



## A Brush of Wings: A Novel (Angels Walking)

By Karen Kingsbury

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Now in Encore! From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Karen Kingsbury comes the third and final novel in an unforgettable series about four friends and the divine intervention that changes their lives forever.

Against the advice of her doctor, Mary Catherine moves to Uganda to work at a new orphanage. Whatever time she has left, Mary Catherine wants to spend it helping children—especially since she is unable to have children of her own. The only problem is Marcus Dillinger, the Major League Baseball player she was never meant to fall in love with. But neither Marcus nor Mary Catherine's other friends—Tyler Ames and Sami Dawson—know just how serious her heart condition is.

Still, Marcus suspects something isn't right. After months of silence, a divinely timed letter from Mary Catherine leads him on a desperate life-or-death mission to get her to a US hospital before time runs out. Meanwhile, as Sami and Tyler prepare to marry, the group receives shocking news that changes everyone's plans.

The team of angels walking is busier than ever in this epic battle between life and death. *Brush of Wings* is a poignant tale of love, sacrifice, and the power of faith.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Kingsbury peels back the layers of dimensions to allow readers to believe there are angels amongst us, and that they guide us, protect us and, most importantly, pray for us." (*RT (Romantic Times), Top Pick!*)

"A powerful story of divine intervention, love, grace, second chances, and healing." (*CBA Retailer*)

#### About the Author

Karen Kingsbury, #1 *New York Times* bestselling novelist, is America's favorite inspirational storyteller, with more than twenty-five million copies of her award-winning books in print. Her last dozen titles have topped bestseller lists, and many of her novels are under development as TV movies and major motion pictures. Her many Baxter books will be the subject of a new TV series—*The Baxter Family*—debuting later this year with Roma Downey, Mark Burnett, and MGM Studios. Karen is also an adjunct professor of writing at Liberty University. She lives in Tennessee with her husband, Don, and their five sons, three of whom are adopted from Haiti. Their actress daughter, Kelsey, lives nearby and is married to Christian recording artist Kyle Kupecky. The couple recently welcomed their first child, Hudson.

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Brush of Wings

## 1



BECK CROSSED OCEAN AVENUE, the sea behind him.

Determination welled up in his heart. The team had chosen him to make the first move, and Beck was ready. Anxious. He walked east along Santa Monica Boulevard toward a brilliant Southern California sunrise. It was several blocks to Mary Catherine's apartment.

Beck stayed in the shadows.

He wore board shorts and a tank top, flip-flops and sunglasses. Over one shoulder he carried a faded black backpack. Take it slow, he told himself. You're just any other surfer headed off the beach for breakfast.

Beck caught a glimpse of his reflection in the front window of a seafood restaurant. His brown arms looked fit, athletic. Like he spent his days conquering waves. No one would suspect he was an angel.

After a few minutes he reached her apartment. Immediately he spotted her car—an old Hyundai. Beck glanced down the street. Several drifter types sat huddled on park benches or tucked up against the buildings. None of them seemed to notice Beck.

He stopped, lowered the backpack, and pulled a tire gauge from it. This first part of the plan was brilliant. Frustrating for Mary Catherine, maybe. But necessary. The gauge slipped easily into the tire stem of the Hyundai's right rear tire. A hissing sound signaled the release of air. When the back tire was obviously flat,

Beck moved to the front of the car.

As he did, a couple of police officers turned the corner and headed his way. Beck felt his heartbeat quicken. Come on, Jag. You gotta help me. He stood, not sure whether the officers had seen him. At the same time another officer, tall and blond, built like a gladiator, stepped out from a doorway and approached the first two.

Jag.

Beck felt himself relax. He could hear Jag's voice—friendly and confident—as he talked to the officers. The words of their conversation weren't clear, but that didn't matter. Jag would hold them off until Beck finished the job.

He worked quickly and in less than a minute both right tires were completely flat. That should do it. She wouldn't have two spares. Beck tucked the tire gauge away, slid the backpack onto his shoulder, and turned toward the beach. At the bike path that bordered the sand, he slipped around a busy bicycle shop and disappeared.



MARY CATHERINE WOKE UP early for one reason—she wanted to feel the ocean against her skin, and she was nearly out of time.

In two weeks she would leave for Africa—no matter what anyone thought. Once she reached Uganda, there would be no beautiful spring mornings for riding waves. No chance to walk along the beach.

Today was perfect. It was early March and not a stitch of fog hung over Santa Monica. Nothing but sunny skies and the cool ocean breeze. Last night her roommate Sami had wanted to stay up and talk, but Mary Catherine had turned in early. All so she could drive to the ocean this morning. Lately, she didn't have the energy to walk, not since her heart had gotten worse.

Sami couldn't join her. She'd already left for an early breakfast meeting at the Chairos Youth Center. Which was okay with Mary Catherine. The more time she had alone out on the beach, the better. She had much to say to God, much to think about.

She could hardly wait to feel the sand beneath her feet.

Mary Catherine slipped on her wetsuit, grabbed her beach bag and towel, and hurried through the apartment. She pulled her boogie board from the front closet and headed out the door for her car.

The moment she was outside, she stopped. The tires on her Hyundai were completely flat.

“No!” A groan slipped from her lips as she walked closer. “Come on!” She scanned the roadway. No broken glass, no pieces of metal. Why in the world would this happen?

Without her car she'd have to pass on the beach. Which was frustrating because she had the morning off. Once a week everyone at her office came into work late. And this was that day. She would have only one more like it—and only if she didn't need the time to finish her final projects.

She took her things back into her apartment and dropped them on the floor. Disappointment darkened her mood. If only she didn't tire so easily, she could walk there. But she couldn't take the risk on a work day. Maybe she could get to the beach later this week. In the afternoon. Once her tires were fixed.

Mary Catherine called a tow truck company, found her journal from beside her bed, and made a cup of decaf tea. She situated herself at the small kitchen table and stared at the weak-tasting hot drink. Coffee was another of her losses. Caffeine would speed the demise of her heart.

Mary Catherine closed her eyes.

She hesitated and then looked at the journal. The book was one of her closest friends. She opened it and found what she'd written yesterday. As far back as Mary Catherine could remember she had kept a journal. Not an accounting of her days, but a record of her dreams and goals. The very specific things she was learning in the Bible, wisdom she'd gleaned from quiet moments with God.

But lately her journal entries had taken a turn. She tended to write more about things she'd never see, the wedding she'd never have. Children she'd never hold. She wrote about her feelings, too. Her fear and excitement over what lay ahead in Uganda and the way she missed Marcus Dillinger.

These things consumed her.

In all likelihood she would never see Marcus again. He still emailed her and texted her from spring training in Phoenix. Sometimes she replied. Usually on days when she could still feel his kiss, still remember the touch of his embrace.

Mary Catherine took a sip of her tea. The days ahead would be easier if she could forget him. But forgetting Marcus Dillinger was like forgetting how to breathe. Impossible, no matter how hard she tried.

Even if all she gained by remembering him was the assurance that—for the briefest moment—she had known what it felt like to be in love.

Something she would never know again.

Mary Catherine started at the top of the next page and wrote, Things I Need to Do Before Africa. Beneath that she scribbled a brief list.

Get shots and extra heart medicine. Call Mom and Dad. Buy school supplies for the kids at the orphanage.

She paused.

This wasn't how she wanted to spend her morning. She didn't need a list to know what she had to do before leaving for Africa. She turned the page and poised her pen at the first line. Her heart overflowed with dreams and hopes, doubts and fears. She didn't have time for lists.

And like that every thought of her heart began pouring onto the page.

Sometimes I close my eyes and I'm there again, I can feel the creaking boards beneath my feet, dancing on that back deck with Marcus. He holds me in his arms, and his quiet laughter fills my soul. The stars hang in the night sky and I can feel his breath against my skin, his lips against mine. And I do everything I can to

hold on to the moment, to etch it into my heart in a place where I can relive it whenever I want. The truth is, I'm lonely and afraid. Marcus is gone, and I'll never see him again. And the scant days ahead are slipping through my fingers.

Mary Catherine closed her eyes. Maybe God would allow her to keep the memory alive—even till her dying day. And since that could be sometime this year, she was even more determined to find a way to hold on to the brightest and most beautiful moments of her life.

Like the one she should've had this morning out on the beach.

Never mind that her doctor didn't want her in the ocean. Too much exertion. Too much adrenaline. She had been taking medication to prepare her for a heart transplant, but it could be years before a donor heart became available. She had to take care of herself, give herself the greatest chance at living long enough to get a heart. If Mary Catherine ran her heart into the ground before a donor could be identified, then . . . well, then she would go home to heaven and she'd spend every morning at the beach.

Forever.

But she would never have another chance to see Marcus.

Mary Catherine read what she'd written. Why was she running off to Africa, anyway? Maybe she should go to Phoenix. Walk up to Marcus at a break in his practice and tell him she was wrong to send him away without a bit of hope, wrong to believe they could never have anything between them.

As soon as the crazy idea landed on her, she dismissed it. The reason then was the reason now. She was dying. It'd be different if she and Marcus had been dating when the news came. If that were the case, she couldn't deny him the chance to ride out this season with her if that's what he wanted.

But they weren't dating. Marcus was just finding a relationship with God, just realizing what was important in life. He needed a love who could walk that journey of faith at his side. Someone who would be there for him through the years.

Not someone who needed a new heart.

She began to write again.

Love isn't God's plan for my life. It never was. I wasn't that girl with the long line of guys trying to get my attention. Real guys . . . guys who loved Jesus . . . they weren't at my school and they weren't around at college.

She thought for a moment. Sure she had dated a little bit, but no guy had ever turned her head.

Until Marcus Dillinger.

Star pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Of all people. She put his face out of her mind and moved her pen across the page once more. Your love is enough. It is. Thank You, Lord, for that.

A smile lifted the corners of Mary Catherine's mouth. She breathed in and felt the presence of God in the most real way possible. Look at all the things I've done, Lord . . . all because You let me live. Really live.

She closed her eyes again and she could see herself, skydiving over a field near Castaic Lake, and riding her bike down Ocean Avenue and across hundreds of miles of paths that ran along the beach from Will Rogers to Redondo. She had known what it was to have the sea breeze against her face, the sunshine in her long hair.

She had swum with the dolphins and looked long at the horizon. She had taught second-graders at church and sat bedside with elderly people at the Santa Monica Summer Hospice Home. She had walked foreign soil in a number of countries to tell people about the hope of Jesus.

Yes, God had already allowed her so much life. Mary Catherine could never complain about the fact that she was running out of time. No matter how sad the next six months might be, she couldn't dwell on what she would never have. The love she would never know. She would anchor herself instead on what God had given her, the ways she had lived. Some people never had a minute of the wonderful life she'd already experienced.

She moved her pen to the bottom of the page.

As for the dreams that will never be . . . maybe, God, You'll let me live them out at night when I sleep. The unimaginable joy of standing face-to-face with a man like Marcus and promising him forever. The precious warmth of my very own newborn in my arms and the journey of growing old next to the love of my life.

Together loving You and loving people for a hundred years.

If You'll let me live those things out when I sleep, Lord, that will be enough. I promise. No tears, no complaining, no doubting. I am Yours, always. No matter how many days You give me.

There was one more adventure just ahead, one more dream that actually would come true. Her dream of going back to Africa. The orphanage in Uganda had just opened. Already forty-three kids called the place home. Mary Catherine would organize it and make a plan for food and schooling. She would teach, and hire other teachers, and bring in caretakers for the children.

Yes, Mary Catherine would make sure the orphanage thrived. She knew exactly what needed to be done. God had given her this mission—she had no doubt.

She opened her eyes. Long ago when no guys seemed interested, when no one invited her to the prom and all of her friends were finding someone special, Mary Catherine had made a pact with God.

She could live without love, as long as she could love where she lived.

And that place—she had known from the minute she went on her first African mission trip—would be Uganda. At times she had hoped she might have years there, pouring herself into the people, helping them know the salvation of Jesus and giving them a purpose. Teaching trades and digging wells for clean water and providing education to better their chances at a future.

She moved to Los Angeles intent on making a difference and saving money before moving to Africa. But she hadn't known how little time she actually had.

A text from Sami flashed on her phone.

How was the beach?

Mary Catherine felt a ripple of guilt. That was something else. She had told Sami about her valve condition, but her friend had no idea that without a heart donor, Mary Catherine might have less than a year to live.

No one knew but the doctor. Mary Catherine hadn't even told her parents—although she needed to find a way to do that. Probably before Africa. The problem was, she didn't want her family or her best friend feeling sorry for her or worrying about her. She wanted them to believe in this trip, and to pray for a miracle. And if she didn't get one, then she wanted them to rejoice that she had lived a full life.

Regardless of how the news was perceived, Mary Catherine had promised her doctor that sometime soon she would tell Sami. Her, at least. She would make Sami promise not to tell Tyler or Marcus. Nothing good could come from them knowing how sick she was. They needed to focus on the coming baseball season.

But in case something happened in Africa, she really should have at least one friend who knew the truth, who could get word to her cardiologist in an emergency. Sami would be that friend. No matter how much Mary Catherine didn't want to tell her.

Mary Catherine closed the journal. She could still see the concern on Dr. Cohen's face when she told him she was serious about spending six months in Africa. He had tried to talk her out of it, but ultimately he had agreed. Six months, no longer. And only if she had easy access to transportation back home.

In case she became sicker.

And so with what might be the final months of her life, she would live out the one dream she could still make a reality. The dream of helping orphans. And at night, when the strange sounds of the African plains kept her awake, she would allow herself to go back. Back to Marcus Dillinger, and a love that would only ever be possible when she fell asleep.

In the quiet of her dreams.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Rebecca Shadwick:**

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### **Belinda Bridges:**

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