

caprices. Yet catching at last her warm brown eyes in his gaze, he realized with a sudden leaping of his heart that despite her passionate and wayward nature, he still loved her. Yet, had he ever been but as a mere cypher in her regard?

A feeling of despair took him. "Ma chérie, Aimee, this is not the time for me to linger, trying to persuade you to come," said he in a weary voice. "What induces you to go so often to Fort de France, I cannot even imagine. One might say, you have a lover there; but who so stupid as to imagine that! What is there that puts you against coming with me? Not only does our Jean call for us, but it is for dear life's sake we are leaving. I tell you, Pierre and Precheur, Carbet, nay, the whole island is doomed," rising to his feet. "Peleé, the safety valve has been screwed down too long. Who remain, remain to their destruction."

Impatiently his wife shook the lace off her wrists. Said she in uncertain but defiant tones, "Eh, bien! The Governor is wrong, then? He brings his wife with him, to Pierre! M'sieur, you take your fears too much to heart. I go, but it is to Fort de France, I tell you," and the beautiful woman rose on her elbow, her excitable Creole temperament on fire.

Lacroix in his effort to restrain himself stepped to the near jalouse, and opened it. Hill and wood, plantation and farm, chateau and hut were covered with the scoriae. It was smothering the luxuriant foliage around the house, and swathing the trees in a hideous drab-gray. Through the thickness the rising sun glowed red as molten copper. Not a breath of wind was in the stifling air. Always more menacing there loomed far-overhead the gigantic tiers and cones of dark-red vapours obscuring the mountain's summit.

Yes, the island of Martinique was doomed, he again told himself. What was prompting Aimee to act so hot-headedly, so foolishly, in refusing to accompany him? He knew not. It seemed to him, she was infatuated with danger.

"What is Jean to me, that I should worry over him?" she continued, irritated at his silence. "I have my friends,

my engagements, and you have yours—just as we always have had. We part for a few days, M'sieur, without doubt, an eternity to you, my devoted husband. On your return, you will find me at Madame Lestocques."

"Madame Lestocques?" Lacroix croaked out in a harsh voice, turning round with a jerk. "I—find—you, at Madame Lestocques?"

"Madame Lestocques!" he stormed, his anger getting the better of him. "She, with her cardsharpping, and her drinking and loose conversation? I am to find you again in her house. And it is frequented by Herve Suffren, that unprincipled half-caste and his fast set. I'd sooner find you dead. You must think I am——"

But a great rushing sound as of a tremendous hurricane suddenly silenced him. Reports like cannonading, voluminous, and far-rolling, crashed in instant succession. The house quivered and heaved and groaned, settling again on its foundations with a dull thud.

"Tiens, the shocks become heavier. It is well for us to go our ways, M'sieur," said Aimee; and as if to evince her intention she arose.

Lacroix stared at her, a puzzled expression on his face. A victim of the *marriage de convenance*, Aimee had had elected to go her own way in life, indulge her desires, spend her means, and choose her intimates, without taking him into consideration at any time. Deeply occupied in the affairs of their joint estates, and of a bookish nature, Bellairs Lacroix had never succeeded in demanding her to hearken to the sacred and innerly voices of married life. Always had Aimee refused to respond to his spirit of camaraderie.

Earnestly and urgently did his excited voice ring out in the unnatural stillness everywhere prevailing.

"Ah, come with me, ma chérie. Come to Pierre, and stay there, where and with whom you wish—if you will not go to Guadeloupe with me. But do not go to Madame Lestocques at Fort de France. Ah, who knows if ever again we two will travel the same road together."

"And so I say, safety must be had at