

Sandpiper Run

By Linda J Pifer



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Other Books by Linda J Pifer

∞Ohio Girl∞

∞The Windows Trilogy∞

Windows

Daniel Smith - New Zealand Passage

Copperswift - Return to Highbridge

∞Thistle & Stone∞

To life with no fear
and faith like a
river.

Jinda

Chapter One - First Step

“Each session is like opening an old book to its first page; it always begins the same.”

Sunnie Reynolds

“The beach is deserted, white... and windswept,”
Sunnie said. In her mind, she watched the scene through a weathered doorway.

“Bright sunlight glints off the water and makes me squint. I turn back to a fire pit where a piece of fish wrapped in a banana palm leaf lays over glowing coals. A strong Gulf breeze blows thru the doorway and cools me; the hot coals flare and the wind carries the smoke up to an opening in the roof.”

“Do you know where you are Sunnie?” Dr. Paulding said. He challenged her to enlarge on the scene in her mind, but she stayed silent with eyes closed and concentrated on memories of the previous night’s dream.

His gaze remained steady as he silently waited for her to answer, hoping for some sign that she would at last open up and not hold back details. Throughout their sessions over the past few months, he knew Sunnie was suppressing what she had experienced as a child. He patiently put his pen to paper to enter his question then added ‘no response’ and prepared to try again.

“I was young and alone, how would I know how to cook?” Sunnie asked him sharply and moved her hand over her abdomen.

He didn’t answer her question, but added to the notation, ‘subject experiencing anxiety and rubbing her stomach’.

“Sandpipers are hunting coquinas along the wave lines,” Sunnie said and wiped the palms of her hands on her shirt then reached to ruffle the damp hair away from the back of her neck.

“The porch was built with driftwood and bamboo... all lashed together with vines.” She intentionally diverted again. “I usually wake up at this point with stomach cramps.”

“Go on Sunnie,” Dr. Paulding said. She quieted at his urging and refocused.

“I keep looking at the doorway as if I...expect... something... any second...” She struggled to lie still on the couch and moved her head sharply from left to right then finally sat up, still rubbing her stomach.

Unable to continue, she freed herself from the visions in the dream and opened her eyes wide to the doctor’s familiar, book-lined office. Relief flooded over her as the leather sofa squeaked and she shifted position to glance out the window behind her; palm trees, blue skies and daylight brought her back to reality.

“That’s all that’s left. There’s nothing after that.” She spat it out as the small store of patience she’d gathered earlier for the session disappeared. Angry with herself for not pushing further, she knew Dr. Paulding expected more. She grabbed a tissue from a nearby dispenser and wiped away the perspiration on the back of her neck and across her forehead then finally looked at him.

“We stop for today.” His voice was quiet and calm as he laid his notebook on a side table and focused

on her. “Tell me, Sunnie, how do you feel about these memories?” He peered over reading glasses, his graying eyebrows pushed together in concentration.

She wanted to chuckle at the sight, but instead rolled her eyes at the good doctor’s textbook question. The answer came to her easily, but wasn’t spoken aloud; chronically sleep deprived, frustrated at the lack of progress, and oh yes, ineffective at handling something she didn’t remember the details of. Still convinced she could conquer the nightmare by herself, Sunnie did acknowledge Dr. Paulding had been patient with her over the past months and deserved at least a civil answer.

Sunnie faced him, red in the face with what she needed to say. “Angry; I want to remember it all.”

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’m ready to be done with this stupid, meaningless nightmare. There must be more to it, but every time I get close, I wake up! Like, I can’t deal with this anymore.”

Filled with anger now, she waved her hands to emphasize the last few words. “I want to get on with life and sleep for eight hours like normal people.”

Anger surfaced more quickly these days, and so, she gave him what he asked for, something he hadn't heard before.

"I'm afraid." She stopped because she'd never admitted it, not for years, to her mother, to her doctors, never. "I'm afraid the rest of the dream will disappear before I find it," she said in a low whisper and felt her gut quiet. Expecting to see surprise on his face, he smiled at her then quickly baited her with another question.

"Wouldn't that be easier?" he said. She didn't know how to respond.

He tried again. "Do you experience fear at the thought of losing it or of recalling it?"

"I'm... apprehensive... that I'll lose it altogether," she said.

"Why is that?" Dr. Paulding said, animated with enthusiasm. He prepared to hear one of her usual divertive tactics, a sudden off-subject question, Sunnie's method to avoid his probing, but she continued on her own.

"If my mind drops this into the 'recycle bin', I'll never know the why of it or the part of my childhood

that's missing. I've adjusted to the lack of sleep... power naps on my lunch hour." She wore a smirk as she waited for Dr. Paulding's reaction to her ill-placed humor. But this time, he didn't react and she realized a door had been opened that couldn't be closed.

"Without the complete dream, how can I fight this?" she said and realized the truth. Silence filled the room.

He cleared his throat and picked up a bottle of water for a sip. "Describe your fears, Sunnie. What scares you the most?"

"It sounds petty." She dropped her head into her hands, tired of the whole charade she'd somehow perpetuated.

"Please," Dr. Paulding coaxed.

"I have phobias about certain things," Sunnie said and looked away to other parts of the office; anything to avoid his eyes. The multi-colored books on shelves around the room were comforting and reminded her of her father's library in their house before the divorce. She looked to the opposite wall and the large abstract by Jackson Pollock. It was a striking tangle

of color and movement, one of her favorite ways to divert when a session turned serious.

“Give me an example,” he said.

She returned from Pollock’s tangle to face Dr. Paulding again.

“I’ve lived in Florida all my life, but at the mention of ‘beach property’ I panic.” Her voice raised a few decibels at the thought and she breathed deeply to calm down. “I literally can’t walk onto a beach.”

“What else?” he said.

“I’m apprehensive about traveling to other places. And forget dating, it’s impossible to trust anyone new; I don’t feel at ease.”

She stood up, restless and walked to his now-familiar university diplomas. A bank of six-pane windows partially covered by white louvered Bahama shutters shed their softened light on the wall. She ran her fingers along the frames of his board certifications; child and adolescent Psychiatry and a second in Adult Psychiatry. She lingered at a framed letter from President Kennedy for Dr. Paulding’s service in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War.

“It took over fifteen years of training for those,” he said. “But I am most proud of that letter from the President... and most fulfilled.”

“I can see why,” she said and returned to sit on the sofa again.

“We’ve discussed how the body adjusts to trauma,” Dr. Paulding said and offered her a lemon drop from the dish on the table. “We know something in your youth inflicted a psychological trauma. The body’s instinct is to protect you by blocking the details, much the same as it does for a soldier with combat trauma. My job is to help you learn more about the entire event; to realize whatever happened has been over for years...and you’re still here in spite of it.”

“You make it sound crazy easy,” she said. “But I blame myself for not throwing this off and getting on with life.” She examined her nails before meeting his eyes again.

“Self-blame will not help.” He taps his head. “You have a very competent brain and none of this is your fault. When the memory is unlocked, you’ll be able to put it in perspective. As an adult, you’ll stop seeing it

as a child and more like ancient history that's no longer a threat. Your inner fight or flight mechanism is focused on the unknown right now, Sunnie. When you know the actual event, I'm confident all will readjust." He glanced at his watch, a signal that time was up.

"This was a good session Sunnie and I appreciate your openness. This is a first step and the hardest, so let's keep going forward, shall we? I want you to write down a few keywords from the details you remember before next week's visit. For instance, the doorway you keep glancing through; describe its surroundings, sounds and location; can you do that?"

"Yes, I'll try," Sunnie said. "But it won't be easy." It'll be really hard is what she thought but didn't say.

"It needs to be done, Sunnie." He gave her a serious look. "You'll find it productive, I promise. See you next week and have a lovely weekend. Remember to keep a notepad and pen next to your bed for anything new."

"I will." She answered without enthusiasm.

Outside the office door Sunnie paused to turn her face up to the sun's warmth after an hour of air conditioning. She felt pure freedom when leaving sessions with Dr. Paulding; must be what prisoners feel when granted parole she thought. Except that her freedom would be short-lived and the dream would surely return that night. It was like opening an old book to its first page, it always began the same; she'd begun to doubt the value of their weekly appointments. She walked slowly out the palm-lined sidewalk to the parking lot where her car sat partially shaded.

The late model CRV started easily, she sat idle for a few minutes and waited for the a/c to cool the car before leaving.

Dr. Paulding's statement that she was recalling details as a child started her thinking. Her only memory of being on a real beach was with her mother after the divorce. They'd watched sandpipers scamper up the waterline as waves retreated. Though small in stature and delicate, the little birds bravely scampered in and pushed their beaks deep into the sand. They knew the danger of the oncoming surf as

they fed, yet they ran at exactly the right time to avoid the crashing waves.

It suddenly made sense that at age twenty-two she'd been running away and allowing her life to be limited for more than twelve years. She needed to be brave like those little birds and work with Dr. Paulding to uncover the nameless mystery living inside her head.

Feeling encouraged for the first time in a long while, she pulled out of the lot and headed downtown for work at Seashell Realty.

Today, she promised, I'll start today.

End of Chapter One