

Angel Falls
Selected Novel Excerpts
Portfolio Samples

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ANGEL FALLS — Novel Excerpts by Jackie Goldman

These excerpts are taken from my novel Angel Falls. They highlight a different facet of my writing—one rooted in emotional interiority, vivid sense of place, and fast-moving, sensory-driven action. Together, these selections showcase my range across reflective character work, atmospheric New York scenes, and high-intensity, cinematic moments. My focus throughout is on psychological texture, lived-in detail, and momentum shaped by the narrator's evolving emotional landscape.

1. The Loft Scene: Moral Awakening in 1980s New York

Character formation, social commentary, NYC atmosphere

I remember the first time I knew this about my parents. I mean, I kind of had a clue when I was a little kid and they got all huffy and embarrassed when homeless people asked for change, even when they were trying to do something to earn it, like sing or break dance on a piece of ripped cardboard.

But when the poor artists squatting in the Soho lofts created snow sculptures one winter morning, after an overnight blizzard had blanketed the city in several feet of white powder, my mother took me for a walk along West Broadway to admire the fantastic creations—dragons, castles and even busts of famous personalities—and put a dollar bill in every coffee can and upturned cap. Yeah, that kind of gave me a clue but you know, I was a little kid, and my parents were still gods to me. But all that changes when you're a teenager.

I think I was thirteen years old on Memorial Day Weekend in 1986. My parents and I walked downtown on a beautiful spring day, the air quiet except for the excited twittering of newly emerged birds and filled with Sunday brunch smells of frying bacon and toast. We were headed to Battery Park, to be near the beginning of the line for New York's part in Hands Across America. They'd paid thirty dollars to reserve a spot for each of us to be

a part of the human chain meant to span the entire country. The money was supposed to go to help people in need.

At Battery Park, a crowd was already forming along the shoreline when we arrived. My mother pointed excitedly at Yoko Ono, standing just feet away from us, wearing her signature dark glasses with the pointed tips. Like me, many people were dressed in the official Hands Across America T-shirt, and I remember taking off my red cardigan, and tying it around my waist to advertise this fact.

The first in line was supposedly a little kid who was living with her mom in a shelter where there were drug addicts and prostitutes, but our spot was too far away from there for me to see her.

I was actually feeling quite emotional when, at three o'clock, we all joined hands and the song "Hands Across America" played over a loudspeaker. Everyone around joined in, their voices merging to form a resonant swell that made my hairs ripple out palpably from my arms and scalp. From where we were standing, you could see the Statue of Liberty, and a boat shooting water out in magnificent fountain-like arches. I belted out the song along with everyone else, feeling a surge of genuine love and kinship with the entire human race.

I was still kind of floating on the whole solidarity vibe as we got on the subway to go uptown to meet some family friends for dinner. The underground platform was crowded and humid, and several trains came and went until one arrived that we could squeeze onto and, miracle of miracles, got seats facing the door.

Then, just as the doors were about to slide shut, this blind guy appeared in the doorway. I guess he didn't hear the *ding-dong* warning that the doors were about to close, or maybe he figured someone would pull him in, but no one did. Instead, the doors kept trying to shut on him as he stood there with his dark glasses, looking upset and confused, holding a white cane in one of his raised arms which were flailing about, his sweat stained straw fedora bobbing on his head. The bells kept sounding; each time accompanied by the engineer's irritated voice: "Please release the doors so we can move the train."

But everyone just stood there and stared. He was poor and black, and it was like everyone was seeing him on TV or something; like he wasn't really there. Finally, I yelled, "Is someone going to help that blind guy?" At which moment a young man who was standing nearby sort of woke up out of his stupor and said, "Oh!" and pulled him in.

I looked indignantly at my parents, but they both looked away. That kind of did it for

me. I thought, it's not real. They don't really care. All the causes, cocktail parties and professed compassion for oppressed minorities—it was all for show. But why? I sighed and shook my head. It would always be a mystery, what people were going for when they placed themselves as costumed actors in the stage play of their lives. Did they even know it wasn't real?

2. Riot Escape & Fountain Sequence: Urgency and Sensory Immersion

Shows action, pacing, tension, sensory detail, and emotional immediacy

The cool water hitting my skin felt like a fire extinguisher, like an air-conditioned interior on the hottest of days. I opened my eyes underwater and swished my head around, the cool blueness rinsing my eyeballs. When I came up for air, I gasped and looked around. Jay's head bobbed up a moment later, and we looked at each other, moaning and crying with relief. We ducked and bathed a few more times before crawling out and sprawling our bodies onto the grass, faces turned up to the dimming sky as our chests heaved. In the distance, the protest was still audible—a distant rumble, like the hum of thunder before a storm—but far enough away for us to feel relatively safe.

"We shouldn't stay here too long," I warned.

"No," Jay said, but neither of us seemed able to move.

With the sun now dipping behind the horizon, bathing the mountain in shades of gold and orange, I felt the rhythms of my heart slow down to almost normal, and my breath come more evenly.

I said, "Those people, they were screaming, 'We want food!'"

Jay shook his head and squinted.

"That's terrible," he said. "Food! Imagine being so hungry you went storming through the streets, screaming for food!"

I was quiet for a moment.

"You know, when I was growing up, I went to this fancy private school. I was like the poor kid. I got to go because my mom was a teacher there."

"That's great," Jay said, absently.

I shook my head. "No. It wasn't. It sucked being the poor kid. I always felt inferior. I envied their fancy clothes, their fancy houses, their fancy vacations. I spent hours imagining what it would be like to be them. Really, I was obsessed."

Jay took a deep breath. "I get you."

I nodded. "But—I had food."

"Yes."

"Do you ever think about that? About how other people have stuff you wish you had?"

Jay half laughed. "I spent my life wishing I was Simon."

"Really?"

Jay nodded. "He was perfect, you know?"

"Oh, Jay, I think you're perfect!"

He smiled. "Well, I said I used to feel that way. But when I moved to New York and started working, somehow, I could see that in little ways I was making people happy, like with the window displays. Sometimes I go outside and pretend to be just another window shopper. I watch the other people looking at my displays, smiling, and commenting. It's like I gave them a little spark of happiness, or hope. I don't know..."

I touched his arm. Yes, it was good to work, to do something meaningful to make others happy. I got that at my job, too. It should be enough. It was enough for Jay...

As if reading my mind, he said, "You feel like you want more."

I sighed. "Maybe more. Maybe different. I don't know."

"I always thought you should work with teenagers, you know."

I propped myself up on my elbows and looked at him.

"Why?"

"Well, because that's what you did when you were in South Africa. That's the whole reason you became a social worker."

I was quiet for a moment, thinking about that.

"You know, it's funny, those kids were so different from me as a teenager. It was a different world. I never thought about them in terms of how I was at their age. I guess I never considered working with teenagers in New York because those kids would remind me of myself, and I was a mess."

"Exactly."

"Thanks."

Jay sat up and looked at me. "No, seriously, Heather. You got over that. You came into your own, you know? So, you could help other kids do the same."

I nodded but didn't feel convinced. I thought working with American teenagers on a daily basis would trigger my PTSD.

"It's getting dark," I said. "We should go."

3. Andrea's Confession

Shows emotional intimacy, dialogue, character vulnerability

Andrea walked towards me, thumbs hitched around the straps of her backpack. Coming to a stop at my side, she smiled and followed my gaze to take in the impressive view.

"It was so fun, right?" she said, enthusiastically.

I grinned. "It was beautiful," I agreed. "A great adventure."

Andrea looked down. "I think my dad is better, now."

I looked at her, not knowing what to say.

She continued. "Did my mom tell you?"

I shook my head.

Andrea looked into the distance, her eyes glassy but sure. "He had a girlfriend."

"Oh, I— I'm so sorry, Andrea!"

Andrea nodded. "My sister doesn't know."

"She's younger," I said. "Maybe that's best."

"Oh, for sure," she agreed emphatically, at once the picture of older-sibling maturity. "Anyway, I think it's okay now."

I looked over at Jeff and Paula. They stood with their arms around each other's waists, staring at the view with contented smiles.

"Definitely okay now," I agreed.

Andrea grinned. She said, "You're cool, you know that?"

My face blazed hot at the compliment. Andrea was the epitome of the kid I envied at school: Thin, pretty, athletic and with normal-seeming parents.

"Thank you!" I said.

Andrea nodded. "Yeah, I can tell you were one of the cool kids."

I laughed and shook my head. "I was *never* one of the cool kids, honestly."

"Yeah, well I mean like one of the smart cool kids, not like the cheerleader cool kids."

I was quiet for a moment.

"Thank you, Andrea. I think you are probably much smarter than you know."

4. Airplane Turbulence & Engine Failure

High-stakes action, sensory immersion, pacing, internal tension

As the plane lifted off, I gazed out my window seat at the receding jungle, tepuis, and the rising mist of the falls. We had been in the air for about twenty minutes when, suddenly, a thud on the opposite side of the small craft made me sit up, my heart pummeling.

“What was that?”

The plane dipped into a freefall before leveling off. Looking around the cabin, I saw the frozen faces of horror of my fellow passengers.

“It’s nothing, nothing,” Jeff said reassuringly, but his white-knuckle grip on his armrests belied his calming words.

I glanced at Mateo in the front row, sitting in a single seat facing the cabin and pretending to read a magazine. He turned the pages with deliberate slowness, but his face was sweaty and tinged with green. A moment later, his eyes flew open as an acrid burning smell filled the cabin.

Jay and I exchanged frantic looks and pulled out the laminated emergency cards from the seats in front of us. An announcement from the pilot came over the tinny loudspeaker. Mateo translated.

“We lost an engine, but it’s okay. We have another and we will make it to Caracas.”

I gulped and grabbed Jay’s hand as the plane jagged up and down, making the skin on everyone’s faces vibrate almost comically, like Jell-O. Paula squeezed her eyes shut and was muttering under her breath. I thought she must be praying and hoped someone was listening.

Soon I felt the plane begin its descent, more smoothly now as the engines were turned off. I dared a look out the window and saw the runway lit up with emergency vehicles and covered with white foam. A flash of heat in my forehead and a stab in my abdomen made me reach for the paper barf bag from the seat-pocket, and I proceeded to make Andrea’s performance a few days earlier seem like the chirpings of a delicate bird.

We plunged into a landing, the foam spurting up to cover the windows, and gradually

came to a full stop. Everyone burst into relieved exclamations, hugging one another. I held onto Jay, both of us laughing and crying.

“This has been the craziest trip of my life,” I said.

“The best,” he said. “In so many ways, the best.”