



Chapter 1 Catherine

Nobody would ever write a book about Catherine Morland. She was not that sort of girl. She grew up in Fullerton, a small village in the middle of nowhere, in an ordinary family, not rich and not poor, with an ordinary mother and an ordinary father and a great many ordinary brothers and sisters.

But Catherine did not want to be ordinary. She wanted to be a heroine.

It was a large family, with ten children, so Catherine's mother was always busy with the little ones and her father generally occupied with his work. Catherine was the eldest girl, with three older brothers, so when she was very young she had always preferred games like cricket and climbing trees to playing with dolls and picking flowers.

As a little girl she had been rather thin and very pale, with straight dark hair that hung around her face like string: the kind of child who loved nothing better than rolling down the green slope at the back of the house with her brothers, and always seemed to have dirt under her fingernails. She was not particularly pretty or especially clever, had never liked drawing or any of the other things





young girls were supposed to enjoy and the day her mother gave up trying to teach her to play the piano had been one of the happiest of her life.

But then, as she grew older, Catherine began to change. Her love of dirt gave way to a liking for fine clothes, and she was pleased one day to hear her mother remark to her father that 'Catherine grows into quite a good-looking girl – she is almost pretty today.' To be almost pretty, for a girl who had been seen as definitely ordinary for the first fifteen years of her life, was high praise indeed.

She also discovered reading. It was between the ages of fifteen and seventeen that Catherine was in training to be a heroine, so she read all such works as a heroine must to prepare herself for the role. She studied poetry, and the plays of Shakespeare, and gained much useful information about tragic queens and doomed love affairs, but very little about where a young heroine might happen to meet her hero or what she should be wearing at the time. For this, she turned to novels. These were not the kind of books her father wanted her to read, full of facts and dates and historical information – they were stories. Delightful stories with names like *The Castle of Otranto* and *Horrid Mysteries*, full of beautiful heroines and handsome heroes, cruel husbands and neglected wives locked up in ghost-infested castles in distant lands, full

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of gloomy passages and candle-lit bedchambers with portraits of long-dead ancestors whose eyes followed you around the room, with ancient chests packed with secrets and mysterious locked doors through which you were forbidden to pass ...

But although Catherine longed to be like one of the heroines in her stories, she had managed to reach the great age of seventeen without having had even one adventure. She had never stayed in a crumbling castle or visited an ancient palace in a foreign land. She had never been beyond her village, in fact, except to go shopping with her mother in Salisbury – and that was only nine miles away. She had not met one young man who brought a blush to her cheeks and had never herself inspired anything more than mild admiration in the red-faced son of a local farmer who lived nearby. There was not one lord in the village – no, not even a baronet; not one family who had brought up as their own a boy accidentally found at their door as a baby, not one young man of unknown origin whom Catherine might accidentally encounter when out for her daily walk.

There were, in fact, no handsome young men in the entire neighbourhood, no romantic poets or wicked princes, no dances, no excitement, no mysteries, no fun. Catherine would never be like the girls she read about. She would never meet a hero, never have an adventure, never be the

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heroine of her own story. Nobody would ever write a book about her and nothing would ever change.

But, when a young lady is to be a heroine, the limitations of one small village in Wiltshire cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way.

Mr and Mrs Allen were friends of Catherine's parents who lived in Fullerton. They were a wealthy couple – kind, if a little dull – who had no children of their own and always spent several weeks of the year in Bath, a big city where people went to talk and to dance, make friends and have fun.

And this year, the year Catherine was seventeen, the Allens invited her to go with them. Catherine's life as the romantic heroine of her own story had begun.