

## Lucy

“Lucy? Luuuucy!” chimed Patrick over the breeze. It blew in his face and made him squint such that Lucy made it back inside unseen. “Come inside, Lucy, or you’ll catch a cold!” But of course, she was already gone. Patrick opened his eyes to the garden, and scoured it for his departed young sister, the flowers waving at him in mocking glee.

“Where are you? It’s getting late,” he exclaimed, exasperated if not alarmed. It took him a moment, but her laughter soon led him out of the wind, through their checkered front door, and back into his kitchen, where he found, with embarrassed reassurance, a smirking young girl entirely too pleased with herself.

“Yes, Patrick?” she chortled, smearing mud on her tiny dress with one hand and fondling her hair with the other, “I’m right here. Aren’t you cold out there?” He stretched a mirthy grin, and before either of them could realize, the room had grown stuffy with their laughter.

“It’s nearly time for supper, but you’re filthy! Go clean yourself up while I put a kettle on the stove. I’m hungry for those leftover potatoes Miss Celia brought us on Saturday. Sound good?”

“Sounds great!” Lucy yelled, half way down the hall already, her gait a skip matched perfectly to the lines on the floor. Hands covered with mud, she pushed the door to her room open with her foot, balancing as her knee scraped the knob - all in one fluid motion. Then, squeezing past the now-hanging door, she made her way to the bathroom, inching along the edge of the carpet like a tightrope. The bathroom door stood open as if prepared, and the stool by the sink, in a like-minded fashion, had been pushed nearly a half-foot from the basin. Climbing upon it, Lucy stuck her arms into the cold water stream - no one likes warm water - rinsing off the dirt

that, upon inspection of herself, she realized was caked onto her forearms, elbows, and nearly up to the ruffled sleeves of her dress. Teetering on her toes, she awkwardly washed, her entire arm crammed into the basin, hand raised high and out, shoulder just under the faucet. Her other arm, washed just the same way, was outspread so as not to drip on her. It was a good thing the stool had been pushed so far away, for she had to lean far into the sink to get the water to reach that high up her arm, and her dress, which hung limply from her, would surely have gotten soaked had her torso been any closer to the water. She lathered soap on it all, both arms, before rinsing again, finally stepping down from the sink like a scarecrow, flapping her limbs lightly.

After drying, she cautiously returned the towel to its rung before stepping back into her bedroom. Arms now hovering over the surface of her dress, she treaded the carpet across the room, pausing to pick Cindy up off her bed and, arms outstretched, hug the beloved doll with her eyes. Though her skin sparkled with newfound cleanliness, Lucy knew that she was far from clean. She felt a grimy pressure on her skin, blanketing her face, over and under her clothes, and encroaching on her forearms. Cindy was perfect, and she wanted it to stay that way. But nonetheless the feeling of the doll on her skin was alluring, and possessed her from afar. For she was quite a ways from Cindy, much farther than the span of her arms. *Later*, she thought, *when I am better than I am now.*

The kettle had just begun to hiss when Lucy returned to the kitchen, smiling at the sight of Miss Celia's potatoes, freshly warmed and cooling on the dining table.

"They smell delicious!" she beamed, pulling up a chair. Patrick handed her a cup tea, to which she liberally added milk and sugar, sampling between pours to get it just right.

"I just bought this tea," he said. "It's jasmine - I've never tried jasmine before." Lucy took a hefty swig and was pleased by it. Unlike most children her age, she liked bitter things, like

tea, albeit with lots of sugar added. The taste made her feel warm inside, and worked to accentuate her hunger. The potatoes looked very appetizing.

“It’s delicious. Thank you,” she nodded, taking hold of the potato platter from Patrick, who next passed her a dishing spoon.

“You’re welcome. I like it too. I’ll have to get some more the next time we’re at the market.”

Happily savouring their meal, Patrick and Lucy ate their supper mostly in silence, exchanging only an occasional word or a, “hmm” between bites. Indeed, the kitchen seemed frozen while they ate, a kind of warm freeze that instills feelings of slow softness and makes one, without exception, smile. So when the kettle and platter were finally empty, and Patrick and Lucy were leaning back in their chairs, they felt as if they had been laying before a roaring fire for hours. Nothing could be better than this.

Coming out of her daze, Lucy noticed that shadows had appeared on the walls, chasing away the daylight as they slowly encroached on the kitchen. She turned to Patrick and saw him staring out the window at the flowers, his face cut into dark and light stripes. He was breathing in the afternoon air, which, with the pungent tea all drunk, had begun to fill the room. Lucy grinned.

Pausing for another moment, the two stood, taking up the food-stained dishes and moving them to the sink together. Patrick scrubbed them, and Lucy scraped the debris into the garbage. Between them, the work went quickly, and soon the kitchen was clean and clear again.

“That was wonderful,” Lucy said.

“Yes, I enjoyed it. So, what are you planning to do this evening? I’m going out into the garden. Care to join me?”

“No thanks. I still feel dirty from earlier, so I’m going to take a shower and stay inside tonight.”

The afternoon toiled on with Patrick gazing at the sky. The flowers' deepest shades, he observed, grew more profound in the dwindling light, expressing beauty abundant as if in preparation for the evening. Childlike glee overtook him, and left the young man in awe as he turned his gaze upward and stared at the stars, the soft humming of the garden seemingly pushing him upward. All of it raptured him. All of it sang.

Meanwhile, having returned to her bathroom, Lucy rinsed off the grime leftover from her own, earlier foray into the garden. The guzzling sound of rushing water filled her ears, her nose raw from the stench of layer after layer of soaps and shampoos. With water and soap she scrubbed at her feeling, until finally she felt satisfied to sit, treading the carpet which she had previously avoided. She plopped down onto her bed, exhausted, and laid her head next to Cindy, which she gobbled up in a great big hug, pressing the doll’s button eyes against her cheek before drifting soundly to sleep. As if she had left the day in the bathroom, it reappeared on the walls, dripping down from the ceiling into the late hours of the night..

Through the evening Lucy lay there, Cindy clutched to her chest, the deepest, most loving grin on her face. She did not awake until morning, not even when Patrick came to see her and, witnessing such a delightfully quiet scene, draped a blanket over his slumbering friend, gently switching off the lights as he shuffled away before retiring himself. No, for all that time Lucy was still and, Cindy beside her, she dreamed a dreamless night.

When she finally opened her eyes, it was morning. Natural light streamed through the window, and Patrick’s shrill whistling could be heard, precipitating the buttery smell of breakfast. Lucy looked around, tossing the hair from her eyes as she slowly awoke. Then,

slipping out from under the blanket, she nestled her feet onto the carpet before replacing Cindy, which was still clutched to her chest, against her pillow. She escaped to the hallway, making her way into the kitchen.

“Good morning,” Patrick exclaimed upon seeing her.

“Morning,” replied Lucy. “Thanks for putting that blanket over me last night.”

“Oh, no worries. You looked cold. Hungry?” He was frying several slabs of bacon in a pan, and thus had to speak loudly over the sizzling.

“Yes, please. Smells good.” She held out her plate. Tipping the pan slightly, it took several thrusts of his arm for Patrick to loosen two slices, sending them skidding onto the plate along with a few droplets of grease, which landed on the table, the flower vase, and into the open flame, respectively. The last one crackled, sizzling like the freshly-minted bacon. With a “pop,” two slices of toast sprung up and into Patrick’s waiting hands, coming to rest on his and Lucy’s plates after a minor feat of juggling; the butter he spread on them melted immediately. Pouring out two mugs of tea - the last of the jasmine - Patrick sat in the seat across from Lucy, gesturing with his hands as if saying, “ta-da!!” before starting on his food.

It was Tuesday, and like every other Tuesday Miss Celia would be coming to the house. Miss Celia was Patrick and Lucy’s next-door neighbor, a spindly old widow who had lived on the block for decades, far longer than Lucy or Patrick had been alive. Like them, she kept a garden, beautiful to walk through, but had found, somewhere along the way, that she wasn’t much of one for *garden<sup>ing</sup>*. Indeed, she loved the flowers but hated the soil, and thus had an ongoing arrangement with Patrick:

Twice a week (or thrice if you count his weekly strolls), Patrick would hop the fence to Miss Celia’s garden and return only after several hours. He tended her flowers, mowed her grass,

trimmed her hedges, watered her vines, and, occasionally, plucked her vegetables. For Miss Celia's garden was more than a tranquil paradise: it grew all sorts of things: tomatoes, carrots, pears, oranges, bushels upon bushels of lettuce, strawberries, apricots, and, of course, potatoes. But she didn't reward him with potatoes, oh heavens no. Instead, Miss Celia came to the house once a week, every Tuesday, to clean since, to his own shame, Patrick was a total slob. It's not that he was too unwilling or too lazy to clean, he simply couldn't tell what was or wasn't messy enough. He'd certainly tried, endlessly stacking and restacking his belongings, shoving them into drawers and under cloths and in closets. But despite his efforts, a thin (and in some places not so thin) layer of dust covered everything, and the floor of his bedroom was littered with debris, a veritable graveyard of pencil shavings, eraser butts, buttons, thread, and those little rubber bumpers on mechanical pens, shredded to a thousand tiny pieces by Patrick's ever-moving hands.

Then there was Lucy's room, which Patrick mostly left alone. She was much more attentive to the state of her space, and dusted regularly, but nonetheless she was just a child, and everyone knows that children are the most careless of people. However, Patrick, out of respect for her privacy, would not clean her room himself, and with respect to his own snobbishness, could not clean his either, leaving Miss Celia a fair bit of work to do - it's amazing how much can accrue in a week.

The doorbell rang.

"Oh, that must be Miss Celia," Patrick said as he leapt from his chair. He'd wolfed down his bacon first so that it wouldn't get cold as he let her in. Two seconds later they walked back into the kitchen; Miss Celia dropped her heavy purse on the living room couch on her way in.

"Good morning, Lucy!" she beamed.

“Good morning.” Lucy gave the woman her seat, for which she received a warm look. Patrick handed Miss Celia a mug before filling it with tea.

“It’s jasmine,” he said enthusiastically.

“Oh I love jasmine!” she exclaimed, taking a whiff of it before drinking.

“Are you hungry? We’ve still some bacon left, and I could toast some more bread...”

“No, thank you. I’ve already eaten. Did you like those potatoes I made?”

“Yes.”

“They were delicious.” Lucy and Patrick spoke together. “Some of the best potatoes I’ve ever had.”

“Oh good. I’m glad. If you too ever need more, I have plenty of food growing in the garden - much more than I’ll ever eat! Take as much as you want.”

“Thank you. We will.”

With that, Miss Celia stood up, suddenly looking determined. “Well, I’d best get to it. Will you two be at the market again?”

“Yes. Got to find more jasmine!”

“Could you pick up some spices for me? I never find the time to go.”

On Tuesdays, while Miss Celia was cleaning, Patrick and Lucy would walk down to their local farmer’s market, the biggest in the county, for that week’s groceries. It was perhaps Lucy’s favorite event of the week.

“Come on, Lucy! They’re only open ‘till noon!” Patrick yelled across the hall. He was waiting by the front door, dressed in a thin windbreaker and heavy boots, Lucy’s own, smaller hoodie draped over his arm. Miss Celia was in his room, mumbling something incredulous about eraser shavings, but Lucy was nowhere to be found. After finishing her breakfast, Lucy had

bolted from the kitchen and was seen turning her door handle with her knee before disappearing inside. Now, nearly five minutes later, Patrick was growing impatient.

“We’re going to be late! What are you doing in there?”

No response. Patrick assumed she hadn’t heard him and resigned himself to wait.

But Lucy had heard him, loud and clear, from her bathroom sink. The bacon had left her hands all greasy and she was washing it off, teetering on her toes, her entire arm crammed into the basin, hand raised high and out, shoulder just under the faucet. Cindy sat where she’d left it, against her pillow, and although the doll couldn’t be seen from the bathroom mirror, it solely occupied Lucy’s thoughts. After the market, she wanted to lay down with Cindy again, wrap it in her arms. But first there was the market: the walk, the stroll, the perusing, the buying, the talking, the chatting, and eventually the walk back home. Lucy flipped through each of these as she washed. She’d have to do them all very carefully if she wanted to hug Cindy when she returned. Truly, she was looking forward to the market - it was one of her favorite places, and she knew that, if she did everything right, she’d be able to do everything she wanted that day.

“Coming!” Lucy yelled back, shutting off the faucet. She kicked it, leaping into the air to do so. This always took her several tries. Her arms now dry, Lucy sped across the carpet, out of her room and down the hall, taking up the hoodie before going outside.

“Bye Miss Celia!” They called out together, locking the checkered door behind them. As they made their way to the sidewalk, Lucy looked back at her shaded bedroom window. She certainly didn’t need to tell Miss Celia not to touch Cindy.

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The market opened at 8:00 AM three times a week. Though it would be open for hours, Patrick and Lucy liked to arrive early, just as the first booths were being set up, to avoid the lines. On this occasion, however, they were running late. It was roughly 7:45 when they left the house, and the walk would take them at least half an hour. They didn't have a car, so when they went out it was important to gauge the size of what they'd be carrying back. Supposedly, they could've taken the bus or called a taxi, but even when late it wasn't worth giving up the walk to the market. If the garden was a serene paradise, the walk was an exciting adventure, fit with dazzling views of other houses and other gardens, birds, trees, and wonders one can only find in passing, yet still peaceful like home. Neither of them would give up this walk for the world - lines be damned!

Lucy, however, stuck to the sidewalk like glue. She matched every step with the cracks between the paving stones, flatly pressing down with the center of her sole such that the arch of her foot aligned perfectly with the lines - one could argue that she wasn't stepping on them at all. It took nearly her full concentration to keep it up. Every few stones there was a long slab of seamless pavement, and Lucy had to jump, propelling her foot forward like a dart to reach it. Patrick, seeing her skipping, smiled playfully to himself.

After half an hour of walking, they finally arrived at the market, which they found packed beyond their experience because of the later time. There were people everywhere, hundreds maybe, at every sort of shop imaginable. Not just food was sold at the market, but clothing, toys, jewels, books, and much more. Lucy was stunned: she'd never seen it so busy. She and Patrick were usually in and out of the market, their strolling, perusing, and chatting phases unnaturally short for frequent customers, especially considering the leisurely nature of their journey to the market. Perhaps it was the long, comfortable walks that made them so swift in their shopping,

eager to be active, to do. Since they preferred to arrive early, they were normally gone by this time. Indeed, it rarely took them more than an hour to shop and return home, during which time they encountered barely anyone at all. The reality that today's trip would be considerably longer dawned on them solemnly, overcoming their initial thrill once they took their place in line for a butcher's booth.

At least the morning was cool. Had it not been, had it in fact been blisteringly hot and sweaty, Lucy worried... but it wasn't. It was a nice day with clear weather, perfect humidity and lots of shade. Lucy allowed herself to breathe. All around her, people were jostling, moving from booth to booth, eating, laughing, playing. Lucy shrunk away from them, her arms chained to her sides. The man next to her bent down to pick up his son's dropped toy and she pulled herself to his side, out of the line of fire, as if he were a cannon being tilted toward her. A young woman pushed through the crowd haughtily, swinging her backpack to her side, mace-like. Lucy ducked and dashed around her, feeling as if she'd quite literally dodged a bullet. Then there were the children who zipped through the legs of the crowd, running between candy shops and toy booths. As she and Patrick waited, Lucy watched the crowd surrounding her and slipped between its obstacles like water, Cindy ever on her mind. It would happen later than she'd originally thought, but it *would happen* when she returned home. She was going to touch Cindy. The day wouldn't end here.

But then it happened, and not the "it" she was hoping for. As Lucy ducked to avoid a passing couple, a young girl around her age bolted across a corner, dragging a limp and clearly well-loved doll behind her, and their sides collided, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip for an instant, nothing more. It was enough. Lucy felt the gash on her side, and as the girl skipped away

unfazed all her hopes for the day were scattered, her dreams of Cindy sent flying into the future, guarded by baths and sinks and soap. She stifled a tear.

Quickly, however, her eyes stopped watering and her muscles relaxed. It was unfortunate, sure, but Lucy saw this simply as yet another problem, one she'd just have to fix. *I'll hug Cindy later*, she thought, *it's just going to take more time*. Its purpose negated, Lucy ceased her dodging and leaned against Patrick's leg. She might as well be comfortable now.

It took them nearly two hours to return to the house. The walk back had been slower as they were laden with produce, bags overflowing with packages of freshly cut meat, bundles of apples, bananas and pears, cartons of milk and juice, and, though it had taken some time to procure, a large array of spices for Miss Celia. Dumping their burdens on the kitchen table, Patrick and Lucy fell into chairs, their legs weak from standing - line-standing can tire a person out faster than running. Sighing deeply, Patrick rested a moment before digging into the largest bag. He pulled out a dozen small vials.

"Your spices," he said, arranging them on the table. "Took a while to find the brand of tarragon you wanted."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I hope it didn't keep you too long," Miss Celia replied. She surveyed the spices.

"These are perfect. Thank you both!"

"No worries. Lucy, would you help me put this stuff away?" He slid one of the smaller bags, filled with fruits and vegetables, over to her. Ripping the bag to free them, Lucy arranged the produce - except the bananas - along the bottom shelf of the refrigerator while Patrick stacked cans in the pantry. Miss Celia was washing dishes by the sink. When they finished, the kitchen sparkled, well fed and bathed by their efforts. Unable to resist any longer, Lucy headed

to her bedroom, already planning out the steps remaining before she could hold Cindy in her arms. She kned the door open and found the room exactly as she had left it. Almost. Only one thing had changed, but to Lucy it looked like a whole different room, straight out of a nightmare. Her heart stopped.

Cindy had been moved.

When she'd left, the doll had been leaning against her pillow, its eyes staring straight at the door. Now, however, Cindy was tilted to the side, and more importantly, it was tucked in! Lucy was in shock. Why? How? Hadn't Miss Celia known not to go anywhere near Cindy? Hadn't she known that Cindy must be left untouched? Her mind racing, Lucy edged around the carpet, trying to get a better look at the problem before her. She started for the bathroom, hoping to move Cindy, to fix it before she realized that she didn't yet know the full extent of the problem. The sheets were different and Cindy was tucked in, so Miss Celia had to have placed Cindy - she shuddered to think - somewhere *else*, somewhere in the room. How could Lucy fix the problem without knowing where that somewhere was? She had no way of assessing the damage.

She had to find out. Sprinting down the hall, she slowed to a casual walk as she entered the kitchen. She'd have to be subtle, to ask Miss Celia what she needed in a way that seemed organic. Otherwise, the old woman may not remember, or spout out anything, or worse, she might think Lucy ungrateful. After all, Miss Celia had been trying to clean her room. Lucy couldn't bear to hurt the woman's feelings, and indeed, she could feel guilt beginning to weigh on her mind for how she was reacting to such a kind-hearted gesture. Nonetheless, this had to be done.

"Hi Miss Celia," she chirped, wearing a generic smile. "How's it going?"

“I’m okay,” the woman chuckled, “How are you? How was the market? Patrick said it was packed.”

“Oh it was. I’ve never seen so many people there. It was great!” This was not going well. She had to steer the conversation her way before it fizzled out.

“So... I saw you changed my sheets. Thank you.” Miss Celia smiled. She was still washing dishes and had her hands full with a rather unwieldy pot.

“I was just wondering, though, if you’ve seen my diary anywhere?” - Lucy didn’t have a diary, but she had to come up with something - “I can’t find it.”

“Oh no dear, I didn’t see a diary when I was in there.”

“Maybe you moved something else and knocked it over,” Lucy added slyly. “What did you do with the stuff on my bed when you changed the sheets?”

“Oh, well, I put it all on the dresser.”

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“Including my doll?” Lucy asked after a pause.

“Yes, her and your pillow.”

That was that. Cindy had been placed on the dresser. The *dresser*! It was worse than Lucy had imagined. What to do? How could she fix this? Lucy nearly gagged right there.

“Okay. Thanks. I’ll check there.” And she turned and left, creeping down the hall for what felt like ages but was brief compared to when she entered the room and stared at Cindy, her pristine, beloved doll, propped slanted against her pillow, broken beyond repair. She stifled a tear.

“Lucy? Luuuuucy! I’m going out into the garden. Care to join me?” Patrick said as he emerged from his room. Lucy stood still and said nothing, still staring at Cindy. Then, only half in control of herself, she turned to face him. The tear in her eye was gone again.

“Why, Patrick? Why can’t people just leave it alone?”

“Leave what alone?” he asked, confused.

“Stuff that isn’t their concern. Why does everyone have to meddle, to manipulate? I follow the rules and I don’t expect anyone else to, but no one will let me do that.”

“What rules?”

“Mine! My own!” The shouting attracted Miss Celia, who listened from behind the hall’s corner.

“They’re my rules and I get to set them on my things!” she panted. The air around her seemed hot and thin. “Don’t look at me like that; everyone has rules, their own rules! And I respect *them*, but no one seems to care about mine!”

Patrick didn’t know what to say. Neither he nor Miss Celia had any clue what Lucy was yelling about.

“And I tried, but people just keep causing problems! And *I*,” she frantically gestured to herself, “have to fix them - constantly! Well it’s my doll! MINE! My rules go for it, no one else’s!”

With that, she stormed out of the hall, past a bewildered Patrick into the garden. When, after a minute or two, he went to find her, she was gone. Coming back inside, he saw her angrily close - but she wouldn’t slam - the door to her bedroom, quickly followed by the sound of rushing water, and thought to himself that it was the same as before, as any other playing-in-the-garden day, but it really wasn’t.

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What to do? How could she fix this? Cindy could no longer be there, but where else could Cindy be? There was nowhere to move it to. She couldn't, not now: it had to stay perfect. Cindy was perfect. Cindy was pristine. It's important. It's law.

Lucy thought hard, staring at Cindy from across the room. *Cindy had to stay perfect.* And Cindy couldn't go. Something had to, though. Something, but what? With a solemn heart she realized what it was. It was her.

Lucy slept on the living room couch that night and every night following it. The door to her room, where Cindy lay untouched, was kept closed, and she allowed no one inside, not even herself. They all would harm Cindy, Cindy's space, and what must be perfect would be broken, burnt. On Tuesdays she would stay behind to stop Miss Celia from entering, leaving Patrick to go to the market alone. In the mornings, Lucy awoke to Patrick's shrill whistling before joining him for a cup of tea and some breakfast, and just as before they enjoyed the mornings together. She played in the garden and in the mud, so to Patrick it seemed as if nothing had changed, but unbeknownst to him, she now refused to bathe in her own bathroom. While he napped in the garden, she took baths in his bathroom, unwilling to disturb Cindy's space, her own room. Let the world go on, the flowers bloom, the market bustle with the sounds of children, and the garden sing, careless, but nothing must touch Cindy. Lucy was as sure of this truth as she hated it: that her whole world rested on that doll.

But every once and a while - or, rather, constantly throughout the day she would approach the door, and turning the knob with her hand she'd open it just enough to look inside, to see Cindy and hug it with her eyes. But it didn't make her feel better. More than anything, she

wished to hold it in her arms again, to feel that warmth and that love and that precise comfort for which she was severely lacking elsewhere. For what was life without that comfort, and what was her life without that doll? It had been taken so cruelly, yet by whom she couldn't say. Who, if anyone, was to blame? And as she closed the door each time, she cried.