

Angel

Angel stretched as she woke up in the spot that had been hers for years—a thick feather pillow by the head of the bed—and shifted so she could be near her caretaker, the Boy, all night. Angel reached out with her paw and batted at the boy’s face until she had sufficiently woken him, then did so once more right on the nose.

“Beep,” the Boy said, as per their custom whenever a finger or paw touched the other’s nose.

That’s better, Boy, Angel yawned.

“Happy good morning to my happy good little Angel.”

Angel smiled. It was always a happy good morning. Angel was a happy good doggy, that's why she always got happy good mornings. It's how the world worked.

From the foot of the bed came the new dog, Lucy, pushing with her hind legs to slide on her back until in position to receive happy good mornings of her own.

"Happy good morning to you too, Lucy," the Boy said, scratching Lucy under her chin.

No, Boy, Angel harrumphed, using one of her paws to take her boy's hand and bring it back to her. Angel has happy good mornings. Angel doesn't share happy good mornings.

"Yes, happy good morning, Angels," the Boy said, giving Angel a belly rub before moving back to rub Lucy. "But Lucy also gets happy good mornings."

Boy!

The Boy got out of bed and got dressed, preparing to take the dogs outside. While he got ready, Angel sat up on her pillow and stretched. Beside her, at the head of the bed where Angel's and the Boy's pillows laid, was her mommy, Lulu. Lulu had, one night, turned into a weird stuffed version of an animal. It looked like Lulu—big and fat—and had her collar. Angel didn't understand, but often during naps and always at night, Angel slept on her pillow under the watch of her mommy.

Beep! Angel lifted her paw and bopped her mommy on the nose.

Angel stayed outside for a little while with the big dog, Jack and her big brother, Blackie. Sometimes the Boy forgot Blackie's name and called him Chewie.

Silly Boy, Angel would think. Can't even remember doggy's names. What would Boy do without Angel to take care of him?

It was a cold day. Angel kept warm in the sun, and when a car came down the road, Angel made sure it knew it wasn't welcome there.

Go away! Angel barked. Don't try to steal the Boy! Go away big metal beast! Go away!

The Boy called Angel to come back in. Angel gave one last bark to let the big metal beast know that Angel meant business before returning to the house.

When the doggies came back in, Angel waited patiently on the floor as the Boy set-up Angel's biome. At one end, the Boy would drape a sheet over pillows to create an Angel cave so that Angel could take a nap on Angel's pillow with Angel's mommy. At the other end of the bed, blankets were folded and stacked to create Mount Angel. In the middle was the Great Plains where Angel could lay down on her back, belly exposed so she could tan in the light of the indoor sun and get belly rubs whenever the Boy

walked past. The Boy had to give so many belly rubs every day. It was required by doggy law.

Sometimes Angel's kitty Merlin would come and take a nap in the Angel cave with Angel. Angel was told for years she was not allowed to have her own pets, no matter how many ticks she brought in from the yard. But the Boy finally relented. The Boy would always relent. All Angel had to do was flash a big smile with her bright white teeth. If that didn't work, Angel would offer the Boy her paw for shake-shakes or a high five. Angel was a very talented little Angel.

When Angel was being a really good Angel, the Boy would give Angel special treats—like the crusts of pizza or bones. One time, Angel even got a whole piece of toast! It's how Angel knew she was doing a good job keeping the Boy trained after her mommy became a stuffed animal.

Slowly, Angel's interest in licking out the plates and pans in the kitchen, and then in eating altogether stopped. Angel didn't see the problem; she was a little itty bitty teeny tiny Angel. Not a big Angel. Angel didn't need a lot of food. But the Boy started to sound sad like he had before Lulu had turned into a stuffed animal. Angel kept coming to the Boy's lap to give him shake-shakes.

“Are you okay, Angel?” the Boy would ask.

Of course, I'm Angel! She would boof at him.

“Happy good little Angels.”

Happy good little Angel, she repeated.

One day, when Angel woke up from a nap, she found that she had “leaked on the bed,” as the Boy had called it when Lulu would wet the bed. Angel had always been a good Angel and went potty outside, but this day she had leaked a little everywhere, including in the chair while she lay behind the Boy’s back.

The next day, Angel threw up. Angel didn’t like throwing up. Her tummy always felt bad. But that day, Angel threw up lots, and spent the day on the bed. Angel always spent the day on the bed, but today Angel didn’t feel like moving. If she got up, it was to walk a few steps and lay down somewhere else on the bed.

As much as Angel took care of the Boy, the Boy made sure to take care of Angel, too. The Boy carried Angel to the kitchen and set her by the water bowl so that Angel could drink, because Angel had not left the bed all day. When Angel got done drinking, she began throwing up again. The Boy held her in his arms and stroked her back as he held her over the sink until she finished.

Angel felt even worse the next day, and the Boy could tell. Angel spent the day laying in the Boy’s lap and being held like a little itty bitty teeny tiny baby so that she could get belly rubs.

“I’m so sorry, little Angel,” the Boy said, tears rolling down his cheeks.

It's okay, Boy, Angel whimpered. You can still rub the belly.

“You're a good little Angel.”

Bestest Angel.

“Bestest little Angel ever, ever, ever in the history of all of the forevers.”

Angel.

“Angel-Angel.”

Throughout the day, everybody came to visit with the little Angel. Blackie and Jack came to check on Angel. The other people in the house came to check on Angel. Angel's kitty Merlin even came to rub heads with Angel at one point. Everybody loved little Angel.

“I know you won't understand me any more than Lulu did, baby Angel,” the Boy said through more tears. “But one of these times you're going to go to sleep and when you wake up, you won't be here. You're gonna be somewhere else, and I won't be there. But the 'Lu will be there. And so will Buddy. And Angel's first kitty, Salem.”

One time, the Boy carried Angel over to the bed and sat down so that Lucy could visit with Angel. Lucy smelled at Angel intently, sniffing her all over as she checked on her.

Lucy, Angels don't feel well, Angel said. You have to take care of Boy until Angel feels well. Make sure you beep his nose,

and give him shake-shakes, and Boys have to give belly rubs every day.

Lucy gave Angel a few more sniffs before the Boy brought Angel back to the chair. Angel stayed in her boy's arms until she eventually closed her eyes for the last time, held tightly by her Boy and surrounded by all the doggy people, and kitty people, and people people.