

The Spice Temple – The Journey Begins

A Novel Experience

By Cindia Luest



SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Dear Reader,

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

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 to new places and share their journeys of discovery.

And feel free to get in touch with any feedback. I'd be very grateful!

With best wishes,

Cindia

*Welcome
to the
Journey*



*The end of winter brings the early spring rain, and with it the milder
temperatures, slow melt of the snow and
a change in the air.
In the countryside, there is a sense of cleansing and awakening.
Urban settings, however, can be somewhat different.*



AWAKENINGS

Chapter 1: The Introduction to a Special Place

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 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. 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.

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 vermillion-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 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.

ARRIVALS

Excerpt from Chapter 3: An Example of the Culinary Worlds

With the orders taken, the first tastes arrived. Franz placed them at the center of the table and announced, “Amuse bouches for you. Gifts from the kitchen.”

The “Luxury Roll,” a modern sushi composition, demonstrated Sakura’s skills. With delicate and sweet lobster and smooth and silky foie gras, marinated in fragrant Lambrusco rosé, the creation was rich and inviting. The aroma of truffle oil sprinkled throughout offered a heady moment; the freshness of the chives, a reprieve. A dipping sauce of truffle oil, sweet soy and mirin accompanied the dish, as well as pickled ginger and fresh wasabi.

Alina was delighted. “This is why I love coming here! Lobster and foie gras.” She leaned into Dmitry and whispered, “And all for free!”

Not wanting to wait for the others, she picked up the sushi roll with her fingers and devoured it as if it was giving her more than culinary pleasure. Dmitry looked at the plate, shrugged his shoulders and followed Alina’s lead. After generously bathing the piece in the truffle sauce, he consumed it in one gleeful mouthful.

Rafael looked down, annoyed that he did not know what it was, or how to eat it. He picked up the chopsticks and aggressively pierced the piece of edible art from the top. He was able to secure the lobster and some of the rice on his chopstick, but the foie gras and other smaller ingredients spilled out and lay discarded on his plate.

Bettina looked on disapprovingly as her frown deepened. “I don’t eat foie gras.” She then pushed her plate away, which Alina picked up with delight. “Darling, you don’t know what you’re missing!”

The second amuse bouche was the work of Alistair’s team. The “Couscous Pearls” were served on a modern podium with four holes holding long sticks. Perched on top were golden balls made of couscous, pine nuts, tangy feta and sun-dried tomatoes. Subtle green shades from parsley and coriander permeated through the crust. The delicate bite was crowned with lemon crème fraîche and a bright twist of lemon zest.

Rafael picked up the stick and ate the small creation as if it was an ordinary olive. As was customary, Bettina put up no resistance and just swallowed. Dmitry, in contrast, brought the perfect sphere slowly towards his mouth. He balanced it between his lips and felt the textured surface. Once it fell, the crispy outer shell collapsed, revealing the warm couscous and smooth lemon crème fraîche. He leaned back as he savored the small bite. “What a lovely way to start!”

Alina picked up her bite, looked it over briefly, then wrinkled her brow when trying to understand what she was tasting. “This might be free, but I don’t think it is as exquisite as the first one. Maybe I should have dipped it in my Champagne!”

Dmitry examined his empty stick while savoring the last taste. “Dear Alina, nothing in life is free.” He then looked at Bettina, while brushing the stick along his lips suggestively. “Everything has a price, doesn’t it, dear Bettina?”

Bettina shot a quick glance at Dmitry, then looked away. “I suppose so.”

With an awkward silence that followed, Alina quickly intervened. “So, Bettina, when will the boat arrive? I do hope before the wedding!”

“Rafael said it’s scheduled to arrive soon,” said Bettina with a skeptical look.

Rafael pulled at his collar and tie. “It’s always about that damned boat!”

He glared at Alina. “What will you put in her head next?”

Alina leaned forward and clutched the edge of the table, her bright pink nails and accessories of gold and glitter fully in view. “Oh, Rafael, think of it! A boat! It will be divine!”

Rafael rubbed his temples, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His temper had been stirred and, like the breath of a restless dragon, could easily ignite. Dmitry understood and knew a distraction was needed.

“My friend, you know I’ve been wanting to discuss a new business opportunity with you. Nothing for these delicate ears. Why don’t we step outside for a moment?”

Rafael raised an eyebrow. He did not always like Dmitry’s opportunistic ways, but their business deals had proven to be profitable in the past. Rafael stood up and tossed his napkin on his chair. “Fine, I need a smoke anyway.”

They exited through The Terrace and made their way down the lawn to The Pavilion, the only place where smoking was permitted at The Spice Temple.

Mara and Candice had enjoyed the amuse-bouches, and were now patiently waiting for the next course to arrive. Candice, who looked like a younger version of her mother, had just graduated from university and was about to embark on her first job. Hired by a bank, she was excited about what lay ahead in her new professional life.

Mara had her concerns but did not want to douse her daughter’s enthusiasm. “So, tell me all about the offer they made you,” she said, cheerily.

Candice beamed proudly. “Well, I’ve been awarded a place in the ‘Early Career Program.’ You have to be nominated, and it provides a kind of orientation to the business. I’ll spend a few months working in various parts of the organization and will learn a lot!”

“That all sounds very positive, Candice,” Mara smiled. “Do you know who you’ll be reporting to?”

“All I know is that I’ll start in the projects area. Apparently, I’ve been assigned to someone very senior and influential. Human Resources said it would be a good place to start establishing a network.” She paused, enjoying the sound of her new corporate vernacular. “Because of course, building a platform is very important!”

Mara had also worked in the business world until having a family and smiled at her daughter’s enthusiasm. Just then Rafael and Dmitry passed by on their way to the garden, and Mara’s lips tightened, reminded of challenges she had once faced. She wanted to protect her good-natured daughter and thought to herself, *Those are exactly the types I am worried about.*

She reached out for Candice’s hand. “So, are you finally going to tell me the name of this company you’ll be working for?”

Candice did not want her parents interfering with her career plans and replied with a frustrated smile. “Don’t be so impatient. You know you’ll find out when the time is right.”

To Candice’s relief, Cedric arrived at the table. “Oh look, here comes the next course!” Their glances shifted to the enticing dishes placed before them, and they leaned forward to take them in.

Mara was presented with the dish, “Garden Delight.” She pulled the modern white bowl toward her, and admired the vibrant, fresh shades of green, all telling the story of early summer on a plate. A bed of green tapioca was laced with the aromas of lime and a subtle hint of ginger. Small spheres of fresh avocado, dots of avocado cream, and thin slices of mini cucumber danced throughout the surface. The dish was topped

with fresh basil and lime cress. Mara and Candice were enthralled when one of the waiting staff added the final touch – a slow drizzle of warm basil oil, from a clear teapot.

Mara savored the supple and yielding beads of tapioca, mixed with the giving, smooth avocado cream. The firm crunch of the cucumber and basil herbs brought freshness; the fragrance of the rich basil oil was luxuriant and warming. The dish offered a vision as natural and vibrant as Mara's personality, and as fresh and hopeful as Candice's dreams of the future.

Candice had the "Sea Pearl Trilogy." This composition was made of three delicately constructed pearls, plated in a row. The first was constructed of oyster cream that was carefully covered in translucent white tea and seaweed jelly. At the other side of the trilogy, a black caviar pearl, crafted from a single layer of precisely placed minute sturgeon eggs, concealed a delicate scallop. In the center, the gently folded flesh of shaved pearl oyster meat was formed into a small, round mound. It was served on a bed of oyster cream and topped with the white petals and green stems of a wasabi flower.

As Candice turned the plate to admire its elegance, they both marveled at the skill required to construct such an intricate dish. The tastes and textures were sublime, ranging from the bursts of briny sea flavor of the caviar to the luscious oyster cream and gentle mouth-feel of the sea scallop and pearl oyster meat.

Candice's appetite was whet for something new and exciting, and this dish reflected her grand visions of her future. The pearls, like small crystal balls, presented concealed visions of grandeur. The wasabi flower looked like a gentle promise, though its bite foretold little of what was to come.

THE HAVELI

Excerpt from Chapter 6: An Example of a Character's Background (Ishan)

As the heat of the midday sun dissipated, Ishan began to cool off. Having returned to his side of town, the shadows of late afternoon draped him in a cloak of familiarity, and welcomed him home.

This was the time of day that best characterized his neighborhood, the place he had decided to settle down for a while to build and create. The colorful, diffuse and sometimes dark shades drew out his diverse mix of neighbors. Recent immigrants, the working class, and students lingered in the streets, shops and cafés; young professionals frequented their favorite watering holes before retiring to their small, trendy apartments, while nightfall brought with it criminals and desperate men seeking company with ladies of the night.

Still lost in the remnants of his green fog, Ishan continued along the main street, nodding at the familiar and welcoming faces. Some he loved, others less so, but all were part of the colorful mosaic of the life he had created in the past two years.

He was about to turn the corner when he heard his name called out in a heavy Ukrainian accent. Immediately, visions of spandex, feminine wiles, and the aroma of cheap perfume, washed over him. "Ishan, why the long face?" exclaimed a young woman, by the name of Alexandra, appearing at his side. She draped a long, pale arm across his shoulders and walked with him.

He was about to say something, but then her friend, Cassandra, moved in close at his other side. She put her index finger under his chin as he turned. "What have you been up to, Ishan? Maybe we can cheer you up?"

The harmless, flirtatious game was a familiar one, and a broad smile returned to Ishan's face. "Hello, ladies! How are double-trouble doing today?"

He slowly pulled himself away from the femme fatale duo, as they teased him with suggestive comments and shrills of laughter.

They kept to their corner as he turned into his small side street. Away from the noise and bustle, his pace became less fevered. Ishan thought back to the steps that had originally taken him to this very place and to his beloved creation, The Haveli.

Ishan had grown up in Rajasthan, a place known for Rajputs, Maharajas and palaces. A place where the desert sands and the dusk suns were burned in one's memory; where the graceful elephants, camels and horses turned visions of the imagination into reality.

Ishan's father, Roshan, was a Merwari artist from Udaipur, specializing in miniature paintings. As a young man, he traveled to sell his artworks, with his repertoire eventually expanding to other artefacts, including handcrafted furniture, religious icons and other forms of art. His reputation for possessing or finding exquisite pieces grew amongst hotels, guesthouses and wealthy private residences. As a result, he journeyed extensively throughout India, selling or searching for treasures.

Ishan's mother, Mariya, had also been exposed to the diversity and richness of humanity, but not from traveling. From an early age, she had worked in her family's guesthouse, situated along the coastal backwaters of Kerala. This place of eternal summer sun, green palms and everything coconut attracted all kinds of guests from the subcontinent, as well as abroad.

Mariya's natural charm and genuine interest in caring for the guests made her popular with the visitors. Ishan's father was no exception. Roshan had traveled to Kerala

hoping to attract attention for his work and precious objects. While he did find some interest from some of the guesthouse owners, it was he instead who became enchanted.

What was meant to be a brief trip became a longer sojourn. Subsequent trips followed, all under the pretense of business. Eventually, their love for each other was no longer a secret, and Ishan's mother left the sandy beaches of Kerala for the desert sands of Rajasthan.

For many great chefs, the love for food starts in the home, and Ishan was no exception. He had many fond memories of his childhood in Rajasthan, but his real passion for cooking came from the precious holidays with his grandmother in Kerala. Her famed spice blends, masalas and renditions of local dishes were known far beyond the shores of Kerala. Her cooking also delighted the delicate palates of all international guests who would visit her.

Days were filled with games of chasing fish, hunting crabs, and gathering coconuts with his cousins and friends. At sunset, he was drawn back to the guesthouse filled with the fragrance of his grandmother's creations. Ishan was always sternly chased away from the kitchen, until cleaned up and appropriately dressed. When he returned, Ishan would be filled with hunger and anticipation. He usually sat at a table at the back of the restaurant and waited patiently. His hunger only grew, as it was teased by the constant stream of flattery from the guests. When it was finally his turn to dine, he fully savored each taste. In those moments, nothing else mattered, except his own enjoyment and the love of his grandmother.

Once old enough to travel, he accompanied his father on business trips. He was introduced to colorful characters, learned of elaborate traditions and celebrations, and the vast culinary landscape of the subcontinent left lasting impressions on Ishan.

Despite the love he had for his family, he could not ignore that hunger to go out and become something more. He wanted to experience the world and do something different. He also wanted to escape from the intrigues and watchful eyes of his extended family.

This drove him to Mumbai. He had heard that information technology, or IT, could provide a solid route to gaining employment abroad. After enrolling in a university course and graduating, Ishan started to work in consulting. His charm and clever nature served him well, and he was soon offered the opportunity to work in Switzerland: his dream of an international life had turned into reality.

His excitement, however, soon waned as his frustrations grew. He felt caged by consulting. The work became routine, and he tired of being at the mercy of clients and account managers. Personal travel was limited due to visa requirements. And even though his assignment was "global," his pay remained "local," with Ishan earning only slightly more than he had in India. Disillusionment settled in.

Ishan walked past a small Indian take-away and was reminded of how the idea to open a restaurant came to him. He had been frustrated by the Europeanized versions of Indian dining pervasive in his adopted homeland. Standard Punjabi or Bangladeshi curries were served in the same copper pots, often greasy and devoid of any bold flavors. The decor of hanging mirrored cloth, time-worn Indian Tourist Board posters, and faded plants in the windows was like the food – starved of color and light, and ultimately uninspired. Ishan quickly realized that he had left behind the desert sands of Rajasthan for a washed out culinary desert.

Knowing that Indian cuisine had far more to offer, Ishan longed for flavors more authentic and inspired. He thought back fondly to the years of his childhood, traveling with his father. The climates, religions and traditions transformed the cuisine, some changes occurring within just a few kilometers. His mouth watered, thinking of the fiery Kashmiri chilies of the north, the fish and sweets of Bangladesh, and the generous ghee and butter used in creamy Punjab dishes. He had sampled Delhi street food and enjoyed the snacks and sweet undertones of Gujarati cuisine. The cuisine of the Mughals was rich with the use of fragrant saffron, nuts and dried fruits. In his own Rajasthan, he had savored special recipes of the Maharajas. The thought of dishes from Kerala – the coconut, fresh seafood and the special touch of his grandmother, always brought a smile to his face.

Ishan had started to cook for himself and introduced his newly made friends to his culinary world. Showered with compliments, he began to realize that his true calling was not to engineer black and white bits and bytes, but rather to create with colorful spices and flavors. The need to be creative, and not follow the path of the “international consultant,” awoke within him.

With some savings, and a small loan from his father, Ishan was ready to create. He thought back to his first home, the large mansion of the extended family in Rajasthan. It was a place of childhood memories, celebration and intrigue. It had always been welcoming, at least for him. He decided to give his restaurant, his home away from home, the namesake of that special place. The Haveli, meaning palace, became his homage to his family and culture.

HARD AT WORK

Excerpt from Chapter 9: An Example of a Character's Background (Rafael)

A small, idyllic mountain village rested on the shores of Lake Luzern. Its cobbled streets, small shops and cafés provided a friendly place for locals to meet. At its center was the main square with a church that overlooked a small harbor. Surrounded by pristine farmland, the air was fresh. This place could have provided a peaceful and idyllic childhood for Rafael. But overshadowing the charming village loomed the great Mount Pilatus.

The village was the hometown of Rafael's mother, Annelies. As delicate and endearing as the first Alpine flowers breaking through the late winter snow, she grew up protected by village life. As she matured, her father, a highly respected hotelier, groomed her in all aspects of *l'hôtellerie*, later sending her to London to refine her language and hospitality skills.

It was there that she met Rafael's father, Richard. Young and ambitious, he also came from a well-connected family in the hospitality business. They became enamored with each other and, driven by the promise of opportunity, married and moved from London to Switzerland. Annelies' father took Richard on as a protégé, and the couple settled into a lifestyle filled with mountain parties and the presence of glamorous guests from far and wide. This spell of tranquility and harmony continued until Rafael came into their lives.

As an infant, Rafael cried furiously. As he grew, so did his habits of pulling, shrieking and vomiting, constantly leaving gifts of disgust in his wake. Once able to walk, he showed great joy in torturing small animals and terrorizing other children. Everyone suspected there was something deeply wrong with the child. Rumors in the village started circulating. Some turned to local legend for answers.

Pontius Pilate's final resting place was claimed to be on the shores of Lake Luzern. Some villagers thought that Rafael must have been conceived close to that spot, leaving a dark shadow on his soul. Others thought he was possessed by the dragons rumored to dwell deep within the caves of Mount Pilatus.

Like the flames of the dragons, Rafael's temperament was quick to ignite, and despite his mother's love, Rafael did not outgrow his vicious ways. His father tired of Rafael's antics and began to distance himself from the family. Soon enough, Richard abandoned them and returned to England, where he started another family. Left alone, Annelies was no match for Rafael, which made him the ruler of the house and master of his own fate.

Rafael was sent to boarding school and continued to challenge everyone around him. As with many of his contemporaries, he later studied finance. It was in investment banking that a newfound enthusiasm was born within him. He embraced risk and forged the reputation of being a winner. After moving to London, his burning ambitions grew.

Through the years, Rafael observed his father's business and personal activities. He even stayed in the hotels he knew Richard had established. The distance between them, however, remained vast. Rafael never saw his father.

Meanwhile, his voracious appetite for risk began to lapse into recklessness. Whether it was timing or fate turning on him, he started to lose, and lose a lot. His vicious streak and excessive ways worsened and became widely known. Others in a similar situation would have been fired; however, he had acquired a number of lucrative and influential clients. It would have been costly to lose Rafael to the competition.

Rafael was instead sent back to Switzerland, where, no longer a solo player, he

became burdened with responsibilities. Instead of being able to spend and operate at will, he was tasked with managing a budget and a group of juniors.

With the loss of his previous outlets for satisfying acquired tastes and habits, the urges grew within him and needed release. This led him to engage in various activities – some within varying degrees of the law – including escapades with his male cohorts at work.

“The boys” possessed special individual qualities, and the subtleties in their appearances revealed much. Their finely tailored pinstriped suits hemmed some in. Crisp white shirts kept them stiff and upright, while expensive cufflinks gleamed from their tightly bound wrists. Many of them adopted the customary banker’s haircut too: the Matterhorn. With a liberal palmful of gel formed into a mini-peak, the hairstyle came to represent the bulls of the banking world.

The boys worked for different departments, but congregated in places where their common needs were satisfied. This included dining venues, the glass-faced smoking room, and the coffee corner.

Morning had come, and Jeremy peeked into Rafael’s glass office, to collect him for their morning dose of caffeine. “Good morning, Rafael. Ready?”

Rafael ignored Jeremy, as he stared into his computer.

Jeremy took a step into the office, as he brushed a strand of his blond hair away from his forehead. “Rafaell! *Coffee?*”

Rafael remained focused. “Just a minute.”

Jeremy’s lineage and double-barreled surname were enough to shield him from the concerns most of his colleagues shared. Always dressed in bespoke Savile Row suits, and educated at Eton, his command of the Queen’s English gave him an immediate air of sophistication. The targets set by the firm never seemed to concern him, as he was able to secure significant deals with limited effort, through family connections. His parents were pleased that he had taken up a vocation aligned with family tradition, and, unlike his siblings, it kept him from being idle.

Rafael and Jeremy made their way through the open-plan office to their favorite coffee corner. It was an ideal spot for observing, as it was tucked away from the peering eyes of senior management. Once there, they shared their first espresso and plans for the day.

“So, where should we go to lunch this afternoon?”

“How about Chat Gourmand?” suggested Rafael.

“Surely you can’t mean that we should go to *that* part of town again?”

“I don’t know what you have against *that* part of town.”

“Well, the hordes of immigrants and criminals for a start!” replied Jeremy, as he brushed down his lapel. “Really, I’m surprised you haven’t been robbed yet!”

Rafael shook his head. “I think you need to expand your horizons and relax. Trust me, there’s nothing to worry about except having too much fun!” said Rafael with raised eyebrows.

“Too much of many things I’m sure!” Jeremy scoffed, rolling his eyes.

Just as they were about to get their second cup of coffee, Bryce joined them. He had just left the academic world and was still getting accustomed to his new work environment and colleagues.

Rafael and Jeremy fleetingly greeted him, but then turned their attention to Rita, a senior assistant, who was leading a young woman into the room. New hires were

commonly introduced in the mornings, and recent graduates in particular were hard to miss with their fresh, yet nervous, enthusiasm.

This new recruit was dressed in a dark blue suit and heels, with a string of pearls hanging loosely from her long neck. Rafael and Jeremy fell silent as they watched her greet her new colleagues with a warm smile and a wide-eyed expression of hope and anticipation.

Rita led her away around the corner, and Jeremy craned his neck. “Well, there goes a nice, new piece of eye candy!” he said, while the others followed his gaze.

“Yes, very sweet...” said Jeremy again, as he nodded to himself.

Bryce frowned at their leering expressions. “I fear too sweet for this place,” but his quip went largely ignored.

“So, you think she’s sweet?” said Rafael to Jeremy, with a turned shoulder to Bryce. “Interested in facilitating a transformation?”

“Oh, now that could be fun! What do you have in mind?” said Jeremy.

Bryce maneuvered away from Rafael’s shoulder. “What do you mean *transformation*?”

They snickered, continuing to ignore him, so Bryce tried again, this time a bit louder. “Excuse me. Transformation? What kind of transformation?”

Rafael sighed and rolled his eyes. “To turn her into one of us, Bryce.”

Jeremy gave Rafael a sharp look and put his arm around Bryce. “Yes, to *introduce* her to the ways of the world – like a kind of education. We have so much to share,” he said and flashed a wink at Rafael. “So, I’ll take her under my wing and show her how to fly.”

Rafael spluttered a little as he took a sip of his coffee. “So much to *share*, indeed. What good colleagues we are!”

Bryce furrowed his brow. “Exactly what kind of education or training is offered here? Is there a special program?”

“Bryce, this isn’t university,” said Jeremy, with a hint of annoyance. “We just want to introduce her to our culture, that’s all,” he assured.

“Yes, think of it as adult education,” Rafael added.

Rafael turned to Jeremy and extended his hand. “So the bet is on! How long for you to *fac-ill-itate*?”

Jeremy pushed Rafael’s hand back down. “Wait a minute, Rafael, what’s your part in the game?”

Just then, Victoria walked by. A senior consultant at the bank, Victoria was a vision of controlled elegance. Hailing from Buenos Aires, her sleek black hair was pulled back, with thin-rimmed glasses perched above her high cheekbones. Wearing a tailored suit and poised with her head held high, Rafael’s gaze was locked.

Jeremy followed Rafael’s glance. “I know! Victoria!”

“Victoria?” replied Rafael, less forcefully than he would have liked, as his eyes slowly released their grip. He turned to Jeremy and said with a slight crack in his voice, “What about Victoria?”

Jeremy’s face lit up with a twisted smile as he slapped Rafael’s arm. “You get Miss Professional Ice Queen to melt, and I’ll get Miss Naive Sunshine to go cold!”

Rafael leaned against the wall, feigning nonchalance. “Right, Jeremy, are you sure about this? You know that challenging deals are my specialty.”

As Jeremy raised an eyebrow, Bryce moved in closer to annoyed looks. “What are you going to do?” he asked.

“We’ll transform these lovely ladies,” said Jeremy, as he crossed his arms triumphantly. “I mean, *educate* our new colleagues in the ways of our world!”

Bryce's curiosity persisted. "And how will you prove that this transformation has been accomplished?"

Jeremy replied smugly, "Don't worry! The proof will be self-evident."

Jeremy looked Rafael in the eyes and held out his hand again. "Deal?" Rafael accepted Jeremy's hand this time, and the challenge. "Deal!"

Thank you for reading.

*Get your copy on the website
to find out more.*

For feedback or updates on
the upcoming release and exclusive content,
sign up
www.thespice temple.com



WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY

All rights reserved. No content may be used or copied without permission of the author.