


# The Curiosity Cabinet

*Catherine Czerkawska*

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## **The Curiosity Cabinet** Catherine Czerkawska

‘The island reminds her of those magic painting books. The shop here used to sell them. You would dip your brush in water and pale, clear colours would emerge from the page, as this green and blue landscape is emerging from the mist.’

‘She saw before her a small but strongly built man, in his thirties perhaps, wearing highland dress, bare legs showing beneath the big blue plaid. He reminded her of the highlanders she had seen on the streets of Edinburgh where sometimes, dressed in their outlandish clothes, they were perceived as crude figures of fun and sometimes, bristling with weaponry and with the drink taken, as dangerous incomers. Manus was no figure of fun although she could see that he might be dangerous, a better friend than an enemy, perhaps.’

When Alys revisits the beautiful Hebridean island of Garve after an absence of twenty five years, she is captivated by the embroidered casket on display in her hotel. She discovers that it belongs to Donal, her childhood playmate, and soon they resume their old friendship. Interwoven with the story of their growing love, is the darker tale of Henrietta Dalrymple, kidnapped by the formidable Manus McNeill and held on Garve against her will. With three hundred years separating them, the women are linked by the cabinet and its contents, by the tug of motherhood and by the magic of the island itself. But Garve has its secrets, past and present. Donal must learn to trust Alys enough to confide in her and, like Henrietta before her, Alys must earn the right to belong.

## **The Curiosity Cabinet Details**

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Author : Catherine Czerkawska

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## **From Reader Review The Curiosity Cabinet for online ebook**

### **Penny says**

I really enjoyed this book, Two love stories set centuries apart on the island of Garve, connected by an unusual embroidered box full of treasures gathered from the island and carried down the years by the McNeills the clan belonging to the place.

The story is fairly gentle to start with, but as you get to know Alys and Henrietta and their situations it all of a sudden comes to life!

A heartwarming, gentle story about two completely different women and their experiences of the island. It finished far too soon for me. A lovely, lovely story.

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### **Chris Longmuir says**

I think I can honestly say this is the best book I have read this year, which is somewhat surprising as my reading preferences are dark crime, and this certainly didn't fit into that category. I loved the intertwined love stories, one set in the present and the other in the seventeenth century. Alys returns to the island of Garve where she holidayed as a child, and immediately falls under its spell as well as that of Donal her childhood friend. While Henrietta is kidnapped and taken to the island against her will. Once there she also falls under the spell of the island as well as her kidnapper, Manus. There are parallels in both stories, both women are single mothers, Alys is divorced, and Henrietta is widowed. Both have a son from whom they are separated, Alys temporarily, but Henrietta permanently. There are many other parallels and sometimes it feels as if the women are mirroring each other despite the separation of centuries. The setting of the island of Garve is equally as enticing and it is not difficult to see why both women succumb to its spell. The story itself weaves a spell of its own, and the question of will she, won't she, runs through the stories of both women. This was a great read which I would recommend to everyone, and if you don't read it you are missing something very special.

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### **Elizabeth says**

I would rate this 4.5 stars if I could. It was a lovely story, well two lovely stories, actually, equally well-told. The first is the story of Alys, a divorced mother from Edinburgh who revisits the small island Garve, off the Scottish highland coast where she summered as a child. There she encounters Donal, a man she had known when they were both children.

It is also the story of Henrietta, a 17th century woman, kidnapped and held captive on Garve.

Two of my friends have mentioned how much they enjoy Catherine Czerkawska's books several times over the last year or so. When this one came available as a free Kindle download I just had to try it. I'm so glad I did. I definitely plan to read more of her work.

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## **Jo Barton says**

When Alys returns to the Hebridean island of Garve she feels comforted by the strength of her childhood memories, of holidays spent exploring rock pools, and the feel of the silvery white sand between her toes. Re-discovering fragments of herself, she sets out to search for the secret of a beautiful embroidered cabinet which is on display in her hotel. Her curiosity is encouraged by the deepening friendship with her childhood friend, Donal, who has remained on the island, and who is the guardian of the curiosity cabinet's secrets. Three hundred years earlier, Henrietta Dalrymple is forcibly removed from her life in Edinburgh, a life she shares with her baby son, but when she is kidnapped and held against her will on Garve she finds life on the small island totally abhorrent. Her captor is Manus McNeil, Laird of the isle and a highlander to boot, fearsome, devilish and ultimately controlling. Henrietta is lost and alone but takes comfort in small friendships, as gradually the relationship between captor and captive becomes something more meaningful. Beautifully written, this dual time romance captures time and place completely. The interwoven love stories blend together quite seamlessly, both strands of the story are equally appealing, neither one outshining the other. The spirit of Garve is captured perfectly, the imagery is so unique, you may find yourself gasping as you see wild swans fly across the sky, and the tang of seaweed, and the hint of a sea breeze remain with you as you turn each page.

The skill of this talented story teller is present in every word, she weaves a kind of magic, and makes beautiful pictures in your mind.

If you have a kindle please download this book – you won't be disappointed.

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## **Valerie Laws says**

I don't normally go for romance novels per se, but this one is a wonderful read. It entwines two love stories three hundred years apart, with events which seem to reflect each other as the narrative switches from one to the other story. In both, the characters are well drawn - not stereotypical romantic heroes and heroines who are boringly bland, but flawed human beings with strong feelings and life histories. Many reviews I've read use images about tapestry, jewels, weaving, and this feeling of something crafted and rich in texture is present throughout the book. One of the top selling points for me with any book is a sense of place, and the Scots island of Garve and the sea that surrounds it not only shape the narratives and the characters' lives, but are characters in the novel as well as a setting. The whole book is saturated with the dry salty scent of a tideline with its found treasures of shells, bones, and secrets washed ashore.

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## **Kathleen Jones says**

If you like well-written romantic fiction with a happy ending, hunky heroes, spectacular scenery and a historical backdrop, then you can't do better than Catherine Czerkawska's Curiosity Cabinet.

The cabinet in question is on display in a hotel on Garve - one of Scotland's more remote islands where Gaelic is still spoken and the distant past still feels relatively recent. No one knows where the cabinet and its intriguing contents have come from, but Alys - desperately looking for tranquility while her small son holidays elsewhere with her former husband and his new wife - is fascinated by it and determined to find out.

Alys had been to the island as a child. She and her brother had made friends with a boy called Donal who was around the same age. Alys is surprised to find that he's still there, and his family own the cabinet. There's an instant attraction between the two, but Donal is very elusive.

In a parallel story, several hundred years earlier, the young Henrietta has been snatched from her Edinburgh home, leaving behind her baby son, and taken to the island of Garve where she is put into the custody of Manus McNeill - laird of the isle. Initially distraught with grief for the loss of her child, she gradually begins to make sense of her situation and construct a new life for herself. She is both attracted and repulsed by her captor.

The story of the Curiosity Cabinet and the part it plays in the lives of Henrietta and Alys is a very good read - the descriptions of the wild landscape are particularly vivid. It's what's referred to as 'a page turner' and highly recommended in the romantic fiction category. It would have had five stars from me, but I wasn't too sure about the way everything worked out so conveniently for everyone at the end - but that's only cynical me - most people will love it!

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## **Jgrace says**

**The Curiosity Cabinet** - C. Czerkawska  
audio performance by Carolyn Bonnyman  
4 stars

The cabinet of the title is a 300 year old embroidered chest. From the description, it sounded like an exquisitely decorated sewing basket with some equally fascinating contents. The basket serves as a loose link to the stories of two women on a fictional Hebridean island. There are two, parallel, love stories, one contemporary and one historical. A few circumstantial similarities link the two female protagonists, but there's really no mystical or time traveling connection between their stories.

That said, I enjoyed the remote Scottish setting and the satisfying romance of both stories. I was reminded of Susanna Kearsley's books. I enjoyed Carolyn Bonnyman's Scottish accent and her beautiful Gaelic, although I sometimes had difficulty understanding her. The kindle version helped me out. (The book begins with a description of a ferry, not a fairy). Likable characters, two mostly happy endings; this is a perfect beach read.

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## **Laura says**

*From BBC Radio 4 Extra:*

*Catherine Czerkawska's tale of a recent widow and her mysterious connection to a 17th-century portrait of a young girl.*

*With Grace Glover, Mary Riggans, John Sheddon and Stella Forge.*

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## Kris McCracken says

A good little read, billed as a 'romance', but more a period piece with romantic interludes. It's a gentle novel, and a worthwhile distraction.

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## Jane says

On a cold, dark winter evening, it was lovely to be swept away, to a Hebridean island that Catherine Czerkawska named Garve:

*"The island is full of flowers. Ashore, Alys knows that honeysuckle will clutter the hedgerows like clotted cream, weaving a dense tapestry with marching lines of purple foxgloves. Earlier in the year there would have been clumps of thrift, a wild rock garden defining all the bays. Later, meadowsweet will fill the hedges and ditches. But now there will be pink roses and yellow irises. There will be nut-brown boats drawn up on the pale sand, and dress-suited oystercatchers patrolling among the seaweed. As the ferry comes to shore, she notices that the sea around Garve is still that shade of turquoise that she has seen nowhere else. The light is different here; the colours are brighter and more luminous. None of that has changed. It is the same as it always was."*

Alys Miller came to visit Garve while her eight year-old son was away with his father and new stepmother in Italy. She had so many memories of childhood holidays on island, but the holiday when Alys had invited a friend who didn't enjoy the island and the outdoor life, when a delicate balance had been disturbed, was the last family holiday on Garve. She hadn't been back since then.

Alys fell in love with her island all over again, and then she met Donal McNeill, the island boy who had been a good friend to her and her brother. She was so pleased that he remembered her, he appreciated her love of his island, and they had many memories to share.

This was the beginning of a very real love story, complicated because each had their own history and complications in different parts of the country.

That story was told beautifully, with sensitivity and understanding. These people and their lives were real; they were fallible and they were fragile.

I was so very taken with that story that I was disappointed when I realised that it was going to be told with another story, set on Garve many years earlier. But I was soon every bit as interested in that story.

Towards the end of the 17th century Henrietta Dalrymple, a wealthy young widow, was kidnapped and brought to Garve, the prisoner of island chieftain Manus McNeill . She was distraught, and she was grief-stricken at being parted from her infant son. Manus regrets what he did, but he knows that he had his reasons, and that what had been done cannot be undone.

In time Henrietta learns that she must accept her fate and that she has to live a different life. Manus admires that, and he does what he can to support her in her new life. at first they are wary of each other, but slowly another love story begins to unfold.

It's a more unlikely story that the first, but I believed that these people lived and breathed, and their emotions and their actions were so very real.

The two stories are linked by a curiosity cabinet. It was a lovely thing: a casket, lined with fabric embroidered with images of island birds and flowers, and full of small treasures.

*"Here is a miniature shuttle, prettily embroidered with gold, and with a few discoloured threads still attached. Here is needlelace collar, very fine and floral. Here is a tiny pincushion, a painted silk fan and a coral teether. On another shelf is a hand mirror, intricately decorated with semi-precious stones in the shape of flowers: forget-me-nots and pansies. Alongside these precious keepsakes, she is puzzled to see a little collection of pebbles and shells and swansdown. Finally there is a scrap of yellowed paper, with a few words of incomprehensible writing: a letter? A poem?"*

I thought for a moment of the cabinet of treasures in Elizabeth Goudge's 'The Scent of Water' but I was too involved with the stories told in this book to think for long.

The ties between past and present are loose, and completely uncontrived. It's simply that the same object is present in both periods, that there are some things that don't change in time, and that there are gentle likenesses in the two stories.

The island Garve, is at the centre of both stories and it is captured perfectly. It is so easy to see the landscape, to feel the weather, to understand the difference in the air, in the way of life. The perceptions of two women, centuries apart, who came to the island, who formed relationships with island men, and with the island itself, who feel the pull of an absent child, are lovely to read.

The writing is lovely too, catching the magic and the reality of life, with both small and bold brushstrokes.

*"The island reminds her of those magic painting books. The shop here used to sell them. You would dip your brush in water and pale, clear colours would emerge from the page, as this green and blue landscape is emerging from the mist."*

The storytelling lives up into all of this; I was captivated, and I wasn't entirely sure how the story would play out until the very last page.

It was the right ending but I was sorry to leave, and I would so love to go back to Garve and to the people I met there ....

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## **Bettie? says**

Review Here

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## **Jeanne says**

Romance novels are not my genre but while this could be called an historical romance novel I found it to be

much more. The story centers on two women who live 300 years apart but whose daily lives, and family values and issues are intertwined despite the differences in their surroundings. The historical aspects of Henrietta's life on a desolate Scottish island is fascinating as is the modern day description of the same. The small doses of romance are there but the emotional climate of the characters including the residents of the lowlands and highlands are what bring this fiction to life. This was a free kindle read which was worth it and I will now look for books from this author.

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## **Hilary says**

ETA - This is my more considered review:

<http://vulpeslibris.wordpress.com/201...>

I need to come back with a more considered review, perhaps - all I can say at this stage is that I've had this on my Kindle app for a little while, I started reading it on a short train journey this morning, and found it so captivating that I couldn't wait for the journey home to read it some more. Then, since I've got home I've neglected my domestic duties to read it to the end. I just couldn't put it down.

Perhaps I was in the mood for this wonderful love story as it is set on the imaginary Scottish island of Garve, and I have just come home from an island holiday. Catherine Czerkawska describes this island in all its moods and colours most beautifully, and I was transported back to the places that I love. Add to that two enchanting and haunting love stories, one modern, one historical, tied together by the 17th century Curiosity Cabinet of the title, and I have had more enjoyment in reading this novel than for a very long time. Thoughtful, intelligent, and oh so sensual, this is a truly original (double) love story with an exquisite sense of place.

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## **Elizabeth Krall says**

I read this novel over one weekend in Sydney, and was transported from a wet and windy Australian winter to the turquoise waters and wildflower scents of the Hebrides. It caught my attention because, like my own novel, this is a love story set primarily on one of the Hebridean Islands; or rather, it is two love stories, for *Cabinet of Curiosities* is a novel of dual storylines. It's one of the rare good ones in which you become so absorbed in one story that you have forgotten the other, and feel momentarily disgruntled when they switch, and then think "oh yes, how has Alys/Henrietta been since I left her?"

I enjoyed this book very much, and have only one quibble, which is that Henrietta seemed more dismayed by finding herself on an island full of 'savages' as a result of being kidnapped than she was by the fact that she had been kidnapped. But that's a small quibble, and I definitely recommend this novel.

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## **MetLineReader says**

A nice dual timelined story weaving old and modern stories of island life in the Scottish highlands. It was extremely predictable but this didn't detract from the tale. An easy read, good escapist stuff and a counter-relief to the highbrow literary fiction I read just before this. Not for everyone and possibly might not have



read it if it hadn't been free recently.

A good read, nothing like some old fashioned historical fiction to recover from a heavy going previous read!  
On that basis 4\*, kept me going to find out more and nicely written. A little gem.

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