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The Accurst Tower

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[CHAPTER 1](#)

Walking at The Accurst Tower dusk along the ramparts of an ancient fortress, three burly men wearing Arabian headdresses leaned into driving November rain. In better weather, they could have seen the Swiss skiing village far below. The crenellated battlements built of jagged stone, overlooking mountainous depths to their right, appeared to be too narrow for cannons, more suitable for arrows and javelins.

They shoved ahead a blindfolded fourth man. Wearing khakis and a nylon zipper jacket, hands tied behind him, the man was of slight build.

The men paused before a sagging oak door while one of them, his right arm severed at the elbow, kicked it open. They stooped to enter the conically roofed tower that formed the northern corner of the ramparts. All four men heard the steady clanking of an iron cage striking against stone in the rainstorm. The cage was hanging by a chain from an iron beam that protruded from the tower out over the forested depths.

“The villagers called this the Accurst Tower,” the one-armed captor said in a language the bound man The Accurst Tower did not understand. “I see why prisoners preferred the dungeon. Even with its branding irons, I’d take the dungeon over this tiny cage. I couldn’t bear to crouch in there for one minute, much less for the rest of my life while I thirsted and starved in snow or blistering sun.”

He grabbed a long wooden hook from behind the oak door and pulled the iron-latticed cage up

against an opening in the tower. As he held the cage, his two companions shoved the prisoner into it, locked the cage door, and let the small prison swing back over the gorges. Its crude lock bore rust from blood of hands The Accurst Tower that had tried frantically to The Accurst Tower open The Accurst Tower it over the centuries.

“That cage fascinated the townspeople, I’m told,” one of the men, knife tucked in his belt, said as they walked back into the rain toward an opening in the ancient pavement—the entrance to a narrow The Accurst Tower stone stairwell. “They watched the prisoner day after day as he went mad, then watched his carcass rot. Now the forest keeps The Accurst Tower the cage out of sight.”

Rain lashed against the cage. The captive tried to peer into the valley below. Then he fell into an uncomfortable sleep and dreamed of his last week in the Caribbean, not so long ago.

CHAPTER 2

Early The Accurst Tower that happy The Accurst Tower summer when troops were returning from success in Desert Storm, long-limbed Mallory Phelps ran to the water’s edge, dampening her flowing white gown. Though only twenty-six years old, she didn’t like the sea and sun of Barbados. Mindful of her alabaster-white complexion, she pressed her broad-brimmed straw hat tightly to her head.

She held binoculars with her other hand, straining to look in the direction of a broad lava reef less than a quarter mile away. She turned and ran on the sand toward an inflated black rubber boat. It bobbed in choppy water just off the beach. Inside it were lifejackets, coiled ropes, an oily gasoline can, and a large outboard motor at the stern.

“Wolfgang! Wolfgang!” Mallory shouted. Clouds were gathering, winds starting to howl. No one a few feet away could have heard her pathetic shout.

She raised the binoculars again toward the reef and crashing waves. Again, she watched her fiancé, Angus Ambrose, The Accurst Tower wearing only gray trunks, attempt to mount a windsurfing board, then attempt to raise the fallen sail and mast, held to the board by a universal joint, out of the water by pulling up on a rope attached to mast, only to be thrown back into the roughening sea.

Every time Angus fell, she saw him and the board draw closer to the The Accurst Tower lava reef. She knew the reef’s countless sparkling black The Accurst Tower ridges were sharp as

razors. In moments, the nearly naked windsurfer himself would smash onto the reef, rolling over and over an expanse as genial to human skin as a field of broken beer bottles.

Mallory ran past the rubber boat, still shouting with all her might, "Wolfgang!" Suddenly, from a pup tent on The Accurst Tower the beach near the sand dunes, the bronzed, muscular windsurfing instructor bounded out. He ran to the boat, blue bandana handkerchief knotted behind his head. Practically in one motion, he leapt in, pulled anchor, yanked out the motor's starter rope, and sped—prow above waves—in the direction of the imperiled windsurfer.

In a moment, Wolfgang swerved into the ever-narrowing passage between reef and windsurfer. He came to a jolting halt, flung himself flat on the boat's broad starboard side, and strained as he pulled Angus, windsurf board, and sail into the rubber boat. Inches lessened between reef and boat, barely floating above lava ridges ready to slice into it. Once punctured, the boat would collapse, leaving the two nearly bare men to be washed over the razor ridges.

With not a second to lose, cargo secured, Wolfgang sprang to the motor and flipped a gear. The boat bolted away from the reef and sped to the beach.

As usual, eyes turned toward Mallory's willowy figure as she and Angus walked into the hotel dining room The Accurst Tower built on an ebony platform over the blue-black waters of Queen Anne's La-agoon. Again, she wore a flowing silk gown. Angus had changed into his usual khakis and windbreaker. Mallory's clear white complexion set her apart from other vacationers—her statement that she was not one to The Accurst Tower lie idle on a beach.

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