Angel Droppings

The Bahamas, romantic novelettes, and a guardian angel swinging from the Hills Hoist.
A short story from Kerry Bashford.

1
Janet Walker has never been to the Bahamas. She knows very little about them. She knows that it's warm there, that there are beaches and tourists and, she seems to recall, black people, but that's about it.

Yet, two pages ago, Cecilia Van der Post was to be found on a West Indian beach. When her editor at Playhouse Publications insisted that, in Chapter Six, Cecilia simply had to be found on a West Indian beach, Janet Walker panicked. Two hours later, she left the travel agents with a handful of brochures.

It is from these tracts that Ms Van Der Post's Bahamas have been created. After another fraudulent paragraph of "sun scorched beaches" and "thunderous waves", Cecilia will look down the beach and see "an astonishingly attractive man emerging from the twilight, it would seem out of nowhere as if an angel had fallen from the heavens".

2
A meal is rarely as meaningful as when it is consumed a few short steps from death. Patrick lets this thought repeat in his mind as he mounts the stairs to the roof. His lunchtime encounters with peril are, in fact, brief and uneventful. Yet, Patrick finds it satisfying to leave the safe, predictable enclosure of the of–ce and snatch a few moments of adventure on the roof of a 20-storey office block.

One day, he imagines he might even sit on the edge. This would give the occasion a hint of credible risk. But for now, he is content with remaining a respectful distance from the street.

3
Around noon, every weekday, she wanders to her window and watches a figure appear on the roof opposite her apartment. She has been intrigued by the man from the moment she first saw him and has devised an elaborate life for him. Some days, he intercepts signals from enemy satellites with a receiver hidden in his lunch box. Other days, he plans the murder he will commit as soon as he lures a victim to the roof.
Today, his life holds little possibility. Today, she must return to work. He has just watched a cup that life is elaborate enough.

It is now 5.52 and six seconds, Eastern Standard Time. The problem is that it has been 5.52 and six seconds for the last ten seconds. The problem is also that Patrick has come home from a difficult day to find that the cat has left the remains of his canary on the living room floor. He is not in the mood to find that the universe is misbehaving as well.

One hundred and thirty miles south of Patrick's house, in a town he is never likely to visit, an incident has just occurred to a group of people he is never likely to meet. During an office party at the Institute of Seismology, the revelry is interrupted by a report from the adjoining room. An earthquake had apparently just occurred in the city one hundred and thirty miles to the north. The earthquake was of such magnitude that the city would have been propelled into the Pacific Ocean. Workers grieved for lost relatives and friends, secretaries stumbled to their seats, scientists clambered under tables. Soon, it will be discovered that no such catastrophe has occurred. Hands will be folded in prayers of thanks, glasses will be raised in expressions of relief and the bearer of the message will be promptly fired.

A few minutes before six, Eastern Standard Time, a violent power surge throws Janet Walker across her apartment. At the moment of the accident, she had barely finished reworking chapter three, in which Cecilia Van Der Post is horribly disfigured in an electrical fire that guts her ancestral home and torches the entire family.

Patrick has just returned home from work. He has just watched a cup that he carelessly nudged off the kitchen counter fall like a feather to the floor. It is now 5.52 and six seconds, Eastern Standard Time. The problem is that it has been 5.52 and six seconds for the last ten seconds. The problem is also that Patrick has come home from a difficult day to find that the cat has left the remains of his canary on the living room floor. He is not in the mood to find that the universe is misbehaving as well.

It is now a few moments before six. In retrospect, Patrick will not be able to say with any certainty whether it was the slippery tiles in the backyard that threw him to the ground or whether it was the sight of an angel hanging from his Hill's Hoist.

The angel, as he will soon learn, had been doing aerobatics. Patrick, as he will soon forget, had been doing laundry.

Patrick is not accustomed to having members of the celestial host in his backyard. He is not entirely sure what he should do. At first he considers calling the authorities but no book he has ever read or film he has seen ever identified who the authorities are and what they might do if called upon to assist. Suddenly, the creature stirs. The wings stretch. The head lifts. The eyes widen. The mouth opens.

"Holy shit!"

By then, it was too late for Cecilia to escape. She had thought that she was alone on the beach and had been so occupied by the sky that was seared by a shimmering sunset.

If in doubt, alliterate.

...that she failed to notice this man, this exquisite intruder, until he was almost at her feet. He stood there with a dog at his side...

A labrador or a German shepherd. A German shepherd, I think, more noble.

...a German shepherd at his side, a strong and aloof figure pressed against a blazing backdrop. As the sea lapped seductively at the shore, the dog lapped playfully at her feet.

Janet, Janet, I think you need a good lie down.

...Cecilia pressed her scarred hands to her charred cheeks, afraid of offending this beautiful creature with her disfigurements. He did not shield his eyes from her twisted face. He did not turn away from her terrible burns. He simply stepped forward and fell over her foot.

"Hello, hello, that's just wonderful. I make contact with a species that has spent the last few millenia wondering whether there is other intelligent life in the universe, whether there is in fact a god and when they actually find this to be true, do you think they can put two words together in greeting?" Patrick is not coping.

"Sorry but I have had better days. If it wasn't bad enough being assigned to this third rate rock, a few moments ago I was hanging out with a few friends in an upper stratosphere and then I suddenly find myself hanging out with somebody's underpants.

Patrick is not coping at all.

"Listen, are you going to help me out or aren't you? You don't seem to realise the significance of this. You must be the first person in centuries to have met an angel. Haven't you always dreamed of something like this happening? Aren't there any questions that you're just dying to ask me?"

"Yes, how quickly can you leave?"

Patrick is exhausted but sleep is the furthest thing from his mind. What does occupy his thoughts is a night in a year he had almost forgotten. It was the evening of the nativity play. He was on the stage, approaching the Virgin Mary in the garb of the Angel Gabriel. At that moment, he tripped over the microphone cord and fell into the manger. The Virgin threw up her hands in fright. The baby Jesus bounced off the stage. She had thought that he was alone on the beach and had been so occupied by the sky that was seared by a shimmering sunset.

If in doubt, alliterate.

...that she failed to notice this man, this exquisite intruder, until he was almost at her feet. He stood there with a dog at his side...

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...a German shepherd at his side, a strong and aloof figure pressed against a blazing backdrop. As the sea lapped seductively at the shore, the dog lapped playfully at her feet.

Janet, Janet, I think you need a good lie down.

...Cecilia pressed her scarred hands to her charred cheeks, afraid of offending this beautiful creature with her disfigurements. He did not shield his eyes from her twisted face. He did not turn away from her terrible burns. He simply stepped forward and fell over her foot.
as she worked, staring at the image of an angel, androgynous in a white robe, blonde curls and a bland smile.

The creature that lies snoring beside him has no robe, no hair and certainly no smile. The angel does remain faithful to the artist's impression in one regard. There is no indication of gender and no sign of genitalia.

11

Playhouse Publications,
2/206 Main Street,

Dear M/s Walker,

I have read Chapter Seven with great interest. Although I found the narrative quite satisfactory and the description of the Bahamas quite authentic, there is one small problem. You have described the male character as tall, tanned with "deep, dark eyes almost disguised by a shock of blonde hair". The problem is this - we need the character to have dark hair. Our research has indicated that heroes with dark features and hair colouring were particularly popular in the last financial year. As the action takes place in the Bahamas, which I believe is close to South America, it would be fitting that the character should be of Latin extraction, preferably with a name like Angelo or something suitably ethnic. I would appreciate your co-operation in this regard.

Yours faithfully,

James Stevens,
EDITOR.

12

The angel lights a cigarette.

"You'll get cancer."

"Spare me, Patrick, I'm immortal."

"Well, I think it's appalling. You've lounged around my house for two days now, filling up ashtrays. Haven't you a higher purpose? What, exactly is your mission here, anyway?"

"What mission?" I was in the middle of a double somersault with a three-quarter twist and somehow I screwed up my angle of entry and
ended up belly-flopping into your backyard."

"So you said. Well, forgive me, but you have been something of a disappointment."

"I've been something of a disappointment. Patrick, let me tell you, watching out for your welfare hasn't exactly been an intense experience. Since birth, the biggest risk you've taken has been changing brands of toothpaste. When you were a child, you didn't do challenging things like sticking cutlery into electrical sockets or playing with firearms."

"Sorry. If you're lucky perhaps in your next assignment you'll be looking after a mass murderer."

"Hey, there's an idea. You know how you always have lunch on the roof at work. Perhaps next time you could pack a rifle and drill a few pedestrians. You know, something like that. Make my life more interesting."

"I don't believe what I'm hearing. My guardian angel wants me to become a sniper."

"Sorry. Just a suggestion."

"So, have I always been a disappointment to you?"

"Well, no, there was a time when I held out some hope for you."

"Really? When was that?"

"When you finally decided you were gay."

"You knew about that?"

"Sure. It's my business to know everything about you. Well, anyway, when you came to this startling revelation despite repeated hints from me...Like, remember, when Mr. Johnston in the third grade kept putting his hand on your knee? Well, that was my idea. Except it took years for the idea to sink in. And when it finally did, I thought, great, the guy's gay, now we can start having some fun. Somewhere along the line he's bound to be bashed, arrested, do dangerous drugs, some serious partying or, if I'm lucky, start hanging around public lavatories. But you - no way. You have absolutely no sense of adventure. For years, your closet door was so securely closed that it could have functioned as a fall-out shelter."

"So, what do you suggest I do?"

"You're not doing anything tonight. Why don't you go out for a change?"

"And leave you alone in my house? I'm not sure this is such a good idea..."

"Who said anything about me staying home? I'm coming with you."

"You can't be serious."

"Of course I can. This will be my opportunity to do some field work. Anyway, what's the problem?"

"Well, how do we explain the wings? A congenital defect?"

"Costume party? Anyway, we're going to a gay bar, they wouldn't notice something like that there."

"I think they might notice two huge feathery appendages flapping in their faces."

"Don't worry. It'll be fine. What could be safer than a night out with your guardian angel?"

Stop me if you've heard this one before. There's this angel, okay, and he walks into this gay bar, right. Anyway...

The angel lights a cigarette.

"Remind me never to go there again."

"I don't think I'll need to. The management will be more than happy to remind you of that."

"Well, I didn't see what the problem was."

"The problem was that you decked the barmen."

"But he made derogatory remarks about my wings. I don't see why I should tolerate that from a lower life form."

"And just when I was getting friendly with the guy in the corner."

"What...the unemployed seismologist? Why would you want to waste your time with him?"

"I thought he was nice."

"Patrick, Patrick, one look at him and even I began to question Creation."

"What do you mean?"

"The man had no neck and I'm sure if you checked his knuckles you'd find signs of contact with the pavement."

"What? Who the hell do you think you are?"

"Your guardian angel. Show some respect. And pass the ashtray."

"If you're my guardian angel, what is it exactly that you do?"

"I don't know. I just hang around, making sure you don't step under a bus before your time."

"So, I'm going to step under a bus, am I?"

"Now, I didn't say that."

"But you do know when I'm going to die, don't you?"

"Yes, I'm aware of the length of my employment. I wouldn't have taken the position otherwise."

"So, when do you finish the job?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Well, at least tell me one thing. What's God like?"

"How in heaven's name would I know? Look, I'm a guardian angel, a shit kicker. I don't mix in those kinds of circles. And would you please pass me the ashtray."

"No. Get it yourself."

"Patrick, I think it's time you started being nice to me."

"Give me one reason why I should."

"Genesis, Chapter 19. You are, I take it, familiar with the sin of Sodom."

"Well, I have had the occasion to commit it a few times, yes."

"No, no, not that. These angels turn up in this city, right, and the townsfolk give them a hard time and it results in a riot. And then the place goes up in flames. You know, the sin of Sodom. Being inhospitable to angels."

"So, what are you trying to tell me?"
Cecilia gasps, her cheeks stinging. "Oh yes. Come and see for yourself." "I can't." "What do you mean, you can't? Just come and have a look." "I can't see." "Of course you can. You're not blind, are you?" "Yes, in fact, I am." Cecilia gasps, her cheeks stinging with shame. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I...I...I didn't realise. Please forgive me." "There's nothing to forgive...Cecilia, tell me once again. Tell me how the stars look tonight. You can be my cock. I'm living with this free-loading, chain smoking, life-size fucking Christmas decoration. And another thing...oh my god, what is that?"

15

"Oh, look, look, the stars are so beautiful," Cecilia says, her face pressed against the telescope lens. "Are they?" His voice sounds suddenly distant. "Oh yes. Come and see for yourself." "I can't." "What do you mean, you can't? Just come and have a look." "I can't see." "Of course you can. You're not blind, are you?" "Yes, in fact, I am." Cecilia gasps, her cheeks stinging with shame. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I...I...I didn't realise. Please forgive me." "There's nothing to forgive...Cecilia, tell me once again. Tell me how the stars look tonight. You can be my cock, Cecilia." She turns and looks once again into the telescope. She cannot see the stars, she is blinded by her tears. "Oh, they seem so wonderful, so close. It's like holding the heavens in your hands. It's like..."...a telescope, Janet, of course. Oh, but I couldn't...

16

"...oh my god, what is that?"

"What?"

"That. That between your legs."

"Well, Patrick, you complained that I was physically lacking, so I improvised. Don't you like it?"

"I must admit, it is impressive if not a little impractical."

"Why, what's wrong with it?

"Well...for a start, it's not supposed to hang any lower than your knee."

"Sorry. Artistic licence...how's that?"

"Better but still a little ambitious...Now let's see if we can take it up a little higher...yes, yes...just a little bit more...perfect. Now...if we could just make the width a bit more proportionate...no, no...back, back...lovely, yes, that will do nicely."

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Now, let me see...how about making the left testicle hang lower than the right?"

"Whatever for?"

"I don't know. Authenticity, I guess."

"How's that?"

"Very nice, very nice...now, just a few adjustments to the upper torso. Firstly, we can ditch the wings."

"No. Absolutely not."

"Come on. Just a few suggestions."

"No."

"So, now that you've performed this extraordinary feat, what happens next?"

"I would have thought that was obvious. I haven't done this purely for self-adornment, you know."

"You mean, you want to...but isn't there a commandment against that?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Are you sure we won't be interrupted by a bolt of lightning or something?"

"I'm sure we won't even create a turbulence."

"Have you done this before?"

"No, but I've been watching you for years. I think I can manage it. But, Patrick, before we go any further, there's something I've always wanted to ask you."

"Yes?"

"Why do you always kiss with your eyes closed?"

Patrick is not really sure. However, it will be to his advantage half an hour later when, lying in the angel's arms, he fails to realise that he is floating five feet above the bed.

17

Cecilia Van Der Post has a problem. During her stay in the Bahamas, she has fallen desperately in love with a man who is both incredibly gorgeous and incredibly sweet. This is not the problem. A few months ago, Cecilia received third degree burns to her face. This is only part of the problem. The man in question is completely blind. The problem is that his blindness can be treated and his sight surgically restored, with a great deal of money. Cecilia has a great deal of money. She can restore his sight and risk losing him when he discovers her disfigurement. Or she can leave him in the dark and save her relationship and her money.

Janet Walker has a problem. She has just rented a telescope. However, the accompanying instructions are for a typewriter.

18

Patrick is walking on air. He is on cloud nine. He is on top of the world. He is on top of the office building, sitting on the edge, dangling his feet above the traffic. In 20 minutes' time, he is due to return to the office. In five hours' time, he is due to return home. He will never return to the office. He will never return home. In a moment he will be blinded by a flashing light from across the street.

19

Now we're in business.

"Welcome to the world of telescope viewing. See the stars as if they were across the street. See the many
wonders of the world as if they were within your fingertips."

Okay, okay...so, how does the fuck­ing thing work? Let's see...remove lens cap...right, I see...no, actually, I don’t...where’s the bloody focus? No, but at least I know how to adjust the tripod...oh, here we go...so, where is he? Oh, there he is...he's sitting on the edge...he's looking right this way...there seems to be a light in his eyes...must be the reflection from the tele...jesusfuck­ingchristno!

20
A fall.
An outstretched pair of wings.
An outstretched pair of arms.
A rescue.

21
It is now 12.13 and six seconds, Eastern Standard Time. Janet Walker turns and throws her hands to her face and screams. She has not noticed the telescope, that she carelessly nudged off the tripod, fall like a feather to the floor.

22
In the next few days, an unemployed seismologist will be reinstated with a full apology.

23
Janet Walker is not coping.
"Yes, Miss Walker, so you say, but there have been no reports, no evidence of a man falling off a roof."
Janet Walker is not coping at all.
"You’re not in the habit of playing pranks on the police, are you, Miss Walker?"
"No, officer. I must have made a mistake. I’m sorry to have wasted your time. I guess that will be all then."

As they rise to leave, she catches the expression on their faces. It is the same expression she sees on the faces of her neighbours and on the face of the delicatessen owner.

24
"You mean, you still love me?" Cecilia says, her bottom lip quivering in disbelief.
"Yes, my dear, how could I not love you? You have given me back my eyes and with my eyes I can see how beautiful you really are," he replies. As he lifts her trembling frame into his powerful arms and walks down the beach, Cecilia sobs into his left shoulder.

Suddenly, she feels like she has been borne aloft, like she is in mid-flight, like she is soaring into the sunset that softly caresses the beach.

25
Playhouse Publications,
2/206 Main Street,
Kingston. 2022.

Dear M/s Walker,
I must say, in all frankness, that I am alarmed by the alterations that you have made to the final chapter. On an earlier date, you might recall, we decided that the character, Cecilia, would finance her boyfriend’s operation. Yet, in the manuscript that you have sent me, I find that Cecilia has abandoned her boyfriend and the Bahamas and flown off to Switzerland for plastic surgery. I’m afraid that this is not suitable. I take it your actions represent a dissatisfaction with company policy and have seen fit to terminate your contract with this company.

Yours faithfully,
James Stevens.
EDITOR.

26
Janet lights a cigarette.
"Honey, it’s so good to have you home."

"Janet, are you okay? You look dreadful."
"I’ve had a hard week, that’s all. I’ll tell you about it later."

"What’s that you’re playing with?"
"Oh, it’s just something I found in the garbage downstairs, a couple of days ago."

"Don’t tell me things have got that desperate that you’re rifling through the rubbish."

"No. It just caught my eye."

"Must have come from a fucking huge bird."

"Mmm."

"So, how’s the book going?"

"It’s finished."

"Really, can I have a look at it?"

"Sure. Here it is."

"Thanks...Hey, what’s this ‘Cecilia’ shit? Darlin’, how could you name such an appalling character after me?"

"Well, at least you were assured of being constantly in my thoughts."

"I’m not convinced. So, what did the publishers say?"

"They turned it down."

"But why?"

"Let’s just say that I expressed ‘dissatisfaction with company policy’."

"So there go the holiday plans, eh?"

"What holiday plans?"

"Oh, I just noticed all those travel brochures on the table."

"Oh, right...yes, it’s a shame. I’ve never been to the Bahamas."

"I’m sure you’ll find a way."

"Well, I could sprout wings. Stranger things have happened."

KERRY BASHFORD is editor of the forthcoming Pink Ink anthology of lesbian and gay writers. He is supposed to be writing a detective novel.