

The Spice King

Elizabeth Camden

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Elizabeth Camden's romance *The Spice King* captures intellectual passion and patriotism at the start of the twentieth century.

For Kansas-born botanist Annabelle, a position at the Smithsonian is an exhilarating opportunity. Charged with persuading Gray Delacroix, who heads a spice empire, to share his exotic plant collection, Annabelle tries to make him see the value of collaboration, but without success. When powerful men ask her to spy on Gray, she's forced to balance her honesty in relationships with her duty to her country.

Through intricate events, Gray and Annabelle discover that they're more suited for each other than they think. The Delacroix siblings are involved in political intrigue that varies from Ida McKinley's influence to US involvement in Cuba. The suspicion that Gray is subjected to is used to bring out a message on trusting God.

A suspenseful sequence regarding Gray's business rivalry forces Gray and Annabelle to rally around an unusual cause: the problem of adulterated foods. Their interest in bringing the dangers of chemical additives and fillers to the public's attention spark with urgency.

Though it incorporates informative, historical details regarding the food industry, the text doesn't mold Gray and Annabelle as pioneers for social change, but instead portrays their moral responsibility in a subtle way. Their chaste romance, which is fed by their mutual work, is drawn as one of respect, despite the tension caused by Annabelle's spying.

Gray and Annabelle are archetypal. By her teasing assessment, he's similar to a Jane Austen character; in his view, she's a breath of fresh air coming straight from the heartland. Their thoughtful arcs see them evolve into surer versions of themselves.

The Spice King is an adventuresome, entertaining romance that blends themes of betrayal and forgiveness.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2019)

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