

CASTLES  
*in the* SAND



# CASTLES *in the* SAND



*Carolyn A. Greene*

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CASTLES *in the* SAND

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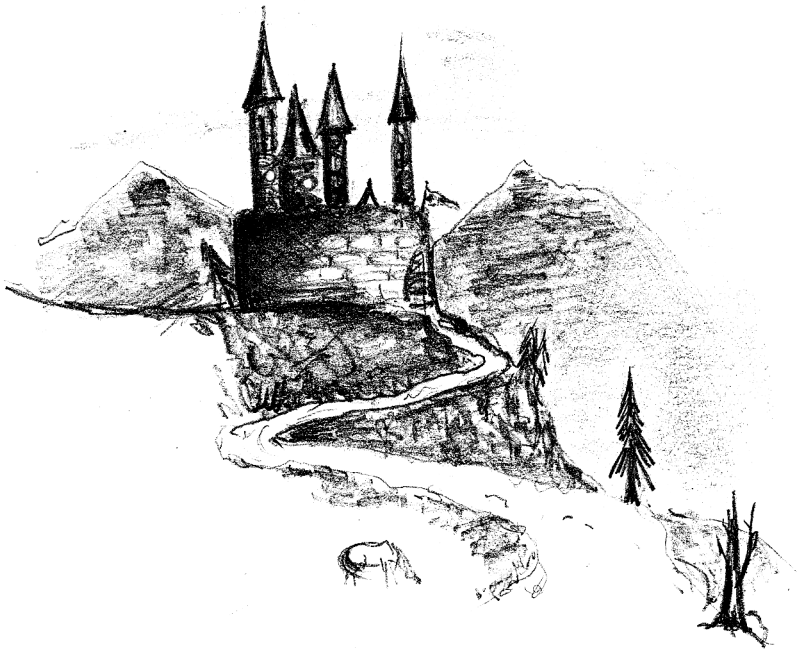
## CONTENTS

1/RUN .....	9
2/ANOTHER TERESA .....	16
3/BUS RIDE .....	19
4/A BOOK FROM UNCLE .....	29
5/FIRST DAY OF COLLEGE .....	31
6/TERESA MEETS TERESA .....	40
7/THE FALL RETREAT AT QUIET WATERS LODGE .....	51
8/GIFT OF TEARS .....	61
9/THE LECTURE .....	64
10/FARMHOUSE .....	70
11/MORTIFICATIONS .....	77
12/SPIRITUAL DIRECTION SESSION .....	80
13/ANGELS AND VOICES .....	90
14/JACOB SEARCHES FOR ANSWERS .....	94
15/SYMPTOMS .....	100
16/TERESA WRITES <i>THE INTERIOR CASTLE</i> .....	107
17/A GROWING CONCERN .....	110
18/NEW YORK .....	113
19/BAD COUNSEL .....	115
20/TERESA'S TRAVELS .....	123
21/A DIFFICULT PHONE CALL .....	128
22/THE LIGHT THAT WAS DARK .....	130
23/SEATTLE .....	143
24/DÉJÀ VU .....	152

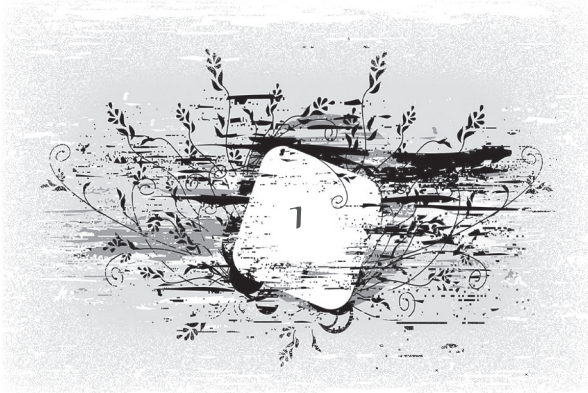
25/THE DEBRIEFING .....	158
26/FRIDAY MORNING .....	170
27/THE WOODSMAN .....	172
28/EKSTASIS NIGHT .....	176
29/IN LIKE A LION, OUT LIKE A . . . ..	185
30/THE ELDERS .....	193
31/RESCUED .....	195
32/SOAKED .....	199
33/FINDING HOME .....	205
EPILOGUE .....	211
GLOSSARY .....	213
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	219
PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION CREDITS .....	220
FOR MORE INFORMATION .....	221

*To my beloved praying mother*

*Castles in the Sand* is a work of fiction. However, Teresa of Avila is a real, historical figure (1515–1582). The depiction of her life in this book is based on historical records. Quotes and paraphrases of her writings are taken from her actual written works. The lives of the other characters portrayed in this book are created from composites of true stories. Names and some details have been changed.







## RUN

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil. Proverbs 4:26-27

MARCH 2009

**N**one noticed the slender girl in the shadows pick up her backpack, tiptoe through the maze of bodies and slip out the back door. The other students were preoccupied as they sat cross-legged on yoga mats while images of Mary, baby Jesus, Celtic crosses, and a winged sun disc flashed across a screen in the darkened room. Two intern youth pastors lay on their backs by the incense station, their eyes glazed as if in a trance. One of them softly chanted a Latin phrase over and over in time to the repetitive beat. The sound man had long since stopped changing the music and lay nearly motionless on the floor beside the control panel.

As the girl exited the room and let the door quietly swing shut behind her, candles flickered and a paper in the hallway floated to the ground. It read:

Thompson Building, Room 109  
Welcome Flat Plains Bible College Students  
EKSTASIS NIGHT

## CASTLES IN THE SAND

### A WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

7:00 p.m. Friday March 27th

All First Year SPIRITUAL FORMATION Students

Required to Participate

~go deeper~make space for God~

She leaned against the back of the door for a moment, heart pounding. “Okay Tessa Dawson,” she whispered to herself, “you either just did the right thing or a very stupid thing. Now run!” While her panicked eyes quickly determined the nearest exit out of the building, she scooped up the paper, crumpled it into a ball, and tossed it into a nearby garbage can before racing down the hall. Her long brunette braids bounced madly behind her as she ran toward the stairwell. Suddenly, she heard muffled shouting in the distance, then footsteps coming down the flight of stairs above her.

Spurred on by fear, Tessa ran toward the nearest door, hoping desperately it would open.

*Locked!* She rushed to the next door and tried the knob.

*Locked!* She could barely breathe.

*Keep going, keep going,* she thought frantically. Turning the corner, she glanced over her shoulder. With furrowed eyebrows, she quietly turned the handle on the lecture hall door. The door swung open. Relief washed over her as she rushed in and quietly closed the door behind her. Inside, the room was deathly silent and inky black. Even the moon’s usual casting of long creepy shadows on its walls was missing, for the moon was hidden behind the churning, dark, and ominous clouds that filled the evening sky. Leaning against the nearest wall, the slightly built girl slumped to the floor and rested her head between her knees.

Exhausted and breathing heavily, she sat for a few minutes in the dark, trying to gather her thoughts. She had stayed in room 109 far too long.

*Why couldn’t I break away?* she wondered. *Has this place turned into a prison after all?*

Doubts had been brewing in her mind for some time, and now

she realized there was only one thing to do. She must escape. They would soon be looking for her, she realized abruptly with a renewed sense of panic. There was no time to waste.

She groped through her backpack, searching for her cell phone. *Please work this time*, she pleaded, when she finally found it. Her phone had been doing strange things all week. She held down the button with her thumb until she heard the familiar beep. *Finally*. She quickly spelled out a text message, the screen casting an eerie green light on her face:

“Need 2 talk 2 u now”

No sooner had she pressed send and flipped the phone shut than she let out a startled gasp. Her heart skipped a beat. She sensed a presence in the room.

Trembling, the girl tried to jump up, but she fell back to the ground as if an unseen force was pulling her down. Wide-eyed and nearly paralyzed with fear, she shrank against the wall as she watched the lecture hall door slowly creak open. The outline of a man stood in the doorway. A moment later, the silhouette turned away, and the door clicked shut.

*So, they are already looking for me.* She pulled herself up, tip-toed to the door and pressed her ear against it. Silence. She reached for the doorknob and tried to turn it. It was locked from the outside. *Oh no!* Frantically she ran to the back of the room, eyes fixed on the red exit sign. She fell against the broad door handle and stumbled outside, inhaling large gulps of the night air. Her feet felt strangely numb, as if she were in a bad dream. She could barely feel the muscles in her legs as she began a sprint through the puddle-filled courtyard and then across the old soccer field toward the girls' dorm.

It was now raining hard. She probably should have pulled her fleece hood over her head, but keeping her hair dry was the last thing on her mind. For a brief moment, the path in front of her lit up as streaks of lightning zigzagged from sky to ground, like long, white-hot fingers.

*Is this lightning storm God's way of telling me how upset He is with me?*

As she raced toward her dormitory, she continued to cast furtive glances over her shoulder. Was it her imagination, or had she seen the blinds move and the lights go out in the second story window of the old office building she was now running past?

“One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand . . .” She counted the seconds between lightning streaks and thunder.

Her phone beeped. Shivering, she flipped it open as she continued running. It was a message from Gramps! “Teresa, dear, remember 911,” read the text message.

“What? That’s it?” she cried, fumbling the wet phone, and before she could catch it, the phone slipped from her wet fingers as she slid through a grassy puddle. “No!” she cried out mournfully. Thunder rumbled in the distance as Tessa reached down for her soaked phone. She needed to talk to Gramps!

Suddenly, the girl stopped short and gazed at her surroundings. A fork of lightning illuminated the wet stone-lined path, and like seeing a digital image imprinted in the memory card of her mind, she knew immediately where she was. Right in the center of the outdoor labyrinth. As she stood there, staring in dumbfounded disbelief at her surroundings, she began to experience the oddest sensation. What little strength she had left was now being sucked from her, as though she was being pulled out of herself and into the earth.

“God, if you are really there, help me!” she cried aloud. “I don’t want to die!”

She was terrified that this real-life nightmare would end the way her horrifying dream always ended. The dream she woke up from every night, the dream that left her staring death in the face.

Images ran through her mind, like an old black-and-white movie: She was inside a dark, brooding castle, gazing intently at an old, round, carved-wood table covered with dozens of burning candles. Around the table stood brown-hooded figures chanting words she couldn’t understand. And a serpent . . . there was always a serpent.

She would awake from the dream abruptly, soaked with sweat, as a voice called to her, “Teresa, you are mine, come out . . .”

Only her parents and Gran and Gramps had ever called her by

her given name. *Is that God calling me?* she wondered every morning. She had been trying to come out. Today she had finally mustered the courage to attempt escape from the suffocating darkness . . . but now this last hour seemed dreamlike. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion . . .

The next lightning flash shook the ground and jolted her back to the present.

Tessa gathered her wits and raced toward the outside light of her dorm room that she had left on. Upon reaching it, she opened the door and quickly ducked inside, bolting the lock behind her. She slipped off her fleece jacket and tossed it and her dripping backpack onto her bed. After flicking on the light switch and turning on every lamp in the cluttered room, she sank into the corner of her bed, placed her back against the wall and wrapping her quilt around her, pulling it tight up to her chin. She was trembling, but she knew it wasn't because of the storm. She rubbed her sore arm. There was blood on the sleeve of her shirt.

Tessa needed to talk to someone. Anyone! Even her roommate, Katy, would be a welcome sight—even with her quirky little habits. *Never thought I'd hear myself say that*, thought Tessa.

*Why aren't they back from the missions trip yet?* Tessa looked at Katy's clock radio. It was 8:57. A small handcrafted plaque above Katy's bed read, "Choose Today Whom You Will Serve." Pulling her brown stuffed horse to her face, a gift from Gran the day she left for college, Tessa shut her eyes and softly began to cry. If only she were back at home right now.

Was it really only seven months ago that she had been a *normal* girl who thought about boys and worried about which sweater to wear to class? What had happened to her at this place?

Just yesterday, during her spiritual formation class, there had been another "occurrence"—the worst one so far. At first, she had sensed this strange "thing" only when she was with her spiritual director, Ms. Jasmine, but she was sensing it more often now. Weird, how it had made her feel special at first. Ms. Jasmine had told her it was because she had been granted a unique gifting. But lately, this

special “gift” had begun to scare her. It was beginning to manifest itself in public, and Tessa feared it would soon take control of her. She knew something was definitely very wrong here, and she wanted out, and now.

She had felt the familiar tingling begin at the base of her spine earlier this night in room 109—the same tingling that had begun when Ms. Jasmine had first prayed over her. Tessa had felt the warm electric sensation creeping through her, accompanied by a growing lump in her throat . . . but not the kind of lump she would get when she thought of something very sad. This was more forceful. Almost insistent.

As Tessa sat, hiding in her room, replaying the events leading up to this night, she stifled a moan. *Not again* . . . It felt as if something was creeping up into her throat. The intensity was growing stronger, and she fought against it. *No* . . .

Ms. Jasmine’s words echoed in her mind: “Some women whom the Lord chooses say it’s like they are giving birth to something new and beautiful . . . some call it rebirthing. When you open your mind to the light within, it brings you into the sweet union of oneness with your creator . . .”

Tessa took shallow breaths and weakly flipped her cell phone open once again. It made a terrible crackling sound and slipped like melting butter through her fingers.

“Oh dear Lord, help me!” she cried aloud as she raised her hands to her head and squeezed hard.

Shaking, she crawled to the other end of the mattress and laid her head down for a moment. Was it the thunder outside or her pulse from within that pounded in her head like hoof beats? She closed her eyes and tried to visualize herself running to safety. But this time it wasn’t working. There was no drawbridge to cross and no beckoning castle anymore. The castle she had once run to for shelter was turning to sand and crumbling before her very eyes.

Desperate to find her phone, but too afraid to put her hand under the bed, she hung her head over the edge and looked around. Her wet braids made a swishy pattern on the dusty floor. Instead

of the phone, she saw only her favorite knitted slippers and next to them a brown paper package with the numbers 911 printed on it. *The package Gramps gave me the day I left for school*, she thought, unsuccessfully choking back hot tears. Tessa grabbed the parcel and pulled it out from its dark dusty hiding place. She quickly tore off the paper, uncovering a book, and wiped her eyes with her sleeve. “Don’t want my tears to ruin Gramps’ handwriting,” she softly sobbed. On the inside of the worn leather cover, it read:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall  
be saved. Romans 10:13

Gramps had given her his treasure . . . his Bible. It had been under her bed all these months. Under the first verse, he had written another.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none  
other name under heaven given among men, whereby we  
must be saved. Acts 4:12

“But Lord, what is your name?” she whispered. The lump still gripped her throat as she tried to speak.

“You know My name, Tessa.”

*Oh Jesus*, she thought, *help me. How can I be sure it’s You? I have been listening to all the wrong voices!*

She forced her lips to move. It sounded more like a quiet whimper than a cry for help.

“Jesus Christ, Son of God, if You are really real, and if You are listening . . .” she whispered, “help me! If this presence I’ve been sensing is not of You, then please take it away . . . and save me!” Suddenly, the room turned black and the old Bible fell to the floor with a thud.