

# Castles *in the* Sand

Sally John

This PDF file contains copyrighted material.  
Use of this file for any purpose other than viewing  
on the Harvest House website is strictly prohibited.



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version (KJ21<sup>®</sup>). Copyright © 1994, Deuel Enterprises, Inc., Gary, SD 57237, and used by permission, and from The New Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Reprinted by Permission.

Some quotations are also taken from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Cover by Garborg Design Works, Savage, Minnesota

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Ste #200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

Cover photos © Ross Anania / Photodisc Red / Getty Images; Krzysztof Nieciecki / istockphoto; Ron Hohenhaus / istockphoto

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

## CASTLES IN THE SAND

Copyright © 2006 by Sally John

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John, Sally, 1951-

Castles in the sand / Sally John.

p. cm. — (The beach house series ; bk. 2)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-1317-1 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-7369-1317-3 (pbk.)

Product # 6913173

1. Pregnancy, Unwanted—Fiction. 2. Clergy—Family relationships—Fiction. 3. Fathers and daughters—Fiction. 4. Mothers and daughters—Fiction. 5. Seaside resorts—Fiction. 6. Domestic fiction. 7. Psychological fiction. I. Title. II. Series.

PS3560.O323C37 2006

813'.54—dc22

2006004026

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 / BC-MS / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# One

## *Late March, Lenten Season*

On a sunny afternoon in late March, Susan trailed behind her sister-in-law through a narrow passageway between two beach houses. Not far beyond the sidewalk's end, ocean waves rushed toward shore.

"I don't feel right about this." Susan's thoughts were not on the surroundings.

Natalie Starr, wife of Drake's younger brother and confident to an almost annoying degree, halted her brisk steps and turned. "Which part don't you feel right about? Five days at the beach in hopes of preventing a nervous breakdown? The feeling that you've abandoned Drake? The fact that you sent your daughter packing? Or that you lie to people at church concerning her whereabouts?"

"I don't exactly lie. I just tell them she returned from the band's European tour excited as a puppy—which she was—and is living with friends again. Which she is, I assume, since she hasn't come home."

Natalie cocked her head and pursed her lips. Sunbeams shone in her dark curly hair, highlighting reddish tones.

Susan diverted her attention to her little pug dog gaily crisscrossing the walkway, sniffing flower beds on both sides, oblivious to any tension. Pugsy, fawn colored and chubby, had originally been Kenzie's dog that short season she attended college and lived in a pets-allowed apartment. Somehow, somewhere along the way, responsibility for the dog fell to Susan. She didn't mind.

“Come on, Susan. Spit it out.”

There was no escaping Natalie’s prodding. “Well, in truth, I guess all of the above. A few days here without Drake, sending Kenzie off, and keeping her situation a secret from the congregation, from friends. I don’t feel right about any of it.”

“That’s what I thought. You know, wallowing in guilt is overrated. Confess the sending and the lying as wrong and forget the rest. You need some R and R. It was Drake’s choice not to come. Smell this salt air, listen to the beat of those waves. Give your mind a break.” She sighed. “And call the boy’s parents tomorrow.”

“The gospel according to Natalie.”

“Yep. I’m going to give my brother-in-law heart failure yet.” She turned and resumed pulling the suitcase alongside the beach house. It clackety-clacked over the uneven concrete.

Susan called to the dog and followed, carrying a large shoulder bag. Although Natalie’s opinions drove Drake up a wall, for Susan they often shed light into tunnels of confusion.

They rounded the corner of the house and stepped onto the cobblestone patio, which served as the beachside front yard. A low picket fence separated the patio from a broad public walkway. Beyond that was the sand and then, a mere stone’s throw away, the Pacific.

Natalie paused again, this time gazing at the house. She snorted. “This place always cracks me up. I mean, look at it. A squished red chili pepper of a cottage still holding its own against progress. It probably looked exactly the same in 1940.”

Susan couldn’t help but smile. The place was an anomaly in a neighborhood of large million-dollar-plus homes. A three-story white stucco towered over one side of it. At the other, three stories of phenomenal engineering rose with curved glass instead of corners.

The humble abode appealed to both women. Natalie and her husband, Rex, had been renting it for themselves every August for some years now. They treated Drake and Susan to a week at it every spring after Easter.

A feeling of peace washed over Susan, the first since Kenzie left two months, three weeks, and five days ago. Except for one brief, explosive

phone conversation on the fourth of January—Day Three of that first heartsick week—Susan had not talked with her daughter. Kenzie called for the sole purpose to let Susan know she was okay and with friends. She offered no address, no phone number. Her stinging blast against her father and against her mother for siding with him still echoed in Susan's ears.

Guilt avalanched her now like a load of rock crashing all around her from an upended dump truck. She sat down on the suitcase.

"Hey, Suze," Natalie said. "You okay?"

"No."

"You will be. Come on. Let's get you settled."



While Natalie put away groceries in the kitchen, Susan took the suitcase into a bedroom and thought again at how odd the situation was, her being there without her husband.

Drake's prediction had not come true. Kenzie did not "come to her senses" and return home.

On Day Two after hearing the news, Susan thought she would drown in her despair. Natalie called. Aunt Nattie, as Kenzie referred to her, wanted to speak with her favorite niece and hear all about Europe. The story poured from Susan.

Drake was not a happy camper. His sister-in-law always told his brother everything, and Rex withheld little from their sons, Eric and Adam, who in turn had friends in the youth group at church. Word would get out.

On Day Six, a Sunday, Susan's capacity for "gutting it out" peaked. That morning Drake calmly declared he would remain mum on the subject; he had no idea how to spin the news to his congregants. Unable to mask her pain, Susan skipped church and spent the entire day in bed. Drake comforted her as best he could.

On Monday though, Day Seven, he reached the end of his own rope. He announced a moratorium on the topic—even with his wife.

A curtain dropped between them.

Adept at hiding real emotions, Susan got by...for a while...up until last week.

She was in a large outlet store on some errand and inadvertently walked through the baby department. Whatever the thin thread was that held her together unraveled right then and there. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, spinning her in a circle.

She found her way to a pay phone and called Natalie, who immediately picked her up.

That night her sister-in-law and brother-in-law convinced Drake that Susan needed a break, at least a week's worth. Drake said a retreat for five days was acceptable, perhaps even a good idea. An entire week was out of the question. Had she forgotten? There was the Hathaway wedding rehearsal Friday night and then the wedding Saturday afternoon. Not to mention Sunday church. He needed her on Sundays. She was his anchor on Sundays.

Susan acquiesced. She liked the Hathaways immensely. Her work as coordinator of their daughter's wedding had been a joy and not nearly the stress of many she did. It had probably been what held her together the past couple months.

The vacation rental was located less than an hour's drive from home, but Drake said he simply could not get away. It was the Easter season. His flock needed him and counted on his availability until his official vacation date after the holiday, three weeks from now. He promised to make excuses for her at meetings she normally attended. He would forward wedding-related calls to his capable director of women's ministries.

So many lives disrupted. All because of her.

The guilt alone might very well suffocate her before she'd even unzipped her bags.