

**Lucy A Sorrowful Tale**  
Matthew Sawyer

Published by Matthew Sawyer at Smashwords

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**Lucy: A Sorrowful Tale**  
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Doubt smelled dead; at least his head did. Lucy doubted the rest of his brother lived elsewhere, especially because Doubt now lay in the owl's belly. If animals did have souls, many mice and other rodents were now confined to the hell of the bird's stomach. Doubt joined them, bringing a few damned souls of his own.

The owl is a ravenous hellmouth. The devil only lacked flame shooting from its beak. Like the evil thing it is, the owl snatched Doubt last night. Lucy watched the monster silently descend and carry his brother, howling into the tree from which Doubt's head fell.

Last night, Lucy reached the tree too late. The owl flew off and disappeared into a leaf canopy before Lucy arrived. He smelled blood in the darkness, and without his brother's wails, Lucy assumed the worst. The owl might come back to roost at the scene of its slaughter, so Lucy came back to stalk the murderer. Twilight still lit the landscape in the park.

This time yesterday, Lucy and Doubt left the house together. They usually paired up and went outside to hunt at dusk and dawn. The rustle of leaves lead the brothers through front and back yards, in a direction they had not yet investigated. They were lured to the park, the hunting grounds of coyotes and now a cowardly, demonic owl. The skies had completely darkened the night Lucy's brother died.

Noises drifted hauntingly through the night from far away. The soft chirps of insects and the hollow sound of a wind were lonely harmonies. In the city, a low mechanical hum normally drowned out the nighttime melody.

Growing up in the city accustomed Lucy and his brother to mundane rattles and exhaust. The noise of traffic and air conditioners sounded like a breeze through trees. But at night, natural sounds could be sorted from the cacophony of civilization.

Occasionally, an echo of a barking dog, or a honking horn, disturbed the nighttime sounds of nature. But the still serenity would not be disrupted. None of noises were loud enough to disturb the sleeping neighborhood. But that quiet made Doubt's cries of pain tangible, like being drenched in water.

The owl came silently from a perch on a broken tree branch. Black shadows, shifting their proportions in the sky, immediately caught Lucy's attention. The owl came unannounced, from a direction Doubt had not watched. Lucy didn't know the perilous shape until the last moment.

The devil swooped from the night and stole Doubt. His agonizing protests begged Lucy to follow. Lucy pursued the attacker until there was no longer a cause. Doubt died.

The owl ate Lucy's brother in the single eucalyptus tree, backed by a neat row of knobcone pines. The tree looked better suited for gallows rather than a supper table. The branches on the eucalyptus tree were mostly bare of leaves and bark. The leaves grew in clumps, like shaved puffs of fur on a poodle. Only the bony trunk and branches were visible last night. The tree appeared as a giant skeletal hand that waved "Farewell."

Lucy climbed the defiled tree. His mortal enemy might come back. Stinking pellets, of bone and fur, in the dust supported the likely possibility. Lucy and his brother often scouted old hunting grounds before scouting riper neighborhoods. Lucy and Doubt looked for someplace new last night. Their motivation added to the attractiveness of the wind's lure.

The absence of bark made the climb more difficult, but certainly not impossible. Lucy hugged the trunk with his front paws. His claws held him in place while he kicked his lower half upward with powerful rear legs. After every dozen inches, Lucy squashed himself, reached a little higher up the trunk and held on to the tree. He shimmied up to the first juncture of branches without trouble.

An angry squirrel chirped and barked at Lucy from a branch higher up the tree. Spotting the gray rodent was not difficult. The ruffled and twitching tail betrayed the animal's location. The squirrel clung to the tree beneath the point the trunk split into two branches. The branches then climbed parallel to each other. The owl had gone to the branch on Lucy's left. Lucy continued the climb undaunted. The squirrel went to the branch on Lucy's right.

The rodent pursued Lucy, scrambling diagonally on a separate branch, just out of reach of its predator. The squirrel fooled itself into thinking it was safe. Lucy can easily jump to the next branch and put an end to the animal's misgivings.

Despite the impulse and temptation to chase the annoying creature, Lucy moved on. The squirrel refused to give up. The rodent fussed uselessly. Lucy will not be turned away, to which the squirrel only scolded the trespasser.

The fat squirrel spoiled a contemplative moment. Even if Lucy silenced the animal, there will probably be more of the unfriendly rodents, maybe even from the same litter. The likelihood would have been an exciting prospect before Doubt died. The brothers could have hunted and played with the skittish creatures. But tonight, Lucy simply was not uninterested. His heart and mind dwelt solely on revenge.

The perspective from the top of the tree mesmerized Lucy. Tonight, the view transfixed and froze him a second time. The first incident could be excused. That happened over a year ago. Climbing trees was a brand new experience then. Doubt refused to follow Lucy up the tree when they were younger.

Back then, upon reaching the apex, Lucy locked himself to a tree branch and swung in the wind. That day was the first time Lucy had ever been alone. He felt frightened and emboldened at the same time. That distant afternoon, Lucy at least returned to Doubt.

Tonight, the view from the tree, in which Lucy used his whirling tail to balance himself, did not encompass the neighborhood. A range of hills on either side of the tree restricted views toward the east and west. The only landscapes visible in those directions were shadowy hillsides covered in scrub. A packed-dirt path ran from north to south, through the hills. Rows of pine trees lined the path until the hills squeezed together so tight that the path rose over them.

The limited field of vision failed to fascinate Lucy. The crisp and unobstructed vantage point triggered his predacious instinct. If Lucy could fly, any prey below might be plucked up cleanly and unawares. That's how the creature seized his brother.

The owl is a sharp and opportunistic hunter. Lucy needed to get close to defeat this monster. He could not trust himself to see the owl approach again.

Now that Lucy hung on the bare and open branch, where Doubt was eaten, he couldn't find a place to hide. The barking squirrel might spook the owl away - or possibly not. The rodent's chirp and squawk will have drawn Lucy and Doubt. Lucy didn't know if the owl felt as curious as him or his dead brother. The trait may be endemic to Lucy's species.

Twilight gave way to the glow of the crescent moon. Lucy knew he looked like a thick, shadowy lump on the empty branch; an obvious deterrent to his prey, but it did come. The owl appeared the same as last night, but three times bigger than Lucy. Regardless, the owl certainly

could not be so foolish to fly into the clutches of an unidentified threat. Although, the fiend now probably considered cats a part of its diet.

Lucy realized his presence may reveal he knew where the bird finished its meals. He lowered himself, backwards, down the tree. The squirrel barked and scampered after him. The fierce animal knew better than to follow Lucy out of the tree.

The squirrel seemed intelligent enough to know Lucy will tear the ornery pest to shreds, if the cat got a hold of animal. Although, Lucy may not have time to waste. He needed to leave the park. Coyotes yelped in the hills. The park became filled with predators at night.

The squirrel remained stuck in a balding tree, but Lucy rushed home. All the way from the park, Lucy watched overhead and stayed under tree cover, wherever possible. When the street came into sight, Lucy sprinted into civilization.

Lucy hustled a couple more blocks, back to where he lived, a single story, brick sided house. The windowless front door remained closed as Lucy jumped onto the stoop in a single bound. Lucy announced he wanted to come inside with a low moan.

A plump woman, in her fifties, opened the door. She stood in the center of the entry. A younger woman stood with the Lucy's owner. Both women wore black aprons. Lucy paid no attention to either woman. Now that the front door opened, he felt compelled to follow his routine.

"Oh, there's Lucy," the older woman intoned. She bent over to scratch Lucy's ears but only managed to swirl the fur at the end of his tail. The older woman called after Lucy as he dashed through the living room and into the kitchen. "Where is Doubting Thomas?"

"That's an unusual name," the younger woman said. "Is that from the Bible?"

"Yes," the older woman answered. "All my kids have names from the Bible. And my animals got the ones that weren't proper for children. Thomas is my ex-husband's name, so that one had to go to a cat. This one here is actually called Lucifer."

Lucy had come back into the living room. The old woman still had not dropped wet food in his dish. Her cat complained with a long wail.

"Shelly, I've got to feed Lucy. Thank you for giving me a ride home tonight," the older woman said to the young lady hovering in the open doorway.

"That's all right, Francis. I'll see you at work tomorrow," Shelly answered. Both women bid each other good night.

After Francis shut the door, she strolled to the kitchen. Lucy wove between her legs. Despite her age, the woman appeared quite nimble. She also regularly practiced navigation with hungry cats under foot. Francis fed Lucy from a can in the refrigerator. She left the light on while he ate in the kitchen.

Lucifer and Doubting Thomas were the only two kittens in a litter born by a stray mother. Their mother died when she lured scavenging dogs from her babies. The young brothers hid in an abandoned car, in which they were born, until Francis discovered them. The woman lured them out of the vehicle with chocolate milk. Both brothers had bellyaches afterwards, but at least the milk was more substantial than the spider and the occasional roaches they ate over several lonesome days.

The only other event Lucy remembered that day he and his brother came home with the woman, besides being given names, is his bath. Both Lucy and Doubt clawed their way through the trial and when Francis combed the matted fur from their coats. Though the brothers were clean, they resolved never to become so dusty and tangled again.

The story of their names is more complex. Months passed before Lucy and Doubt realized their names did not mean "food." The only useful purpose the distinction seemed to serve is that one brother no longer ran to disappointment when the other's name was called. Lucifer had been named after the devil. According to Francis, even the devil served a purpose.

Before that reason, Francis told people Lucy got his named because of his long tail. It moved serpent-like. That story seemed to have gotten lost. Lucy never grew into the tale, or his own tail. All of Francis' grown children shortened "Lucifer" to "Lucy." The name became the only one anyone now used.

Doubting Thomas had originally been named because, as a kitten, he was wary and aggressive. Francis' ex-husband apparently shared the same personality. Lucy never met the man to verify the similarities. The woman's suppressed anger toward her ex-husband manifested later, when "Thomas" was dropped from his brother's name. He became "Doubt."

This evening, Lucy attempted to sleep in his usual place, at the foot of the woman's bed. His brother's absence made him anxious. He left the bed because he could not bear the reminder that Doubt will not return. Back in the living room, Lucy fell asleep on a folded blanket, behind a battered recliner.

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The next morning, Francis woke at the precise time Lucy and Doubt were usually hungry every morning. Despite the sound of a new can being opened, Lucy was eager to get outside. The murderous owl may have fallen asleep in the glow of dawn. More often than not, Lucy fell asleep when he lay in the light of the sunrise.

After watching her pets swallow their breakfast in chunks, Francine usually then let them go outside. Hearing one or both of them throw up in the thin front yard never surprised her. Today, Francis fed Lucy but also decided to keep him indoors.

The woman worried for both her adolescent cats, but especially Doubt. Again, he had not come home with his brother and never turned up by himself. Doubt may be hurt, but most likely dead. A car, coyote or even an owl might have killed him. The poor kitty appeared yet another pet in the neighborhood to have been gobbled up.

Francis grounded Lucy, until she lost the feeling she will lose her last child who, unlike her other children, had not moved away from home. Those darn kids left their mother to live alone with her cats. Still, her pets were sweet creatures, unlike her grown children.

Lucy rebelled against his indoor confinement. The lack of exits always foretold of horrifying trips to a veterinarian. The day cannot accommodate nausea and anxiety, Lucy needed to avenge his brother's murder. He must convince the woman she preferred to let him outside.

Lucy hovered at the front door. A rare chance always existed that someone from outside will walk into the house, like one of the woman's children. An open door will allow Lucy to dart outside and cease his futile begging. Lucy accented his constant presence by the door with howls and whines. The high-pitched sounds bounced off the room's smooth ceiling.

When Francis finally came to investigate her cat's complaint, Lucy climbed the bookcase next to the door. Lucy jumped to the top shelf, stacked with magazines, spilling them and nearly losing his footing. The scrambled mess frustrated Francis. She had to stoop to pick up the magazines and the letters that fell with them.

Francis stooped over, first reaching for Lucy. The woman moved as if she intended to snatch hold of him. If the woman did catch him, Lucy knew she will toss him into one of the old bedrooms and shut the door. The possibility is worst than being obstructed by a single door. Lucy will only get out of the room once the woman remembered what she did with him.

Lucy trapped himself in a corner between the door and the bookcase. Francis reached around his head, for the scruff of his neck, but Lucy swatted at the woman's hand with tensed claws. He averted the woman's lunge and insulted her with a wet hiss.

Francis threw open the door and yelled at Lucy. "Get out, you thankless, orphan! Find your brother!"

Lucy raced out the open door at the moment the gap spread no wider than the length of his whiskers. Francis tended to very bloody wounds as she watched Lucy go. The cat stopped and turned around. Lucy stared at Francis as she scolded him. He wanted to lure the woman to Doubt, but she refused to follow. Lucy ran across the street and disappeared at the side of a neighbor's house.

The morning was still early. The crescent moon, turned on its heavy side, hung between telephone lines. The sun had just fully risen from the eastern horizon and shone beneath a mattress of pink clouds. Lucy hurried back to the tree to discover the branches unencumbered.

Revenge will wait, although Lucy had yet to resolve how to reach the owl. If the monster roosted in the tree while Lucy prowled the ground, he will have to climb. The owl will be alerted, especially if the idiotic squirrel still guarded the tree.

The owl won't come back to the tree all day. Owls were nocturnal creatures. This one has most likely found a hole in another tree somewhere to sleep. Lucy preferred the dim light of twilight, but managed to see fine under any illumination. Lucy supposed that gave him an

advantage. For instance, he could have caught his enemy, if the owl slept in the branches overhead.

While Lucy lingered beneath the tree, he smelled the scant and rotting remains of his brother. Something moved Doubt's head a dozen feet away from where it landed. Francis should have followed Lucy this morning. That way, Lucy could have shown the woman what had become of his brother.

Ants crawled over the tacky stump of Doubt's neck. The insects also explored his lips and empty eye sockets. Some scavenger had robbed the eyes from the discarded skull. The owl had not taken them yesterday. Sadly, the eyes lost the luster of their emerald reflection when Doubt died. At least, the carrion eater will not have eaten any part of his soul.

As Francis could not be convinced to find Doubt herself, Lucy decided to take what remained of his brother back to the old woman. Lucy needed to open his mouth wide to gain a grip on Doubt. His teeth scratched through the loose fur as Lucy closed his mouth. His fangs caught hold of Doubt below his upper jaw and inside his ear. The fetid odor of his dead brother drifted into Lucy's nostrils, but he won't be dispirited. Lucy brought Doubt home to Francis.

Doubt grew heavy as Lucy trotted out of the park and the couple blocks back to his house. Lucy's head drooped under the weight of his burden, but he never dragged his brother once. When the ants, still crawling over Doubt and now along for a ride, explored Lucy's face, he merely blinked to drive them away. The insects climbed all over Lucy by the time he reached home.

Lucy attempted to call Francis to open the door, but holding his brother muffled his voice. Doubt dropped to the concrete stoop, his thick fur made the landing soundless. Lucy hollered and scratched at the door.

Francis understood the scratching to mean Lucy and Doubt urgently sought entrance. The training took some time, and Francis frequently needed reminding about the meaning of the noise, but the recognition eventually endured. The door had already been scratched down to the wood and a whole other color of paint lay exposed. The last coat came off in blue chips and exposed the bone white color.

Francis opened the door and Lucy raced outside. He chewed on Doubt's head to pick him up again. Once he seized his brother, Lucy made an attempt to dart back into the house. Francis shrieked and forbid him entrance. She stepped in front of Lucy, taking extreme care not to touch the dead thing in his mouth.

"Oh, Lucifer!" Francis yelled, stomping her foot. "You and Doubting Thomas know better! Mother gets her own breakfast!"

No matter which gap Lucy tried to slip through, Francis moved her big, furry slippers in front of him. If she stepped backwards, to avoid contact with Lucy or his brother, Francis refilled the space when Lucy jumped for another opening.

"What is it, Lucifer?" Francis continued with her raised voice. "It better be dead, but either way, it's not coming inside!"

Lucy gave up, worn out. He dropped Doubt on the carpet at the woman's feet. Francis screamed again and then stopped. For a moment, Francis stared confused. She mentally listed all the things the dead object could not be; a mouse, bird or a baby bunny. Francis recognized a cat's head lay at her feet, and then she remembered the markings on her two blond tabby cats. Lucy had brought Doubt home.

"Poor, Lucy. Poor, baby" chanted Francis. "That's your brother, isn't it? That is such a shame."

The woman vanished into the kitchen, postulating Doubt's demise. She proposed teenagers caused of her pet's death, racing their parents' cars through the neighborhood, or maybe the mean dog across the street got loose again. Lucy stood sentry over his brother in the open doorway. Francis soon returned to the front door with a broom and a dustpan.

The woman's grim rambling continued as she swept Doubt out of her house. Francis chased after him. She caught Doubt when he came to a rest on the concrete stoop. Francis used the broom to sweep Doubt into the barren flowerbed in front of the house. Lucy jumped into the dirt, next to his brother.

"You can stay outside, Lucy," Francis said. "I planned to leave you outside until nighttime, anyway. You better come home tonight. That is sad about your brother."

The front door shut, leaving Lucy alone that morning with Doubt.

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The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Lucy waited outside the house the whole time. He curled his front paws beneath himself and wrapped his tail around his body. Both Lucy and Doubt lost the same amount of fur while they lay in the afternoon sun. The yellow fur floated in the air between them. It blew away when a wind blew from the southeast and then swirled in the direction the street twisted.

The sun sunk toward the horizon, which meant Francis will open the front door any moment. Lucy won't need to call for the woman or scratch the door. Despite feeling hungry, Lucy evaded the risk of becoming trapped indoors until morning. The owl might return to its perch at dusk. Lucy needed to see.

The traffic on the streets this empty night looked in stark contrast to that during the day, although only neighbors ever seemed to drive to and from their homes. Nevertheless, their cars were blind and furious. Francis is forgiven for assuming Doubt had been struck by a car.

Francis may be excused for her disrespect toward Doubt, as Lucy was also uncertain what to do with his brother's head. Lying next to the house seemed all right. Although, Lucy will have preferred to have stayed indoors with the remains of Doubt. The sprinklers will go off soon, changing the desolate flower bed to mud, as ordinarily happened every night.

Coyotes howled. Lucy needed to get to the park and up the tree quickly. He crossed the browned, thirsty lawn in a couple leaps and bounds. A gust of wind pushed Lucy to one side as he glided through the air. Beast or element will not dissuade him from pursuing vengeance. Lucy sprinted to the park, keeping under the cover of trees and better still, bushes.

Lizards and ground squirrels scampered through the dead leaves beneath the brush. Lucy paid no attention, despite the impulse ignited by the distraction. He arrived at the skeletal tree, panting. The branches were empty, although Lucy heard hoots. The coyotes stopped crying. Lucy's invisible nemesis now teased him with its cryptic song.

Lucy pulled himself up the eucalyptus tree, furiously hooking his claws into the trunk and pushing with his rear legs. The vocal squirrel did not attend tonight's conflict. Lucy's mouth hung open the entire climb. He climbed one branch higher than the one he expected the owl to land upon. Lucy will have to creep from a veil of waxy leaves, but he knew he could do so unnoticed, and then drop down upon the monster.

The owl circled the glade in the park for three hours. It hooted from every tree top in the park, except the one in which Lucy waited. The slow, random hunt of the owl frustrated Lucy while he waited in his blind, but he resisted the urge to scamper down and then up another tree.

The owl then swooped onto the branch below Lucy, the same limb where the creature ate his brother and dropped his head. Nothing struggled in the owl's talons tonight; it may have eaten elsewhere. Whether the owl had eaten did not interest Lucy. He stretched himself along the tree limb above the owl. They were the same size when the owl kept its wings folded.

The bird spun its head all the way around, but missed Lucy overhead. Lucy crept directly above his clueless prey. He anticipated pouncing on the owl and riding it all the way to the ground. The bird will be crushed and Lucy might be hurt. Last summer, Lucy fell out of a tree from a height higher than where he now rocked in the gusts of winds. After that fall Lucy picked himself up with nothing worse than the air knocked out of his lungs.

The wind shook the tree at that moment. Lucy crouched low against the branch and sunk his claws into the living wood. The owl stooped as it prepared to take flight. Just then, it looked backwards and up at Lucy. Lucy stared back at his merciless, even righteous enemy. Lucy will not let this fiend claim death's mantle. The monster will be pulverized and stripped of its feathers, then flesh.

The startled owl opened its beak in surprise. The fiend spread its wings and left the branch, diving downward. Lucy jumped toward the bird's back. For a moment, Lucy feared he missed his target and now fell into darkness. He then felt his front claws catch weight. They hooked into the owl. Lucy pulled the creature toward himself as they both plummeted.

Lucy bit at the owl's wings as the bird flipped over and gouged at his face with its beak and talon. The monster swiped at Lucy's face and plucked out an eye. Lucy's torturous howl

ended abruptly when he and the owl hit the ground. Both creatures were dazed and anesthetized in their disorientation.

Lucy saw that the owl's wings were broken. They flapped uselessly, spread out across the mowed grass. The owl's beak opened and its eyes flashed fiery red; its dry, finger-like tongue resembled a lick of flame.

Lucy's ribs hurt, which made breathing painful and difficult, but he still stood and attacked the owl. The monster backed away, moving slowly and never pulling in its enormous bent wings. Lucy caught the owl. He sunk his teeth, without a struggle, into the bird's neck. Lucy dropped on his side and used his rear claws to rake into its feathers.

The owl scratched at Lucy with its razor-sharp claws. Loose feathers flew over Lucy, until he found himself blanketed by the bird's broken wings. Even Lucy's enhanced vision succumbed to the absolute blackness under the owl. In that utter darkness, Lucy felt talons grab his abdomen and stab into him. Despite the pain, like dragging himself over broken glass, Lucy jumped up and bit whatever he caught in his mouth. Something snapped in the bite. Moonlight suddenly appeared, as if the park had been released from a lunar eclipse.

Lucy watched the dead owl jump in circles, with its head dangling and wings dragging. Lucy also felt cold and lay in shock. The monster had disemboweled him as Lucy broke its neck. The chilly wind offer no relief and only grew more bitter cold during the night. Lucy fell asleep shivering and died, not far from where Doubt's head had fallen.