



The mysterious cabinet

Jane Austen

Northanger Abbey (1817)
Chapter 21

The following text describes an exciting experience Catherine has while she is at Northanger Abbey. She has just found an ebony cabinet in her room and is exploring its secrets.

The place in the middle alone remained now unexplored; [...] It was some time however before she could unfasten¹ the door, the same difficulty occurring in the management² of this inner lock as of the outer; but at length it did open; and not vain, as hitherto³, was her search; her quick eyes directly fell
5 on a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment⁴, and her feelings at that moment were indescribable. Her heart fluttered⁵, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale. She seized⁶, with an unsteady⁷ hand, the precious manuscript, for half a glance sufficed to ascertain⁸ written characters; and while she acknowledged with awful sensations
10 this striking exemplification of what Henry had foretold, resolved instantly to peruse⁹ every line before she attempted to rest.

The dimness¹⁰ of the light her candle emitted made her turn to it with alarm; but there was no danger of its sudden extinction; it had yet some hours to burn; and that she might not have any greater difficulty in distinguishing the writing
15 than what its ancient date might occasion, she hastily snuffed it¹¹. Alas! It was snuffed and extinguished in one. A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. Catherine, for a few moments, was motionless with horror. It was done completely; not a remnant of light in the wick¹² could give hope to the rekindling breath¹³. Darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room.
20 A violent gust¹⁴ of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear¹⁵. Human nature could support no more. A cold sweat stood on her forehead, the manuscript fell from her hand, and groping her way¹⁶
25 to the bed, she jumped hastily in, and sought¹⁷ some suspension of agony by creeping far underneath¹⁸ the clothes. To close her eyes in sleep that night, she felt must be entirely out of the question. With a curiosity so justly awakened, and feelings in every way so agitated, repose must be absolutely impossible. The storm too abroad so dreadful! She had not been used to feel alarm from wind, but now every blast seemed fraught¹⁹ with awful intelligence. The manuscript
30 so wonderfully found, so wonderfully accomplishing the morning's prediction, how was it to be accounted for? What could it contain? To whom could it relate? By what means could it have been so long concealed? And how singularly strange that it should fall to her lot²⁰ to discover it! Till she had made herself
35 mistress²¹ of its contents, however, she could have neither repose nor comfort; and with the sun's first rays she was determined to peruse it. But many were the tedious hours which must yet intervene. She shuddered, tossed about²² in her bed, and envied every quiet sleeper. The storm still raged, and various were the noises, more terrific even than the wind, which struck at intervals on her startled²³ ear. The very curtains of her bed seemed at one moment in

- 1 **unfasten.** Aprire.
- 2 **occurring in the management.** Si verificò nel maneggiare.
- 3 **hitherto.** Finora.
- 4 **for concealment.** Per essere nascosto.
- 5 **fluttered.** Batteva forte.
- 6 **seized.** Afferrò.
- 7 **un steady.** Malferma.
- 8 **half ... to ascertain.** Mezza occhiata fu sufficiente per constatare.
- 9 **to peruse.** Esaminare accuratamente.
- 10 **dimness.** Debolezza.
- 11 **she hastily snuffed it.** La spense in fretta.
- 12 **wick.** Stoppino.
- 13 **to the rekindling breath.** Affinché si riaccendesse.
- 14 **gust.** Folata.
- 15 **struck on her affrighted ear.** Colpi il suo orecchio terrorizzato.
- 16 **groping her way.** Cercando di raggiungere a tentoni.
- 17 **sought.** Cercò.
- 18 **by creeping far underneath.** Scivolando ben sotto.
- 19 **blast seemed fraught.** Raffica sembrava carica.
- 20 **it should fall to her lot.** Le fosse toccato in sorte.
- 21 **mistress.** Padrona.
- 22 **She shuddered, tossed about.** Rabbrivì, si rigrì.
- 23 **startled.** Spaventato.