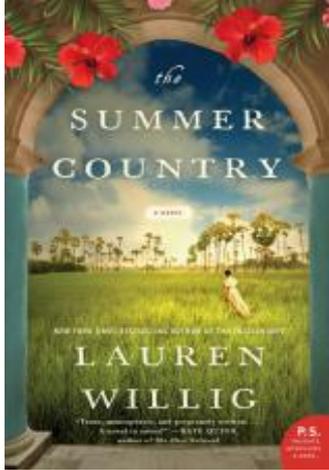


The Summer Country

by Lauren Willig



About the Book

A brilliant, multigenerational saga in the tradition of *THE THORN BIRDS* and *NORTH AND SOUTH*, *New York Times* bestselling historical novelist Lauren Willig delivers her biggest, boldest and most ambitious novel yet --- a sweeping Victorian epic of lost love, lies, jealousy and rebellion set in colonial Barbados.

Barbados, 1854: Emily Dawson has always been the poor cousin in a prosperous English merchant clan --- merely a vicar's daughter, and a reform-minded vicar's daughter, at that. Everyone knows that the family's lucrative shipping business will go to her cousin, Adam, one day. But when her grandfather dies, Emily receives an unexpected inheritance: Peverills, a sugar plantation in Barbados --- a plantation her grandfather never told anyone he owned.

When Emily accompanies her cousin and his new wife to Barbados, she finds Peverills a burnt-out shell, reduced to ruins in 1816, when a rising of enslaved people sent the island up in flames. Rumors swirl around the derelict plantation; people whisper of ghosts.

Why would her practical-minded grandfather leave her a property in ruins? Why are the neighboring plantation owners, the Davenants, so eager to acquire Peverills? The answer lies in the past --- a tangled history of lies, greed, clandestine love, heartbreaking betrayal and a bold bid for freedom.

THE SUMMER COUNTRY will beguile readers with its rendering of families, heartbreak and the endurance of hope against all odds.

Discussion Guide

1. In the first chapter, Emily tells us that "her grandfather had always said she was the most like him." What did that mean to her at the start of the book? What might it mean to her by the end, when she has learned more of her

grandfather's life story?

2. When Emily is shocked to learn that London Turner --- himself born into slavery --- had owned slaves, his nephew Dr. Braithwaite challenges her: "Should my uncle be subject to sterner censure than the man who owned [Pever-ills]? Or, for that matter, than those who traded in sugar, knowing whence it came?" What do you think?

3. Charles tells Jenny: "My father always said that the institution of slavery is a disease that sickens owner and owned alike --- but so much worse for the owner, who has choice in the matter. To own another person corrupts one." Do you believe this, as Charles seems to? What does it mean that Charles' father believed it yet continued to enslave people? How are the other plantation owners in the book corrupted by the fact that they own people? How does this reflect on Charles himself?

4. Charles and his father both have children with enslaved women. How are their circumstances --- and the way they treat the women involved --- different? How are they similar?

5. When Jenny and Mary Anne are teenagers, they carefully stick together in order to protect themselves from the danger posed by Mary Anne's Uncle John. What happens after marriage frees Mary Anne? Does that newfound freedom change her relationship with Jenny?

6. Mary Anne attempts to free herself from the threat of her uncle by marrying Robert Davenant. But after marriage, she discovers she still has little control of her life and fortune and is still very much under threat. Were there any good options available to 19th-century women?

7. Dr. Braithwaite says of Mary Anne: "If you ask anyone, they'll tell you that Mrs. Davenant was a good mistress --- by the standards by which people judge their own." How would you judge Mary Anne? What might Jenny, or Charles, or Jonathan Fenty say?

8. After Robert's death, Charles thinks, "They had killed Robert. Or had Robert killed himself? Fate or free will, divine judgment or the mere consequence of one choice leading to another and another and another, until the weight of those choices collapsed on one, bearing one down." What do you think?

9. Why does Jenny tell Bussa to burn Beckles to the ground? Would you have done the same?

10. Mary Anne tells Emily, "You've come to be a judgement to me. Or to put things right. One or the other. Unless they're one and the same." What do you think Emily's presence at Beckles means for Mary Anne?

11. When the truth dawns on Emily that she is Jenny's granddaughter, she thinks, "The truth was that she didn't want to believe that might have been her grandmother in the picture. It was one thing to go to a lecture and account herself enlightened...but quite another to imagine oneself in shackles, bought and sold because of the color of her skin." Does it matter that Emily was raised by abolitionists? Does that help her to accept the truth about her mother and grandmother?

12. Emily is determined to marry Nathaniel Braithwaite, who is also descended from enslaved people, but unlike her, his family history is unmistakable. Do you think she would have been just as willing to marry him had she not known about her own heritage?

13. What do you think will happen when Emily goes to Paris? What kind of welcome will she find there?

14. What do you think will happen to Emily and Nathaniel, Laura and George, Charles and Jenny, in the years after this novel ends? What kind of future do you see for them? Where do you see their descendants today?

Author Bio

Lauren Willig is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of more than 25 works of historical fiction, including *BAND OF SISTERS*, *THE SUMMER COUNTRY*, *THE ENGLISH WIFE*, the RITA Award-winning *Pink Carnation* series, and five novels co-written with Beatriz Williams and Karen White.

Her books have been translated into over 20 languages, picked for Book of the Month Club, awarded the RITA, Booksellers Best and Golden Leaf awards, and chosen for the American Library Association's annual list of the best genre fiction.

An alumna of Yale University, she has a graduate degree in history from Harvard and a JD from Harvard Law School. She lives in New York City with her husband, two young children and vast quantities of coffee.

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