

THE SPICE OF DEATH

By Anne Swardson

“*Monsieur*, do you have any caraway seeds?”

The old woman was so tiny that I had to lean over the mounds of spices on my table to hear her. Clad in several layers of dusty black clothing, she spoke French with what sounded like an Eastern European accent.

I was desperately trying to succeed at my new life selling herbs and spices at this market near the Seine, six months after I’d fled Algeria. But I had no idea what caraway seeds were.

“I don’t believe so, *Madame*, but I might be able to get some,” I said in my Arabic-accented French.

“*Votre altesse*, please. Princesses should always be addressed as Your Highness. I want the servants to sprinkle it on the *saratele* so we can eat it at Sunday lunch.” She rubbed her wrinkled fingers together. “Do your best to procure it.”

Suddenly, a beefy young man in black jeans and a leather jacket strode up and grabbed her arm. He spoke in a language I didn’t understand as he pulled her away. The vendors on either side of me didn’t even turn to look; they must have seen this before.

“Let me go, you fool!” she cried loudly, trying to wriggle out of his grip as they crossed the street and headed down the sidewalk. “Don’t make me have you arrested!”

I looked over at Jean-Pierre, the vegetable seller in the next stall. “She claims she’s a Romanian princess,” he said through his huge gray mustache. “But she doesn’t have a *centime*.”

“Who’s the guy chasing her?” I asked.

“His name is Codrin. He comes for her about this time most days.”