

The Spice Temple The Journey Begins

A Novel Experience

By Cindia Luest



SAMPLE CHAPTER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this sample chapter.

Before you start, find a quiet place, maybe get something nice to drink and take your time.

The Spice Temple is a work that unfolds and builds. Allow yourself to arrive, and the characters will take you on journey to new places and discovery.

Let me know if you have any feedback and welcome to the Journey!

With best wishes,

Cindia

Read on...

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: Awakenings

This place was not unlike many other places. On any given morning, the main streets were filled with people lost in the fog of their first thoughts of the day, of all there was to do in the coming hours. In an age where time had become a rare commodity, thoughts, so focused on the next moments, left the external world mostly unnoticed.

On one morning, the sun did rise, but was shielded by thick, gray rain clouds. The main street of a small Alpine city awoke to a sea of umbrellas busily winding along in unison. Only a single, violet umbrella countered the flow and turned a corner, trying to find a place with more space.

Yasmin peered out from under the umbrella and felt the cool rain touch her skin. For a moment, she watched the clouds as they told of their mysteries and listened to the patter of the raindrops as they splashed over the cobblestones.

After pulling up the sleeve of her navy blue raincoat, she checked her small wristwatch. Feeling the weight of time and where her next steps would take her, she felt compelled to push on. She wove her way back into the crowd, to icy glares, clashing umbrellas and the occasional strike of a bag.

Eventually, she reached a large, open square, bustling with morning commuters, marching briskly along and dodging passing trams. Yasmin's eyes were drawn to a café on the corner; its windows filled with brightly colored confectionery enticed her in and promised shelter.

She stood before the café's glass doors, and when they opened she entered to the smell of croissants and coffee. Yasmin breathed in the sweet relief with a smile, and then climbed the curved stairs just ahead to the floor above. After hanging her raincoat on a brass hook, and placing her umbrella just below, she eventually found a free table and fell into a seat.

She had nearly sat on a beige fedora hat, now resting next to her on the short banquette. A silver-haired waitress wearing a black dress with white apron approached to take her order. Yasmin lifted the hat and handed it to her.

"Someone must have left this here," she said.

The waitress turned toward the stairs and both noticed a figure in a beige coat glide away down the steps.

"He's gone already," she said quietly as the soft lines on her face curved downward. She pocketed some coins that had been left on the table: Yasmin had not noticed them before. The waitress took her order, and Yasmin finally relaxed.

Wiping the still-damp fringe away from her forehead, she turned when the rain against the windowpane caught her attention. She looked out at the grand buildings, housing mostly banks and boutiques, and admired the turn-of-the-century ornamentation.

Yasmin remained mesmerized by the bustle and constant waves of trams passing through the interchange, until she noticed a street musician. Protected from the rain within the entrance of an arcade, she watched him play as his fingers nimbly strung a violin. Though she could not hear it, she smiled when imagining a familiar melody.

After another wave of trams, Yasmin's deep brown eyes widened when a black umbrella – larger than the rest – pushed its way through the crowd. A tall man stepped out from under it and stood within the arcade entrance. He thrust his umbrella shut and hastily lit a cigarette. The musician flinched from the spray of raindrops but continued to play. After finishing his piece with a long draw of the bow, he reached

out an open hand to the man with the cigarette. The lanky figure stepped forward but instead of offering change, he threw the glowing butt of his cigarette next to the change box. Turning abruptly on the heels of his polished shoes, he disappeared within the arcade, while others marched by without taking notice. Yasmin just shook her head, left wondering.

The waitress returned and placed a small silver tray on the table. Yasmin first savored a small dark chocolate that was served alongside the cappuccino, then swirled a small silver spoon through its white froth. With a sip of the warm drink, her gaze returned to the rain, and she began to reflect on her own life.

Juilliard, the prestigious music school, had turned her down twice, and the disappointment ran deep. *That one failed note*, she thought to herself, and she sighed when remembering how her fingers had failed her at the keyboard. With that one moment, her dreams had been shattered.

Looking for a distraction, she tapped her fingers on the table to the rhythm of the raindrops. After another sip, she drew a piece of paper from her bag and unfolded it. Running her fingers along the words, it read *The Spice Temple*. Although she had no experience in gastronomy, she remembered her parents' famed Kensington parties. Yasmin not only understood the fine art of entertaining, but losing herself to tastes and aromas intoxicated her with almost the same force as music.

She sat up straight and cleared her throat. If the world of music would not have her now, perhaps it was time to try something different. She held the paper tightly and then resolutely put it away. '*A new direction, just for a little while,*' she thought.

Yasmin paid the waitress, then collected her things and made her way back down the stairs. Holding her umbrella, she was about to step into the rain when, like the flap of dark webbed wings, she was nearly hit by the folding of a large, black umbrella. She jumped back in alarm as a half-burnt cigarette landed at her feet.

"Excuse me," bellowed a stern voice. A man pushed past Yasmin almost knocking her into the doorframe. Her gaze followed him, but he quickly disappeared into the café. She then looked down at the cigarette as its ashes smoldered in the rain.

Once at the edge of the city, Yasmin neared the shores of a mountain lake. After following an ivy-covered wall, a round moon gate appeared, decorated with intertwined dragons and phoenixes reminiscent of those found in Chinese gardens. As she approached the entrance, Yasmin paused and checked the note again. She wondered, '*Is this it?*'

As she passed through, she thought she saw the mythical figures writhe for her in dance. She shook her head in disbelief and then whispered with a faint smile, "This must be The Spice Temple."

The wrought iron door was already opened from within. She passed through and ran her fingers along its gilded oriental flowers still damp with the remaining cool, glistening raindrops. The rain began to slow, and a single ray of sunshine broke through the clouds. Yasmin began to feel the ordinary fall away.

A flock of birds and their cheerful chorus drew her attention to a cluster of colorful peonies. It was this time of the year when they appeared in all their glory. She noted colors ranging from shades of pearly white or soft peach to mysterious tones of deep vermilion or black velvet. Their feather-like petals, teased by a

springtime breeze, danced for her in the morning light as she leaned in to smell their fragrance. Their first high note of delicate rose was quickly overcome by a subtle shade of woody musk, foretelling that the peony's life was one of great beauty, but also short-lived. brief

A scattering of raindrops propelled Yasmin on toward a standing Mandalay Buddha that beckoned to her. She thought she saw its long, flowing robe move with the wind, as if catching the air of spirits, and heard a whisper.

Patience. There is more for you.

Looking around hesitantly at first, she picked an orange marigold and placed it at the base of the small bronze figure. She put her hands together in prayer and felt at peace.

Yasmin jumped back in alarm when a wide-eyed Siamese cat appeared, curling around her legs. With a piercing glance and purposeful meow, the cat pranced toward the villa. Yasmin sensed an all-knowing presence about the cat, and followed.

They approached a raised promenade covered in ivy. Round in form and with a fountain at the center, it shielded any direct view to the entrance. Yasmin climbed the three short steps on the left side. With the sound of her heel on the weathered teak, another sense awakened, while another piece of the outside world, and her past, fell away.

The main entrance to The Spice Temple finally revealed itself. She touched the vermilion-colored double doors that were still shut. She noticed they were well cared for, but worn by the elements, and knew this was not their first home to guard. Two golden Garudas on the doors faced each other, protecting what lay beyond. Intricate vines and flowers cascaded from the open beaks of these mystical birds, as if espousing poetic grandeur.

Yasmin reached out to grasp at one of the brass rings, but then hesitated when faced with the intricate lock mechanism, certainly crafted by former masters. She tried to peek through the keyhole, but then, to her surprise, one of the doors opened with a profound click.

A man wearing white gloves and holding a silver tray appeared. "Welcome to The Spice Temple. We've been expecting you," he said.

He handed her a small, blue and white porcelain plate. She looked down to find it bearing a warm golden pastry – too small to bite in half, but big enough for a mouthful. Two thin strips of nori seaweed wrapped it as if it were a gift, but instead of a bow, a small edible flower topped the creation. She wondered what delicious secrets it held within.

She placed the delicacy in her mouth and was immediately overcome by the most heavenly combination of flavors she had ever tasted. The outside was flaky and gave way to a warm, gentle cream. The filling had something smooth, then crunchy. The flavors shifted from pungent to sweet, with subtle notes of citrus. The taste sensation finished with sweet umami and something that tickled the palate. The welcoming gesture had both surprised and comforted Yasmin. She did not know what this strange flavor shifter was, and did not care.

When she looked up, she saw that the man had disappeared. The cat placed a paw on Yasmin's shoe and looked up and tilted his head as if saying, *'It is time.'* She turned and gazed at the garden once more before taking those next definitive steps. Although she had only sought a short reprieve, life sometimes has other plans.

To be continued.

Thank you for reading.

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