

# MOCCASIN TRACE by Hawk MacKinney

## EXCERPT

Like the proper exemplary young lady, a bored Sarah quietly sat in the drawing room, daintily sipped her tea, thinking how they'd be here for hours with this meaningless chitchat, and wishing she was out riding, wishing she was anywhere but here.

Bessie stood to one side, tryin' not to think of Sam. 'Membered Mistress Corinth'a calling these folks merchants. Mistress was right, these were uppity folk with no manners.

"It's understandable you're being so busy," Abigail sighed. "There's simply not enough time to do all the things a body must do to get ready for the Saint Catherine's Christmas Ball." She placed her Wedgwood cup and saucer just so on the marble-top tea table.

"Of course," Corinthia fastened on a charming smile. "Charlestown is all the talk."

Abigail leaned close, intimate, "I spoke with Jonathan. He wouldn't hear of taking time off, spending the season in Charlestown. Heaven knows it would've done him a world of good. I told him if the Greers and Ingrams are going, the very least we could certainly do is be in Charlestown to welcome our Queensborough friends." Her immaculate French maid hurried in with more tea and an array of sweets.

Corinthia sipped with her smile fixed in place...showy hanger-on. Being invited to Charlestown's Saint Catherine's Ball the week of Christmas was all the talk, not only of Georgia and South Carolina, but considerably beyond. Invitations had come through Andrew's cotton and tobacco friends. Corinthia wasn't about to countenance having anyone think the Whiteheads were their associates. It was strain enough remaining gracious with such interlopers.

"I surely understand why you're so very excited. Everyone will be there," Corinthia said.

"I was so relieved they arrived yesterday." Abigail Bothwell Whitehead fairly beamed. "When your man dropped off your note telling me you would call, I was all in a twitter. At the time our invitations hadn't arrived. I immediately sent Jonathan straight to the post office." She rolled her eyes in mock relief. With an insipid smile through a pinched mouth and puckered lips, she gloated, "I was so reassured when he came back with them." She could hardly contain herself, enjoying herself immensely -- the perfect dig at uppity Corinthia Greer. "It will be so grand. Anyone who's anybody will be there."

Sarah's expression matched her mother's composure; Corinthia's attention never left Abigail. Sarah knew Abigail and how venomous this artless woman could be.