

*A Short Story*

# THE PATH, CARMEL, AND LUCY



FERIDOON MALEKZADEH

*A Short Story*

**THE PATH,  
CARMEL  
AND LUCY**

**FERIDOON MALEKZADEH**

“The Path, Caramel, and Lucy”  
First Edition

© Feridoon Malekzadeh  
Seattle, WA 98177

<https://feridoon.malekzadeh.net/>

*This short story is dedicated to one of the strongest,  
and bravest people I know: Leyni.*

# PROLOGUE

The roads we walk are not always the roads we expect.

Sometimes, the path is smooth and familiar, stretching easily toward the places we want to go. Other times, it twists when we thought it would stay straight. It leads us somewhere we didn't plan to be. It sometimes even vanishes beneath our feet just when we need it most.

There are times when we think we've figured it out—when we believe we finally understand the way forward. But then, suddenly, we're stuck. The old paths no longer work. The turns we never learned to take now seem impossible.

And in those moments, it's easy to believe that we've failed. That we should have known more, done better, seen further ahead.

But what if the problem isn't that we've failed?

What if we've simply reached the edge of what we know?

And what if, just around the corner—past the limits of what we've learned—there's something more?

There's a phrase in German, “die Kurve kriegen,” which translates to, “making the bend.”

This is a story about paths. About what we know, and what we don't. About the steps we take, and the ones we're afraid to try.

And about what happens when we finally decide... to try something new. To make the bend.



## LUCY

Lucy was a curious, clever, and creative girl. The kind you always find in books about young girls who go on adventures into wardrobes and spare rooms. Lucy was also the kind of girl with hidden power: she could make the world — and sometimes the people — around her bend to her wishes. Sometimes, she could even make things move out of the way.

Lucy lived in a world where roads built themselves as you walked. All you had to do was step forward, and a path would appear beneath your feet. Some people had roads that curved gently, adjusting to the world around them. Other people could summon bridges over rivers, or staircases that climbed mountains.

For Lucy, the only type of roads that ever appeared for her were straight. That had always been fine, though. She knew

how to make straight paths work. She was an expert at it. Plus, she had her hidden power.

Lucy was not alone in her world. She had a tiny hamster, Caramel, that lived curled up in the little pocket of her big coat.

She didn't know where Caramel had come from — just that he was hers, small, warm and always there.

When she was younger, whenever she got stuck, she could swear she heard a tiny voice whispering in her ear, telling her where to go. She never really knew where the voice came from. But it always *seemed* to come from Caramel.

Lucy would often whisper her fears to him, and sometimes, she imagined he whispered back...

*Go left, Lucy.*

*Take three steps forward.*

*Use your power.*

And for a long time, it helped.

But as Lucy grew older, she stopped asking. Stopped listening. She didn't need a tiny voice in her pocket anymore. She didn't need help. She was pretty sure she knew how to move forward on her own. And she did.

For years, Lucy walked confidently, her straight paths appearing beneath her feet. She took step after step, trusting that if she just kept going forward, she'd always find her way.

On rare occasions, when facing a particularly challenging obstacle in her way, she would summon up her power and make everything around her bend and move to allow her through.

Though her power often got her where she wanted to go, she often felt bad about using it. It sometimes felt like

cheating. Sometimes the things that got bent, would not, or could not bend or be bent back.



Today was such a day.

She had reached a place where straight wasn't enough. The land ahead was full of deep, winding canyons and towering rock walls.

She stepped forward, waiting for her path to appear like it always did. A straight piece of road shot forward. It went and went... until it slammed into the side of a canyon wall. A dead end.

Lucy frowned.

She stepped to the left, willing another road to appear. A straight path shot forward again. And again, it slammed into a rock face.

Another dead end.

She tried again. And again.

Each time, the same thing happened.



Frustration surged through her. A tightness coiled in her chest. She could barely breathe.

Lucy clenched her fists, feeling the heat of anger rise.

Then, a whisper: *Pay attention. Don't act. Just observe.*

Those words surfaced in her mind, unbidden. Something a voice had whispered to her once. A lesson she'd long ignored.

She exhaled slowly, grounding herself.

Around her, Lucy observed other travelers making their way through the canyon and over the walls with seeming ease. Some of them curved smoothly around the cliffs. Others built bridges that stretched over impossible gaps. Some paths even wove different types of paths together.



She felt anger and resentment swelling up in her.

Lucy scowled. *Must be nice*, she thought.

She turned back to her own road, took a breath, and forced another step forward. Another straight path shot out — useless, right into another wall.

She screamed and kicked at the dirt. "Why won't this work?! It's always worked before!"

She tried again.

And again.

Each time, straight. Each time, useless.

*This was the time to use her powers*, she thought.

Lucy set her mind to it and tried to make the wall bend. To move out of her way. To do *anything*. Nothing happened.

"This isn't fair."

She *almost* wished for the travelers around her to stumble, run into walls, or — even worse — to fail.

"I don't know what to do," she sighed in exasperation.

And then... she felt something. A soft squirming in her pocket. For the first time in years, she remembered Caramel. He was still there! He had always been there.

*Accept what is, as it is right now*, whispered a voice.

She placed a hand over the tiny lump in her coat, feeling his warmth. *But why would he stir now?* Lucy wondered.



A soft chuckle behind her made her turn in surprise.

An old woman stood nearby, leaning on an old, gnarled wooden staff. She stood at the end of her own road, a curled, wavy path beneath her feet that stretched behind her.

“You don't only have to go straight, you know,” said the woman.

“Well, that's all I've ever done,” Lucy shot back annoyed.

The old woman turned, gesturing with her eyes at Lucy's last attempts to move forward. All the paths that went only into cold, hard, impossible rock walls.

The woman smiled kindly. “Tell me, my dear: is that working for you now?”

Lucy crossed her arms. “How rude!” she shot. “It's always worked. This is all I know. I can't do anything else.”

“But *I* believe... you *could*. I think you haven't tried.”

*Haven't tried? I've been doing nothing but try,* Lucy thought.

Lucy swallowed hard, her cheeks now burning hot.

“So you're saying I'm failing.”

The woman shook her head. She tapped her wooden staff slowly against the ground.

Lucy looked at the path behind the old woman. The most recent bit was curved, but stretching into the distance, she could see that the old woman's path also included bridges, stairs, and — yes — straight sections just like hers.

“All these years, you've gone only straight. You've thought your only power was to make things and people bend and move out of your way.”

Lucy felt the tightness in her chest again. She didn't like hearing the woman speak about her this way. She began to set her mind to using her power.

The old woman continued, “In truth, your power was always your curiosity, your cleverness, and your creativity.”

Lucy didn't understand. She hadn't felt curious, clever, or creative in... years.

"*They* were your true powers. *They* helped you lay your straight paths in ways that no other person could."

"So I... *haven't* failed?" Lucy asked.

"No, dear. *You* haven't failed. Your *paths* have failed. Your straight paths have taken you as far as you can go. You have always been brave and strong. Your persistence and singleness of mind have helped you to overcome your obstacles. Until today. Now, it's time to be curious. It's time to try something else."



Lucy reached into her pocket and felt Caramel press against her palm.

A whisper came: *Curiosity... not judgement.*

And for the first time, she *was* curious. Curious what it would feel like... to do... *something else.*

She turned back to her own road. To the wall blocking her way.

*What's next?* she wondered aloud.

*Something different*, came the soft, eventual reply. Whether it was Caramel whispering, she didn't know. She almost felt that she *herself* had said those words.

She closed her eyes and set her mind to using her *real* powers.

Lucy thought about the other travelers, about what they were able to do. She was glad for their example.

*Observe. What was working for them?*

*Accept. What was not working anymore?*

*What could she now do differently?*



Lucy worried about stumbling, running in the wall, or — even worse — failing.

“Avoiding failure should not be your worry, child,” said the old woman. “Failing to *learn* from your failure is what you must avoid.”

Lucy looked down at her feet. She saw the same straight lines. The same dead ends.

*Adapt*, came a whisper.

She again closed her eyes and took a deep, long, breath. For the first time, Lucy timidly considered a new thought: she imagined the road bending before she took her step. She visualized the curve, the possibility of a path not yet seen.

Slowly, with her eyes still closed, she stepped forward. Once more, she heard the old woman chuckle.

Lucy turned around and opened her eyes. The old woman was gone.

Slowly, Lucy turned on her heel to face her wall once more. Nothing had changed with it at all. The wall was still there. Still cold and impossible. Impassable.

Lucy's cheeks went hot. Tears pooled in her eyes.

Then, she looked down in amazement. Lucy's path had not shot straight forward as it had before.

It had changed. It had... *bent*.



Not because the world bent for her and around her path, but because she had finally allowed herself to see beyond the wall within herself and the straight lines she had always known.

The change Lucy imagined started with a bend in *herself*, she realized. A change in the way she'd always done things. She no longer saw setting straight paths as her only choice.

Lucy then felt something move gently near her heart.

Again, a whisper: *Observe. Accept. Adapt.*

This time, Lucy was sure that it *wasn't* Caramel whispering. These were her own words. Her own voice. This was now her power.

To observe, Lucy had to be curious. To accept, she had to be clever and sharp. To adapt, she had to be creative.

Lucy looked down at her feet.

This step she had taken was different.

Her path at her feet was different.

Both she and it had taken a turn.

They had both, finally, made a bend.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Feridoon (Doon) Malekzadeh is a dad who loves music from the 80s, TV shows from the 70s, stories from the 60s, and taking care of — and loving — his family in his 50s.

He loves dark chocolate peanut butter cups and telling bad jokes. He's a dad after all.

<https://feridoon.malekzadeh.net>