

The Laundry Thief

by Ted Boretti

Lucy owned a clothes dryer. But she preferred to dry her clothes on a clothesline. She often said, “I can smell the sunshine on my clothes.” It made her very happy.



Lucy also liked pinning the clothes up. It was a special and peaceful chore. Lucy stood in the warm sun. Her apron

was full of wooden clothespins. She held a few in her teeth. She pinned up shirts, pants, socks, undergarments, napkins, tablecloths, towels, everything that came out of her clothes washer.

When she was finished, Lucy sat in the kitchen. Her hands cupped a glass of iced

tea. She gazed out at the clothes flapping in the gentle summer breeze. She felt satisfied.

Lucy's husband, Trent, liked the chore, too. "It saves us so much money on our electricity bill," he boasted. It was true. But he also loved the deep outdoor smell of a freshly dried shirt. Trent also loved watching his wife as she worked. He stood at the window. He saw the clothespins in Lucy's teeth. Lucy's loose curls waved in the breeze. She picked up a towel and it snapped away in the wind. She moved slowly down the clothesline. Soon, all their laundry had been hung out to dry.

At first, Lucy thought that she had lost some clothes. A pair of socks went missing from the clothesline. The next wash, she lost one of her husband's T-shirts. She imagined a squirrel stealing it away. Then, a pair of pants went missing. Lucy grew suspicious.

“I think someone is stealing your clothes from our clothesline,” she said to her husband.

“I guess we’ll have to use the dryer,” Trent replied.

Lucy frowned. No. She would not use the dryer as long as the sun was shining.

“I’ll keep a close watch out,” she said.

And Lucy did. She found a comfortable pillow. She sat on the pillow underneath the window. Her nose rested in the windowsill. Her eyes spied. She sat for a half-hour. An hour. Two hours. But no one came to steal any clothes that day.

Then came a spate of rain. For days it poured. Lucy was forced to do her laundry inside.

The sunshine returned. Weeks had passed. Lucy was ready to dry her clothes outdoors again. She pinned up the clothes. She found her pillow. She set a watch. What she saw surprised her greatly.

She spied a boy, maybe 12 or 13 years old. He came quickly into the backyard. He snatched a shirt from the clothesline and ran off into the thicket behind the toolshed.

Lucy was not angry. Instead, she was saddened. She pitied the poor boy. His face had been dirty. His clothes ruffled and worn. Perhaps he was homeless. Or perhaps his family was far poorer than Lucy's. Her heart went out to the boy.

Before the next wash day, Lucy went shopping. She bought clothes for a 13-year-old boy. She washed them. She hung them

out to dry. And again, she waited under the window.

The boy appeared. He stopped. He stared at the clothes. Never had he seen clothes like these on the clothesline. The boy looked to the house. Lucy ducked down below the window. She waited many long minutes. She feared a knock at her door. Lucy gathered her courage and looked at her clothesline. Many of the clothes were gone. She could not help but smile.

Lucy's charity warmed her husband's heart. And as the weather cooled, she bought warmer clothes: turtlenecks, flannel-lined pants, long underwear, sweaters, boots, a goose-down coat. The weather was too cool to dry clothes. Lucy had returned to using her clothes dryer. But these new clothes, she hung up dry for the boy. They disappeared.

One day, Lucy found a slip of paper hanging on her clothesline. She went outside. It was a note. Scrawled letters read, “Thank u.” Lucy never saw the boy again.

The End