Review: *The Rose of Martinique* by Andrea Stuart

I was totally awestruck by all the exploits and ventures that Rose encountered throughout her life. And what a life she lived! (She arrived in Paris at the age of 16, met her husband in an arranged marriage, had two children by the age of 17, agreed to a divorce, lived in a convent, returned to Martinique (a 72 day trip to and fro), was imprisoned at *Les Carmes* during the revolution, her husband Alexandre was guillotined, had numerous amorous affaires and liaisons, embarked on a life with Napoleon, was crowned empress of France, and suffered immensely when Napoleon decided that he wanted to divorce her). She had a deep spirit and she had the acute wherewithal as to know how to move forward while adapting and thriving in her new circumstances and settings. Andrea Stuart does a super job of showing how Rose’s life was intrinsically entwined with Rose’s physical surroundings. Having spent a week in Trois-Ilets, just a few kilometers from *La Pagerie,* enabled me to envision the passion that Rose had for her family and her land of origin. At barely the age of 16, Rose sailed for France in order to meet her future husband, Alexandre de Beauharnais; the journey took 3 months- a very hazardous journey with unimaginable weather conditions. When the ship landed in Brest the weather was weary and the sky was grey. Rose had so much to adapt to, for having grown up in Trois-Ilets, she had only known the sky as blue; she was accustomed to warm weather and a glowing sun.

Later in her life she recreated many of her childhood memories in the designs of the gardens- including exotic plants and animals from Martinique and surroundings at the *Château de Malmaison*. Rose was a risk taker, a loving mother, a compassionate friend, and once she had decided that she was in love with Napoleon, she adapted once again and was able to interact with him in such a way that he felt loved by her. *The Rose of Martinique* ends with this line: *When Napoleon died, in the spring of 1821, the last word to leave his lips was the name he had given her: “Josephine”.*

*Rita Davis*