



The events of
October

1 – A professor returns one of Jessica’s printed essays, having circled apparent gibberish in the text. Her instructor warns Jessica to be more careful with her work if she hopes to graduate from this school. Jessica recognizes the snafu as Bridget’s actions and bursts into laughter. Taken back, the professor asks just what’s so funny. Jessica explains. Her mirth fades when she sees no humor in her mentor’s eyes.

2 – Jessica awakens John to check out something she heard, or thinks she heard, from somewhere around the living room. John stumbles out there, only to see something dark swinging on the curtains. He stumbles for a light switch when the shadowy thing leaps at him. Before John can move, sharp claws sink into his feet. He howls from a well-worn anger and kicks at the

A Year in the Lives of God's Furry Angels

interloper, which snarls and snaps and claws, marking both sides of that extended foot. John limps back to the bedroom, the hissing fury pursuing him all the way until he falls beside his wife. As she hears Jessica consoling her husband, Bridget recedes into the shadows, content to own the night.

3 – Edna shares with Blat her growing concern for Butch. Each day the squirrel has watched the golden retriever search through the park, seeking some sign of the little warrior cat who had marked their lives in such a brief time. When the owl eyes her, Edna says it's simple: Butch misses Bridget. Blat hoots at that, then turns his head. All this adds to the growing burden Edna feels, watching her friend wander so in his loneliness more and more each day. Blat hoots again. Not knowing what that means, Edna wonders if perhaps they might do something to console the sad dog. Blat turns his head around once, twice, then a third time. Edna stares up at the horned owl, sighs, and finds herself wishing for once that the hawk was there.

4 – A chill rain settles around the little Kansas town. Jessica leaves for class early and returns late, giving herself plenty of time for her naturally cautious driving. Since his office is just downtown, John decides to walk to work. He enjoys his time outdoors, no matter the weather, and has always loved the rain. Tom'alaxt observes them both as he surveys the town. The hawk could have predicted their choices with almost 100 percent accuracy, having watched their daily activities for what seems years. He still has no idea just why they travel so, nor does he care, leaving that to God. But the hawk does sometimes wonder if these humans realize just how blessed they are... how set apart they remain from all the rest of creation. The hawk sees Bridget sitting in the Ferguson's front window, watching and waiting for her loved ones to return... just as Tom'alaxt would have predicted.

5 – Hearing about the apparent vacancy, a group of militant rats establish a bridgehead in the alley behind Jason’s Pet Shop. Soon catching a whiff of it, Charles disposes of their bodies before the end of the day.

6 – Jason tells Pepper about a coyote pup he saw scampering around the edge of town. Pep assures him to not worry, for juveniles often wander from the pack in the fall. It’s also possible a lone hunter may cut through town on the way to someplace else. Even so, Jason says he’ll make sure to check the park during his stop that afternoon, and warn Butch and the squirrel. Pepper nods. “It is always good to be careful,” he admits. So Pep makes a call to the police and sheriff’s office, knowing that will get a warning to the newspaper. Then he stops, considering just what Jason said. “You’re going to warn who?”

7 – Jessica tries to sweep up the living room floor. Bridget makes it next to impossible, clawing at the broom fibers, pouncing on the rolling fur clumps, and generally scattering whatever dirt Jessica manages to gather. To solve her problem, Jessica picks up the cat, expresses concern over Bridget’s weight, and places her in the pantry, a place she knows the cat loves. Jessica then finishes her sweeping in relative quiet. She arranges the pillows and papers the way she likes, dusts the bookshelf and television console, makes sure the TV remote is where John can find it, and adjusts the curtains just so. Pleased with the effort, and her general plans to maintain the house by straightening one room each day, she goes to check on her cat... and finds six columns of soup cans toppled, her storage canisters shoved back to where Jessica can barely reach them, and her spare bag of cat sand ripped open and scattered across the floor. In the middle of all that sits Bridget, full of innocence. It makes Jessica so wish she could scream, even as she laughs inside.

A Year in the Lives of God's Furry Angels

8 – When a second band of rats moves on the alley behind Jason's Pet Shop, followed by two others, Charles decides to clear out the entire block. He sends feelers to his old cat network, seeking help, and is surprised to soon receive an inquiry from Tom'alaxt. More than happy to cede the rooftops to the birds, Charles joins with the hawk, who calls in Blat and some of his other friends for help. Together they rid the block of rats and mice within two days.

9 – The broken remnant of the invader rats hears of a sanctuary in the city park. They head that way before discovering it's the domain of Tom'alaxt and Blat – the same devilish hawk and owl that confounded their downtown efforts. So these vagabond rats flee into the sewers, get lost at the double-T pipe crossing that's known for confusing many a washed-out vermin, and end up in a smelly old landfill that most area residents stopped using years ago. There the rats spend the rest of their lives in relative peace and harmony, not minding the snakes, coyotes, bobcats, and other hunters that frequent their new home. Those creatures they can predict with decent accuracy. But that mutating waste dumped by the experimental U.S. Army base hidden near the back of the county... that problem no one could have foreseen, even after it was too late.

10 – Jessica nearly trips in the darkness on some sort of rope strung across the bathroom floor. Catching herself against the doorway, the weary wanderer manages to turn on the light. Ignoring John's groans as the beam strikes his sleeping eyes, Jessica finds long, tattered remnants dangling from her favorite old bathroom rug. It saddens her, even though she'd been expecting this to happen from Bridget's clawing ways. Jessica rolls that old footpad up for disposal, then recalls when her parents gave it to her, and how she's always hung onto

it. The memories spur Jessica to place the bundled rug in a pantry corner, as a future cat toy for when Bridget's just too rambunctious to deal with.

11 – The city council gathers this morning at the park to celebrate Butch the Dog Day. Even with two TV crews and several busloads of distracting school kids in attendance, Butch provides the model example of how a loving dog handles public adulation in a sentimental, totally meaningless, yet completely moving television moment. Pepper can't remember any politician who mugged better for camera appeal and constant attention than did Butch. He suspects it will get airtime at stations across the country.

12 – Butch sees Old Snapper dragging a desperate sidewinder into the park stream. It makes the dog sad, until he hears Edna praise the turtle. She tells the retriever to warn everyone again about vipers, so without another thought, that's what he does.

13 – Jessica spreads her things across the dining room table, determined to finish an astrobiology essay due the next morning. Her topic: adaptive scientific models for recognizing and comprehending alien intelligence. As soon as Jessica sits down, Bridget tries to nestle on her beloved's lap. Jessica starts to shoo the cat off, but Bridget latches her claws into Jessica's thin pants and bides her time. The time-stressed student takes a deep breath and tries to put up with the situation. Bridget takes that as a victory sign and starts flexing her nails with each purr. She adjusts her position, finds a spot that's just perfect for her back, and again anchors her claws. That's good for a few moments, until some of Bridget's hairs start twitching against a ticklish spot, which makes the cat drag herself around a few times until she feels comfortable again, with plenty of room to lick her fur back into place. With that, plus more stretching and relaxing claw flexes, Bridget settles

A Year in the Lives of God's Furry Angels

down once more for some serious purring. Jessica, meanwhile, finds herself still contemplating her opening sentence. She prays for patience. Bridget goes through such readjustments three more times, making the pre-med student wonder if she'll ever understand this cat. It dawns on Jessica to apply her adaptive model to her history with Bridget... and the paper writes itself.

14 – A few rats wake Edna up to report that another snapping turtle is in the pond. No one can figure out quite when or how this happened, much less why. The newcomer's smaller than Old Snapper, with somewhat different colors and far fewer spikes on its shell, but Edna notes it seems to be thriving. Butch wonders if there might be still more strangers in there, under the water or in the reeds, but the rats don't report seeing any others, and neither does the hawk. Still, they don't know what's outside the park. Since this turtle, like Old Snapper, refuses to share much information about itself, Butch leads a fun game to determine just what to call the newcomer. Someone mentions New Snapper, and the name sticks, even though Tom'alaxt thinks it's just as stupid as Old Snapper.

15 – Jason drops by the city park to check on Butch. They play fetch with a tennis ball, drawing the attention of several children heading home from school. One of the kids tosses the ball into some brush, and a rabbit scampers out, followed by another, and another. Thrilled, the kids charge after the bunnies, which makes Butch follow them. Curious, Jason steps into the bushes after the ball – and wave after wave after wave of cottontails spring forth, making him laugh before the sheer numbers leave Jason speechless. The kids just stop and watch the bunnies race out every corner of the park. Pretty soon the sheriff's office is flooded with calls about big rabbits, small rabbits, nosy rabbits, frightened rabbits, hungry rabbits, noisy

rabbits (which seems hard to believe), freakish rabbits (another difficult one), and on and on. Dispatchers would come to call this The Day of the Bunnies. Never had so many dog and cat owners called Jason and Pepper in a single day, each one worried about rabies or gardens, of their pets and children catching rabbits or being cornered by rabbits. They called with wild worries of rabbits getting into their homes or basements, swimming in their pools and eating their bushes, chewing their auto wiring or their antenna and phone cables. To Pepper's knowledge, nothing like this had happened in this town before. A few callers reported rabbits in trees. One police call warned of a pack of coyotes running down the streets after prey. Several told of bobcats. It was then that some deputies noticed an influx of raptors, which soon everyone witnessed. For several minutes their town resembled the old Hitchcock movie, although some residents welcomed these predators. The birds made quick work of scattering the rodents, although a few dined on the spreading mammals in very public places. One hawk in particular, known for his windmill roost, was seen just about everywhere running rabbits ragged, although no one ever actually witnessed him eating one. Once the birds got involved, the hare issues seemed to simmer down, then disappear. Pepper hesitated to claim that, pointing out how night fell about the same time, but the dispatcher calls did slow, then stop, almost across the board.

16 – Hearing some strange early morning commotion, Jessica wakes up John to see just what's going on. He stumbles into the dark living room, spies something outside the window in the porch shadows, and in his tired, absent mindset, opens the front door. Bridget flies outside. John shouts for her to stop in sudden fear of another escape. Then he sees a big gray shadow jump off the porch. Bridget goes right after it. The dark specter seems to hop through the night with incredible

A Year in the Lives of God's Furry Angels

speed, as if it were a bunny... not an everyday critter, but a very, very big rabbit, the kind you might imagine in a dark alley or a horror movie. Bridget chases the intruder right up to the elm tree, only to see what was a single, frightful shadow break into one big dark image and four smaller clones, all speeding down different paths. Bridget stops, pondering what to do. John calls for her again. Bridget twists around, eyes the tree and Sebastian's grave, then John, and heads back to the house. The accountant takes no chances, running down to grab the cat before she gets close to the porch. By that time Jessica's also outside, chill in her nightgown, yet worried sick about what's going on. John reassures her that everything's okay, which Jessica sees for herself when she takes her purring pet into her arms. Together they head back into the house, and bed.

17 – After two days of Tom'alaxt and others in the bird council keeping constant guard in the air, the hawk reports no sign of the eagles. Tom'alaxt still fears word of the plentiful rabbits, or even the rats, might reach the air lord and bring him, or others, back towards their area, if not the town. The hawk vows to keep up the sentries, even if they see no sign of the great predator. "We must drive the rabbits clear out of the country!" he says, which Edna wonders might be the longest sentence the hawk ever uttered. At Blat's hoot, the hawk admits the guards did catch an influx of snakes, and they warded off a few wandering coyote packs and a bobcat or two, but all those hunters have since followed the rabbits into the farms. So their biggest fear didn't come true, Edna says. "Yet," warns the ever vigilant Tom'alaxt, which draws a hoot from Blat.

18 – Bridget awakens to the sound of footsteps on the front porch. Jessica soon walks through the portal, tears drifting down trails drying on her cheeks. Alarmed, Bridget runs across the top of the couch to leap onto her beloved's chest, her claws gripping Jessica's sweater.

The weary lass cries Bridget's name in surprise and shock, but the cat knows now how to draw in her claws just enough to not damage these clothes, so she eases Jessica's fears by climbing to the giant's shoulder. Bridget rubs her purring neck against her beloved's cheeks, then kisses away those lingering tears. Jessica thanks God for such a caring angel and grasps her cat close while drawing enough strength from Bridget's flowing compassion to quell her spreading anguish. The struggling student determines to maintain her faith in her family and future as she works through this setback.

19 – Jessica awakens from tears dripping down her cheeks. Her dreams were so vivid, of children growing in this house, chasing Bridget, playing around the elm tree, basking in a Christmas tree's vibrant glow. She's had these dreams before, of these children. They thrill her, uplift her, encourage her... and shatter her. The doctor's words echo across those lingering emotions she knows she may never get to realize. More tears flow at that thought, that dreadful thought. But she will have faith, Jessica almost declares out loud. God would not have given her John and then take away their future, their dreams. Such certainties carry her eyes to John, who sleeps restfully through her nightmares. Jessica feels she should tell him, but determines not to. She will not burden her beloved with things she cannot accept... not yet, anyway. She will not give in until this prognosis proves undeniable.

20 – Butch spies a group of rats coming back to the windmill from the creek. He waits in the shadows until they're just about to the deadwood, then rushes out growling like the angriest cat he's ever heard. The rats scatter, then stop and look at Butch, amazed that he almost did scare them. That turns into claps and cheers before they all run up and give the dog a big hug.

A Year in the Lives of God's Furry Angels

21 – Jessica looks up from her studies to see John reclining in his lounge, a football game winding down on the TV, a folded sports page on his lap. He looks tired... or is it boredom? Perhaps a bit of both, with the score out of hand and the moon shining through the window. She starts to get up, go to him, but she still has two chapters to read for school and a sleeping cat on her lap beneath the table. "Ready for bed?" she softly calls, to see if he's listening. "Whenever you are," John responds, full of life, and perhaps anticipation. She hopes a bit of both. He lifts the paper, glances at the articles, then tosses it aside, uninterested. That, she realizes, reveals part of the problem. So Jessica asks the name of his favorite sports magazine... one without swimsuits or women's volleyball or cheerleaders and all those other sexy topics. He laughs, saying they all do swimsuits now. "And I never look at them!" he adds. "Not without seeing you." That draws her laughter. "It's true!" he says. "You know, I tried to order five of those suits for you." "Just five?" she scoffs. "Well, what stopped you? Don't tell me you couldn't find my size!" John shares her laughter. "Oh, they all would have fit you fine," he said, emphasizing that last part so sweetly, "but I just couldn't see spending \$278 to \$500 or more on a swimsuit." Her heart swells at that, though she can't resist another dig: "I'm not worth that to you?" He rises from his chair, his eyes aglow. "There isn't a bank in this world that could cover what you're worth," he says. "Those swimsuits certainly can't." He turns off the TV and extends her his hand. Jessica slides out of her chair while lifting her sleeping cat to her chest. This man will get his sports magazines, she decides, and everything else she can give him.

22 – With Pepper visiting the pet shop during his morning break, Jason shows his friend a catalog entry for wire cages the size of bedroom wardrobes. Surprised and impressed, Pep asks if he's going into rabbits after all. "Oh, har to that!" Jason snaps. "I don't