagement to James; the situation is not improved by a further letter from Isabella saying she herself has now been rejected by Frederick. The next upset occurs when the General returns home unexpectedly from a journey he has made and commands his daughter Eleanor to dismiss Catherine immediately. Poor Eleanor has no choice but to send a distraught Catherine on the journey back home in the morning.

Catherine is welcomed back home on arrival, although her family is startled by the General's inconsiderate behaviour. Catherine's misery turns to joy when Henry suddenly arrives at her home and duly proposes to her! Henry later explains that his father, General Tilney, had been told by John Thorpe that Catherine was from a very rich family. When the General later encountered John again, he was given precisely the opposite information about Catherine's family fortunes by a resentful John, who may have felt that he had been inexplicably spurned by Catherine in favour of Henry. The General is furious to learn that Henry's possible future fiancée has no money and promptly ejects her from his home.

Within a few months, Eleanor receives a very advantageous proposal of marriage which puts the General in a better frame of mind. Once he learns that the Morlands' finances are actually moderate, not dire, he

consents to the marriage of Henry and Catherine who now see a clear path forward to their united happiness.