



# ISLAND

*of the Red*

# MANGROVES

SARAH LARK

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# About the Book

Island of Red Mangroves is the follow-up to Sarah Lark's tumultuous novel, "Island of a Thousand Springs," set in Jamaica, 1732.

Jamaica, 1753: Deirdre, daughter of Englishwoman, Nora Fortnam and slave Akwasi, lives a sheltered life on her family's plantation. Her stepfather, Doug, has welcomed her into his life as his own. Despite Deirdre's scandalous origin, the men of the island flock to the young beauty, but she shows no interest. That is, until she is charmed by young doctor Victor Dufresne, who asks for her hand in marriage.

After their lavish wedding ceremony, Victor and Deirdre embark to Saint-Domingue on the island of Hispaniola, where Deirdre can live without the burden of her mixed background. But what happens there changes everything ...

Best-selling international author Sarah Lark delivers a gripping historical account of social upheaval set against a romantic Caribbean background. For fans of Kathleen Grissom, *THE KITCHEN HOUSE*, Alex Haley, *ROOTS: THE SAGA OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY*, and Sue Monk Kidd, *THE INVENTION OF WINGS*.

# About the Author

**Sarah Lark** is the author of several bestselling historical fiction novels. She was born in Germany in 1958, studied education and psychology and wrote her PhD-thesis about “daydreams.” She worked as an elementary school teacher, copywriter, and as a travel guide and was always fascinated by the paradisiacal and exotic places of the world. Her captivating novels gained a large readership and have a longstanding position on the bestseller list in Germany.

Sarah currently lives in Spain and is working on her next novel.

SARAH LARK



THE ISLAND OF THE RED  
MANGROVES

Translated by Sharmila Cohen

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# A BETTER FUTURE

Jamaica - Cascarilla Gardens  
Cayman Islands - Grand Cayman

Late summer 1753

## CHAPTER 1

We really should not be supporting this ..."

Lady Lucille Hornby-Warrington dourly looked out from the open carriage at the sunny summer day. There wasn't much to see aside from the roads between the Hollister and Fortnam plantations, which were dusty and lined with sugarcane plants. Some of the reed-like grasses were up to twenty feet tall and the streets looked like freshly cut swathes through the lush greenery. The lady was inescapably bored. Lord Warrington, her husband, was more interested, appraising the height and circumference of the plants. After all, the income brought in from the plantation that he managed for his wife's uncle also came from sugarcane and it looked like this year's harvest was going to be good. Warrington seemed to be in a significantly better mood than his wife.

"You can't be serious," he replied to the lady with a touch of mockery in his voice. "Miss a feast at the Fortnams' because the occasion doesn't suit you? May I remind you that Nora and Doug have the best cook in the area, keep the most beautiful ballroom, and always hire the most talented musicians? And the girl is also quite charming."

"The girl is a half-breed," his wife replied with a pinched face. "A mulatto. Such a thing belongs in the slave quarters. One doesn't just raise her as the 'daughter' of the house and have a great celebration for her 'coming of age.' But Doug Fortnam acts as if the conception and rearing of this bastard is some brilliant achievement!"

Warrington smiled. Lord Hollister, Lucille's uncle, was well known for siring bastards with black slaves. Lucille and her aunt looked past the fact that the Hollister plantation was actually populated with dozens of her cousins and half-cousins. Even their coachman Jimmy had some resemblance to the plantation owner, who had retired to his townhouse in Kingston several years ago. He left the plantation to Lucille's husband after having adopted the young woman, who came from the destitute Hornby family of civil servants. Lord Hollister hadn't had any children with his wife. Doug and Nora Fortnam, on the other hand, had two younger sons in addition to today's debutante.

"Is the girl not actually Nora's illegitimate daughter?" Lord Warrington asked.

He still hadn't entirely sorted out the situation at Cascarilla Gardens, even though he had already been living next door for five years with Lucille. But the Fortnams did not keep close contact with their neighbors. They were polite and invited them to parties from time to time, but they were not seeking out friendships. The other planters also kept more distance from the owners of Cascarilla Gardens. Doug and Nora Fortnam had a very outlandish way of dealing with their black plantation workers. Although they kept slaves like everyone else in Jamaica, they hardly ever employed white overseers; they gave their slaves more days off than the others; and they set up a system with a sort of self-governance under the leadership of a black foreman.

Initially, the neighbors had expected the whole thing to turn into a disaster. After all, everyone knew that the blacks were lazy and often violent if not kept under strict control. Nonetheless, Cascarilla Gardens flourished despite the owner's unconventional style of leadership. In fact, it was among the richest plantations in Jamaica, which made many of the other planters envy Doug. What he saved on

salaries for overseers alone! However, no one would even think about taking on his model for his own plantation.

Lady Warrington exhaled sharply. "All the worse!" she said. Unlike her husband, she remembered the details quite well. "Well, it wasn't Miss Nora's fault, she had been kidnapped and ... and one of the men was probably violent with her ... but that's exactly why! Who wants to keep the ... the fruit of such a misfortune around?"

Warrington shrugged. He also found the whole situation disconcerting. After Nora had spent years in captivity in a pocket of resistance partially comprised of runaway slaves and then was finally freed, Doug Fortnam had not only married her but also adopted her daughter, who had been fathered by one of the insurgents. Well, he did find the girl quite charming and she had probably been delightful as a child. Perhaps Doug simply didn't have the heart to separate mother and daughter. His heart was too soft - everyone around Kingston had agreed on that matter for years. And at some point, he would end up paying for having such a lax attitude toward his blacks ...

The carriage was now passing one of the last fields on the Hollister plantation, where some slaves were planting sugarcane. The men hardly looked up, which Warrington noted with satisfaction. After all, they shouldn't be wasting time and watching his carriage, but working. He nodded approvingly at the overseer. The burly Scot sat on his horse with gun and whip at hand, but not in continuous use. The man did a good job, as his presence was clearly enough to put the fear of God into the blacks. And apparently, he didn't support this business with the slaves singing! Some overseers promised higher yields if the men swung the machetes to the rhythm of a song. Every now and again, singing could be heard coming from Cascarilla Gardens. Warrington, however, didn't care for it much and preferred the silence - if only because his wife talked so much. Although, at present, she had gone quiet with indignation.

Apparently, she was still at odds over her participation in this party, caught between disapproval and curiosity.

Then the silence was broken. When the Warringtons' carriage crossed the border into Cascarilla Gardens, rapid hoof beats and bright laughter echoed from a side path. Coachman Jimmy stopped the horses abruptly. Lady Lucille hissed resentfully, as she had nearly slipped off her seat.

Warrington was calmer. Had Jimmy not stopped short, it would have been nearly impossible for him to avoid a collision with the two riders whose horses were now galloping on the road in front of them. A petite gray horse with a young woman in the saddle had just overtaken a much larger brown one. The young man, who was desperately spurring his horse on to a faster pace, called out a fleeting apology to the Warringtons. The gray had already disappeared between the plantations.

Warrington snorted. "The young Keensley," he muttered.

"And the Fortnams' bastard daughter," Lucille added acerbically. "Scandalous! I say ... we should not support this!"

Warrington shrugged. "And yet, we will enjoy the evening," he replied. "Moving on, now, Jimmy! I'll be needing a good swig of rum to help with the startle. Or rum punch."

The Fortnams' cook had a legendary punch recipe and Warrington's mouth was already watering. And the Fortnam daughter was also an extremely pleasant sight, even if she was only galloping by on horseback. It would undoubtedly be even more exhilarating to watch her dancing later. Warrington wondered if it would come across as fatherly or just seem ridiculous if he offered to lead the girl for a minuet ...

"See? It's just as I said - Alegria is faster than your brown horse, even if he has racehorse ancestors. Alegria has oriental blood, she is a granddaughter of a Darly Arabian ..."

Deirdre Fortnam immediately began trying to persuade her companion as they crossed the finish line where the plantation paths met the hard-surfaced driveway of Cascarilla Gardens and they slowed their horses to a walk. The small gray mare had masterfully won the impromptu race.

Quentin Keensley, her tall, lanky, red-haired companion twisted up his mouth a bit. It was hard to accept defeat.

"Well, surely the fact that she needn't carry around a lot of weight plays a role in it," he countered. "Since you, Miss Fortnam, weigh hardly more than a feather. The loveliest feather from the most delightful of hummingbirds that our entire world has ever produced ..."

Young Keensley twirled his beard, which was fashionably trimmed to a point, and smiled at the girl. The smooth words were clearly about more than their ride - horses didn't really interest him. What attracted him was Deirdre Fortnam and nothing else.

Quentin was well traveled. His family had provided him with a traditional English education and also given him a trip to Europe before his return to Jamaica. But he had never seen a girl anywhere that was as beautiful as the daughter of his neighbors. Her skin alone - cream with a shot of coffee in it, soft and silky. Quentin longed to touch it. And her unusual hair ... it was black, but neither straight, nor with big curls, nor really frizzy. It was much finer than the hair of all the other black people he knew and cascaded down her back in tiny ringlets. And then her eyes! They looked like emeralds, protected by long, dark black lashes. There was a fire in them! Just like now, as Deirdre glared at him.

"Hey, that makes it sound as if I were just a decoration atop my horse!" she complained. "Alegria wants to be ridden! You can certainly try, but I'll tell you, if you can't really ride, you won't manage to get her to stop before Kingston!"

The young woman stroked the neck of her mare, which actually seemed quite relaxed and agreeable. Keensley was sure that Deirdre was exaggerating. Although, in fact, he wouldn't have thought the horse capable of such great speed as it had just shown.

"I bow before your horsemanship and your beauty!" he exclaimed with an apologetic smile and bowed his head.

He would have also liked to tip his hat, but the tricorne had already been lost at the beginning of the wild ride. He would have to send out a slave to look for it.

Deirdre guided her horse around her parents' house, a cheerful construction in the colonial style that had reminded her of a castle in her childhood. There were turrets, verandas, and balconies. It was painted in blue and yellow, her mother's favorite colors, and adorned with ornate carvings. Cascarilla Gardens itself trained carpenters and wood carvers. The slaves here had many more children than on other plantations - Doug Fortnam accepted marriages among his people. He didn't tear any families apart by selling men, women, and children separately. In fact, Doug actually sold no slaves at all. Whoever was born on Cascarilla Gardens had the right to live there. It was good, since under these conditions, almost no one ran away, but activities had to be found for all the young blacks.

Deirdre and Quentin trotted along the Fortnams' garden fence, which surrounded a vast, already festively-decorated property. The common rooms at Cascarilla Gardens led out to the garden areas and when the weather was nice, the wide doors of the ballroom were opened and the guests could sit outside or walk between the trees and flowerbeds. Nora Fortnam was a great friend of the Jamaican flora. She put all of her pride into cultivating as many species of the island's orchids as possible in her garden, pampered her acacias, and tolerated the ubiquitous, thirty-foot-high cascarillas that gave the plantation its name. A giant Blue

Mahoe dominated the garden, offering shade in the summer. Now there were lamps hanging on its branches.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Deirdre said joyfully, pointing at the decorations. "I decorated the garden yesterday with the maids and my brother. You see that red lamp up there? That's mine - I made it!"

"Very ... pretty ..." Keensley commented with restraint, "but you shouldn't spoil your hands with housework ..." In Quentin's family, a lady would have the slaves decorate the garden if need be. And she certainly would not have taken part in producing the lanterns.

Deirdre sighed. "And I should wear riding gloves," she said with a guilty glance at her fingers, which were almost always gripping Alegria's reins and keeping the mare alert. "I just always forget. But riding and gardening are more the cause of calluses than a bit of paper folding. It doesn't really matter anyway. 'There's no shame in work,' as my father always says ..."

At a young age, Doug Fortnam had financed his trip through Europe himself by toiling away on farms and in quarries. In the end, he even worked as a sailor to pay for the journey back to Jamaica.

Deirdre brought her horse back up to a gallop to reach the stables faster. The sight of the decorated garden had reminded her that she ought not to stay on her horse any longer but should have already been changed and ready for the evening. After all, this was her party - the Fortnams were celebrating her eighteenth birthday.

The stable area had long been prepared for receiving guests. Kwadwo, the old stableman, awaited the carriages in front of the entrance, prepared to greet the guests, and take their horses. He had also insisted upon dressing in the traditional livery of a servant from a noble household: light blue with yellow lapels and sleeve cuffs. On top of that, he wore a white, powdered wig. He looked rather peculiar to Deirdre dressed like that, but Kwadwo seemed to like the



suit. He would step forward in a stately fashion and open the carriage doors for the ladies and gentlemen with an elegant swing. Then he would bow in the manner of a footman in the court of the Sun King. Someone must have shown it to him at some point and it took his fancy, since his lordship did not maintain such formalities.

Otherwise, however, his behavior was not particularly subservient. Quite the contrary: As the busha - which is what they called the black plantation heads in Jamaica - he represented the interests of the other slaves. Doug Fortnam valued him as a mediator between the slave quarters and manor house. In addition, Kwadwo also held the position of Obeah Man, the spiritual leader of the slaves on the plantation. However, that was a strict secret. Among the whites, the Obeah cult was generally frowned upon and usually forbidden on the plantations. The slaves would have to sneak out at night for the ceremonies. Doug and Nora Fortnam would never admit to their neighbors that they tolerated their workers' Obeah meetings, but, in fact, they would look the other way if a chicken disappeared from time to time as a sacrifice for the Obeah gods ...

When Deirdre and her companion stopped their horses in front of the stables, Kwadwo immediately came out to them - although he did spare himself the formal greeting with the daughter of the house. Quite the contrary, in fact. After a glance at the position of the sun and Deirdre's flushed cheeks, a displeased expression ran across his broad, wrinkled face.

"My goodness, Missis Dede, what are you doing ... why are you here? You should've been in the house all this time. Your mommy will scold you! And riding out alone with a gentleman! Is that how a lady behaves? Admit it, you smuggled the horse out of the barn on your own - I wouldn't have let you ride off without accompaniment ..."

Deirdre laughed. "I would have outrun the servant anyway!" she responded.

Kwadwo looked up to the heavens. "And you probably also outran Mr. Keensley just now, haven't you? When I look at your hair ..."

Deirdre had pinned up her curls and tucked them under her hat before her ride, but they'd come loose during their race. Deirdre was about to respond argumentatively, but then Quentin spurred his horse between the servant and her mare. The young man flew into a rage. The lack of respectful greeting had already angered him - and now the slave also proved amazingly perceptive with regard to his defeat in the race.

"Is this how you speak to your mistress, nigger?" he snapped at Kwadwo. "Did I hear an unfitting form of address just there?"

The young man's riding crop cut through the air - but the old stableman caught the blow in his large, calloused hand.

"Not so, young sir!" he said quietly. "I am no slave, I am a free man. And how I speak, I am only accountable to the backra and no one ..."

Kwadwo broke off. Free or not, it wasn't for him to rebuke the young man. Even though the young man had deserved the reprimand - it was not proper for a gentleman to lure a girl out for a ride without a chaperone. Deirdre was sometimes a bit reckless, but Quentin Keensley should not have exploited it.

Quentin let his eyes shift angrily and helplessly back and forth between the old black man and the distressed Deirdre.

"What is he talking about?" he turned to the young woman, confused. "That sounds like ... like proper English."

Most of the slaves taken from Africa only spoke broken English to their masters or at least acted as if they didn't know how to express themselves fluently. However, Kwadwo and the other slaves on Cascarilla Gardens refrained from doing the latter and Nora Fortnam urged

the young blacks to speak in full sentences. Kwadwo, who had come to Jamaica as a young man, had acquired the language quickly. Nonetheless, his former masters were never to find out about it and, even today, he spoke Pidgin when guests came. He had just forgotten in front of Quentin.

"Kwadwo has been here for fifty years," Deirdre responded and looked at the gentleman angrily. Only then did Quentin notice her outrage. "It is completely normal that he speaks English. But you should be ashamed of yourself, hitting old men! That is ... young men also should not be beaten ... well, slaves in general. At that, Kwadwo isn't even a slave. My father gave him his freedom long ago. Kwadwo is our Busha. And he is part of the family!" She turned a bit red. "So, he is something of a grandfather to me ..." Deirdre smiled to the old Obeah man conspiratorially.

Kwadwo's face was beaming. "Now, now, Missis, I'm probably too black for that ..." he protested good-naturedly, knowing full well that Deirdre's paternal grandparents were no less dark-skinned that he was.

But Deirdre took strongly after her mother and the Fortnams made no point of hanging her descent from the rooftops. She was the child of Nora and Doug - if something else were being whispered, it was always in secret. Those who didn't already know the story at that point would often doubt the truth behind such talk.

"You are quite right, Kwadwo!" Deirdre laughed. "Have you hurt yourself?"

She pointed to his hand and slid out of the saddle. Quentin's offer to assist her in doing so was deliberately ignored.

The stable master shook his head, causing the longer curls of his wig to flit about atop his head.

"No, Missis. I have calloused hands ... just like you will soon, if you don't finally start wearing gloves when

riding ..."

Kwadwo probably would have started with his usual tirade again now, were the Warrington's carriage not coming up the driveway. Kwadwo quickly called a couple of stable boys to take Alegria and Keensley's brown horse into the stables while he took care of the guests himself.

"Mrs. Warrington, Backra Lord Warrington!" Kwadwo performed his famous bow in full. "Welcome to Cascarilla Gardens! You had good trip? Not too hot without roof on carriage? Jimmy, good-for-nothing, don't ever think that you will spoil Missis complexion with sun ..."

Deirdre smiled when she saw Quentin watching irritably. Kwadwo was once again playing his role brilliantly, but Quentin did not seem to see the humor in it. In general, this Quentin Keensley ... Deirdre shook her head at her own stupidity. How could she have bothered with him! She didn't even glance at him again as he escorted her to the main house. She had so hoped for an open-minded, intelligent companion when he told her of his travels through Europe. But now he proved to be nothing but a pompous little sugar baron: Always quick with the whip in hand when a slave couldn't fight back. Always ready to take all people with black skin for stupid.

And he was not even a decent rider!

## CHAPTER 2

Nora Fortnam stood ready to greet the guests in front of the reception rooms and looked equally as annoyed as she did relieved when Deirdre finally slipped in. Her daughter also looked appropriately guilty. Without Keensley's accompaniment, she probably would have chosen the kitchen entrance to quickly enter the house unseen, but that clearly couldn't happen with the gentleman at her side – fortunately, her wild daughter stuck to the basic rules of etiquette. Even though the young man did not seem very presentable at the moment. Nora noted how the house servant at the door looked at Quentin's suit with disdain. Keensley's already festive clothing had suffered a bit on the excursion with Deirdre. His pale blue jacket and matching breeches had a light reddish tinge from the dust on the trails. On top of that, he was missing his tricorne, a necessary piece in accordance with the current fashion. To appear at a formal social event without his hat under his arm was not gentlemanly and Keensley looked embarrassed. They managed to look past his not so neatly powdered hair in house Fortnam, considering that the master of the house used to disdain the fashion himself.

"Dede, what took you so long?" Nora said to her daughter. "You should already be in full array and standing beside me, ready to greet the guests! After all, it's your day! And I'd do better not to ask where you were and with whom!" Deirdre's riding dress and her loose hair made the question largely unnecessary.

Nora would have almost felt pity for her daughter's companion, were she not so upset about her lateness. He

had probably been hoping to start a courtship with Deirdre, but Nora needn't worry about that. Her daughter had turned down every gentleman so far. She was far more interested in racing on horseback than exchanging forbidden affections.

"And you, Mr. Keensley, you'd better freshen up a bit, too!"

Nora looked around for a house servant who could take care of helping Quentin and sent two little black boys out to look for the guest's tricorne hat. Deirdre quickly disclosed the route along which she had led Keensley. She seemed amused by the whole matter and was clearly having a grand old time.

Nora sighed. She had also been wild in her younger years and still loved racing on her horse to this day. Only, she had paid more attention to formalities at Deirdre's age - or at least she acted as such ... the memory of her own escapades nearly made her smile, but she held back now. Deirdre was already hopelessly spoiled and now was not the time to show understanding.

"Now hurry up, Deirdre, you're needed here!" she then told her daughter sternly. "We'll talk about your behavior later ... it is outrageous to simply slip away with Mr. Keensley as you have done!"

Deirdre smiled apologetically. "Oh, don't be angry, Mommy!" she plead and kissed her mother on the cheek - and then backed away in disgust to wipe the powder from her lips. "I'll just arrive later. When everyone is already here, I'll come ... hmm ... glide down the stairs and everyone will look up at me admiringly."

She straightened up and moved with exaggerated, dance-like steps, as if she were already wearing high heels and a corset.

Nora tried to keep a straight face, but didn't entirely succeed. "Now glide up to your room!" she said warmly. "The girls are already waiting to dress you. Tell them to

hurry. We didn't organize this celebration for fun, Deirdre. We're introducing you to society and it would be most desirable if you could behave accordingly ..."

Nora herself had already long been dressed for the occasion - and was an impressive sight. Although she was already over forty and had given birth to three children, she was still slim. On this day, she was laced up tighter than usual. She hated wearing corsets and usually went about her daily work without one. Nora was knowledgeable on healing and often took the place of a doctor for the blacks and whites on their own and even the neighboring plantations. For that, she preferred wearing lightweight, comfortable, cotton clothes. For Deirdre's birthday party, she was wearing an elegant dark-green, silk robe with gold trim, and had even powdered her artfully pinned up hair and worn makeup according to current standards. She hoped that her husband would also be willing to make concessions for the current fashion, but had no high expectations. The plantation owner and successful lawyer found it quite amusing to shock his neighbors by breaking the conventions. Doug Fortnam preferred pants to knee breeches, only owned one wig for court appearances, and refused to powder his full head of blond hair white.

"Experience shows," he used to lecture, "that people's hair turns gray in the long run, if you live long enough. I intend to wait for that. And even the deathly pallor will eventually set in on its own. I do not intend to start early by painting my face white."

Nora was of the same opinion entirely, but on this day it was just more important to make a good impression than to take a stand for their convictions regarding fashion. This party was important for Deirdre - even if the girl herself couldn't see it and Doug only had to a limited extent. But Nora had been keeping a sharp eye out and hadn't failed to notice that Deirdre was in danger of becoming isolated from Jamaica's better society. Over the course of the past

year, there had been many balls and receptions in Kingston and the surrounding plantations in celebration of young girls' coming out in society. This custom had its roots in England, where the young ladies of nobility were traditionally presented to the Queen in their eighteenth year. At that age, they were considered ready for marriage and could be courted by suitable young gentlemen. In the colonies, it had been modified for their own, specific circumstances - whoever had a daughter of appropriate age would give a ball, inviting an extensive list of acquaintances along with their sons and daughters. This was how the young people - who otherwise lived on distant plantations - met and got to know each other. Of course, the purpose of the whole thing was marriage.

Nora had also been expecting invitations for her daughter over the past year, but they didn't actually materialize. The representatives of Kingston's high society certainly did not say it to the Fortnams and would have absolutely denied any accusations of excluding Deirdre because of her dubious origins. With invitations, people already even used to "forget" her from time to time as a child and with the debutant balls it became obvious. Deirdre Fortnam was unwelcome.

Nora had considered it for some time and then decided to take action. Deirdre's eighteenth birthday was to be the occasion for one of the most glamorous balls that had ever taken place in Kingston and Spanish Town. And no one that came to Cascarilla Gardens that evening would be able to keep from including Deirdre on their invitation lists thereafter.

Doug, who was still willing to believe it was an accident, pointed out that people could simply avoid their reception if they wanted to continue ignoring Deirdre. But Nora didn't harbor such fears. Cascarilla Gardens was too big and too highly-esteemed and Doug was too well known and sought-after as a lawyer and expert on international trade law for



anyone to risk an affront there. The invited guests would come and then hopefully be convinced of what a beautiful and well-bred young woman Deirdre Fortnam really was! If the lady deigned to show it ... and if she no longer persisted with such escapades as unaccompanied rides with the neighbor boys.

Deirdre hastened to the first floor of the house and was happy not to have crossed paths with anyone in the ballroom. The guestrooms had long been occupied and the first visitors from Kingston and the Blue Mountains had already arrived in the morning. The Fortnams took it as a matter of course - people lived too far apart for short visits and if the household was well organized, the full house hardly meant any more work for the hosts. There was no lack of personnel at any of the plantations - and the household staff at Cascarilla Gardens was particularly well trained. The younger ones were born on the plantation and were taken under the strict custody of the cook Adwea, whom everyone lovingly called Mama Adwe. Along with Nora, a merchant's daughter and well trained in all social affairs, and the first housemaid, Carrie, Adwea trained outstanding kitchen maids, lady's maids, and house servants to be at the disposal of the family and their guests.

Three black girls had been waiting for Deirdre and were looking at her excitedly.

"Missis, hurry now!"

Amali, the oldest of the girls, couldn't help Deirdre out of her riding dress fast enough. Genet, the second, was holding a bowl of warm water and a sponge ready, so that Deirdre could freshen up. To her pleasure, Deirdre noticed that the water smelled of roses and lavender - the girls must have put a few drips of flower essences into it. She washed up quickly while Amali and Genet already had her silk underclothes, stockings, and the unavoidable corset ready.

Most of the ladies of their society wouldn't have sponged themselves off. Nearly all of them handed their personal hygiene over entirely to their black servants. However, Nora always made sure that Deirdre was independent. She found it embarrassing to reveal the most intimate parts of her body to her servants and had passed this shame on to her daughter. Deirdre didn't have any body servants - although she sometimes did quite enjoy being treated like a princess.

Kinah, the third girl, was skilled at hairdressing. She insisted upon taking down Deirdre's hair and brushing it out before she got dressed.

"It's very dirty, Missis, and if the red sand gets on the white dress ..."

Deirdre giggled at the thought of Quentin Keensley's dusty party array and let the girls in on the story of his defeat in the race. The three happily laughed together. Amali in particular was more of a friend to Deirdre than a house servant.

"But if you treat the young gentlemen this way," the girl now pointed out, "You'll never find a husband, Missis! You read it to us yourself: A girl should be humble, gentle, and kind. There's nothing about horse races in your book!"

Deirdre had several books from England that explained how the young ladies of high society were to behave. Nora had dutifully ordered this literature - driven by her bad conscience. She knew well that she had let her daughter and also her younger sons grow up far too freely. The Fortnam children played with the slave children in the kitchen, in the garden and even in the slave quarters. They could swim and ride, rove about the beach, in the woods and in the sugar fields. Deirdre only even began to wear shoes with some regularity at the age of fifteen.

Her tutor, the gentle Scot, Ian McCloud, wasn't exactly strict with her either. In terms of assertiveness, he had already failed when Doug had originally hired him as an

overseer for his slaves. Now that was actually good enough by the Fortnams' standards. In reality, the blacks quite excellently organized themselves under Kwadwo's leadership, but at some point Doug had to give in to pressure from the community, feeling that slave quarters without an overseer were a threat to public order. So, he hired McCloud at Cascarilla Gardens. He spent his first years on the plantation mostly reading or daydreaming under a palm tree - while his wife Priscilla, a self-proclaimed medium, summoned ghosts. It was only with the Fortnam children that Mister Ian, as the blacks called him, had found his true calling. He first taught Deirdre and then also provided her younger brothers with a comprehensive education. Doug hadn't sent any of his children to school in England, since he had traumatic memories of his own time in boarding school. If Thomas and Robert wanted to study at some point in the future, they were still able to travel to the motherland.

"There was something about riding in the books," Deirdre then explained, as Kinah fought with her hair. "But only nonsense! The gentleman must make sure that his lady is only given the gentlest, slowest horse ... but in England it seems that they only ride for pleasure and not to go anywhere!"

Nora had told Deirdre about her rides in St. James Park and hunts on horseback in Scotland. The girl certainly would have found a hunt on horseback an exciting pastime. However, Nora forbade her daughter from participating in similar such events here in Jamaica. In Kingston, they didn't hunt wild animals, but chased young black boys who made a game out of running away from the riders. The children might have found that fun, but Nora considered it inhumane. And it made Doug think of the real slave hunts in which his father had always happily participated - they would chase after runaway blacks with dogs and horses and then punish them cruelly for the escape attempt. The

playful hunts had also served as a means of training the animals.

"In any case, I won't marry a man for whom I have to act like a shy, silly girl who can't even ride!" Deirdre continued. "My husband will have to take me as I am."

Amali laughed uncomfortably. She knew a bit about Deirdre's story - the story of Nora Fortnam's kidnapping and her relationship to Deirdre's biological father, Akwasi, was known in much greater detail in the slave quarters than in the fine society of Kingston. Deirdre would be lucky if she could even choose from the young men among the white backras. She could just as well end up as a servant in the slave quarters. In the eyes of the law, the daughter of an escaped slave was considered black - up until a few years prior, plantation owners weren't even permitted to issue letters of manumission to their slaves. It had since changed. Kwadwo and Adwea were free - and somewhere in her foster father's chests, there was also a document signed by the governor designating Deirdre as a free black. It gave Deirdre security - but it didn't necessarily make her any more appealing as a marriage candidate for young men like Quentin Keensley.

Amali had her young mistress stand and began to lace her up. It was easy, as Deirdre was very slim and the artificial assistance wouldn't have even been necessary at all anyway. But the extreme wasp waist formed with whalebone was the style now. Deirdre moaned as Amali energetically tightened the laces.

Then the girls helped her into a crinoline and a light, pure white dress, over which she wore a mantilla with light green ribbons. Despite the fact that her hair was still undone, Deirdre looked stunning.

Amali smiled at her friend and mistress. Luckily, she was beautiful, as Mama Adwe would say ... the men wouldn't even think about Deirdre's ancestry when they looked at the young woman and courted her favor. And their families

wouldn't dare snub Doug Fortnam of Cascarilla Gardens by categorically rejecting his foster daughter. At least that's what the Fortnams had hoped - along with their servants. There was no one at Cascarilla Gardens that wished any wrong on Deirdre.

"We really don't have any more time for makeup!"

It took a long time to get Deirdre's unruly curls into a loose braid and to weave in the orange blossoms. Deirdre turned down Genet's attempt to reach for the makeup pots in the end.

"But Missis Nora said ..."

Genet looked skeptically at her and went to say something, but only half-heartedly. It seemed completely nonsensical to the black girl that the white people would powder their already bright faces. Especially since it wouldn't flatter Deirdre at all. There was no makeup in the world that could make her more beautiful than she already was. Her skin was smooth and clear and her natural complexion suited the white debutante dress far better than the artificial paleness.

"Oh, mommy didn't mean that seriously!" Deirdre asserted and stood up. "You've done a wonderful job!" she praised the girls. "Now go down and tell the announcer that I am coming, ok? And Mommy, of course. It will be a very grand appearance!"

In her elegant silk high-heeled shoes, she was now actually moving as flirtatiously as she had demonstrated for her mother earlier. Walking around in them for the entire evening would be terrible ... but Deirdre knew that she had no other choice. She giggled when she thought about how it would be to appear at her debutante ball barefoot.

Deirdre followed the girls in her full party array to the corridor and, as the three were already running down the stairs, she stopped for a moment at the finely lathed balustrade to take a look down into the hall from above.

"Deirdre, how beautiful you are!" she heard her foster father's voice from behind. "You remind me so much of your mother today! I still remember the first time I saw her - it was at a Christmas party. She came down the stairs and was so beautiful ... I immediately fell in love with her. And tonight you will probably turn the head of every young man down there! Just be careful that they don't fight over you!"

Doug Fortnam smiled mischievously at his foster daughter. He was also on his way to the guests, but now just had to stop and take a look at Deirdre alone. His somewhat angular face was now traversed by wrinkles that the sun and wind had formed in his always-tan skin. But every now and again, the boyish, bold expression that Nora had fallen in love with so many years ago would still shine through.

"You also look very nice!" Deirdre returned the compliment. "Very sharp. I'm afraid I wouldn't have recognized you among all those people."

Doug laughed at her teasing him. In fact, he had given in to Nora's demands and forced himself into knee breeches, silk stockings, a lace jabot, and a brocade jacket. The high buckled shoes were the hardest for him. Doug felt his attire was ridiculous and made him look too much like a dandy - and why he should have to carry his tricorne under his arm in his own house was also a mystery to him. But he acquiesced this once to the prevailing fashion and had even powdered his full blond hair white, clipping it together on his neck.

"Then stay with me until you get accustomed to the sight," he said with a wink and offered Deirdre his arm. "May I, princess?"

Deirdre smiled as she walked down the stairs to the ballroom on his arm. The announcer, who had been specifically hired for such events, stood at the bottom of the stairs, ready to announce them.