

LUCY

by John Glover and Kelley Rourke

PROLOGUE

Temerlin's study: a desk plus a set of shelves or cabinet holding books, notebooks, tape reels, mementos, etc. Temerlin enters, unwrapping a package containing a cassette tape. After retrieving a playback device, he inserts the cassette and presses play.

"October 6, 1987. The remains of the chimp known as Lucy Temerlin were found in the Gambia last week. The cause of death is inconclusive, although some of my colleagues here..."

Temerlin stops the tape. After a pause, he goes to a shelf and retrieves an old tape reel and a playback device.

PART I. OUR HAPPY HOME

Temerlin as doting father. There are bits of humor and exasperation,
but in general the mood is one of misty-eyed wonder
at the amazing development of his adorable, intelligent daughter.

Temerlin starts the tape. The reel continues rolling throughout the piece, even when our focus shifts from the "research assistant's" voice to Temerlin's. The research assistant's lines are indicated in quotes throughout. This is the last time Temerlin will actively bring the research assistant into the room; the reel stops and starts "magically," via the light board, throughout the rest of the piece.

"January 24, 1966. The University of Oklahoma's cross-fostering project placed its fourth chimpanzee with a human family this month. By studying the effects of an enriched environment on the subjects' development, we hope to learn more about the primate mind."

We wondered what she would be like

Lucy...

When Jane and I decided to adopt Lucy

we wondered what she would be like.

Would she learn to love us?

Would she be well-behaved, rebellious, intelligent, or stupid?

We had questions about ourselves, too.

What kind of parents would we be?

We determined to take no chances,

to spare no expense,

to devote ourselves completely to raising Lucy.

Temerlin retrieves a baby book (or other key memento of Lucy's childhood) from the shelf, willfully losing himself in memories of her childhood.

Baby's first year

She smiled and laughed...

From day one she smiled and laughed,

from the day Jane brought her home.

By month two, her eyes would focus and follow our movements.

After three months our little girl could walk—she could walk on all fours.

Next thing we knew, at five months, she could escape her crib.

At eight months she'd walk alone, but never far from Jane or me.

“For the first 12 months of life, chimpanzee mothers maintain constant body contact with their infants; young chimps continue to suckle and sleep with their mothers for five years. Since they never need to summon their mothers, immature apes never learn to cry.”

Kinship

As I sit with Lucy, I feel a kinship—

a direct line to our common ancestor.

Looking into her clear brown eyes,

I have the feeling

the deeper I look into Lucy

the more I see of my own basic nature.

“Lucy lives with the Temerlin family just outside Norman, Oklahoma. She is treated as a full member of the family: She eats with them, sleeps with them, works with them, plays with them. To the extent possible, the family makes no distinction between their adopted daughter and their biological son, Steve. Lucy has never seen another chimpanzee, except on television or in a magazine.”

pure chaos

Lucy could take a normal living room

and turn it into pure chaos

in less than five minutes.

She would unscrew light bulbs, drop them, and break them.

She would take books out of bookcases, look at them, and discard them.

She would open the refrigerator, take out a piece of fruit, and play ball.

She would disconnect the toilet paper, hold one end, and run laughing through the house.

“Yesterday, Lucy moved into a new wing of the Temerlin house, constructed especially for her; it is made of steel and reinforced concrete. The furniture is held to a sparse but durable minimum, and there are drains in the floor.”

It makes no sense for her

I prefer an organized world
in which feces are deposited in the proper place.
But Lucy refuses to adapt.
It is not a matter of aptitude.
She makes her way to the bathroom
whenever she feels the urge
but she always retains half her movement
to unload in another location.
She takes great satisfaction
in the utterly natural act
of defecation.

We have seen Lucy use the following tools:

We have seen Lucy use the following tools:
wrench pencil dish mirror cigarette-lighter
pliers light-switch tricycle knife
matches ladder vacuum ash-tray
rake wastebasket crayons
shears key Kleenex
fork book
hose comb
brush cup
screwdriver toothpick spoon

“In addition to their suburban home, the Temerlins own a large cattle ranch. Lucy enjoys roaming the many acres of dense forest. She screams with apparent delight whenever she observes the Temerlins making preparations for an excursion. She also responds excitedly to the word “ranch”—the family has learned to spell the word when mentioning the property in her presence, unless an immediate trip is planned.”

completely at home

Lucy in her natural setting
is a sight of great beauty.
The woods hold no fear for her.
She is completely at home and relaxed.
She never loses her balance or seems uncentered.
Her movements are a flowing ballet of grace and dignity.

Lucy is an ideal drinking companion

Lucy is an ideal drinking companion.
She makes sounds of delight when offered a drink.
The only liquor she's ever refused
is straight crème de menthe.
She never gets obnoxious,
even when smashed to the brink of unconsciousness.
Another reason
I like drinking with Lucy:
It wouldn't be right
to drink with Steve.
He is still too young.
It might hurt his liver.
What would the neighbors say?
Drinking with Lucy is less complicated.
And she is so grateful.

"While studying chimps in their natural habitat, researchers have identified 32 distinctive sounds and 66 gestures that the animals use to communicate with one another. Lucy is one of several chimps participating in a language study being conducted here at the university. So far, Lucy has learned the American Sign Language signs for more than 100 words."

Lucy's vocabulary at age 9 ½

(No vocals; the vocabulary is signed over an instrumental composition.)

airplane babydoll ball banana barrette berry bird blanket blow book bowl bow tie broom brush
candy can't car cat catch clean coat cold comb come corn cow cry cup dirty dog drink eat enough
fish flower food fork fruit go grass hammer handkerchief hat hug hurry hurt key kiss leash light
lipstick listen look make me mine mirror more no nut oil open orange out pants paper pen pick
pipe please purse radio ring rubberband run shoe smell smile smoke spoon sorry string swallow
tea telephone that tickle want

Lucy looked me directly in the eye

Lucy had torn every leaf
from our potted banana tree.
The trunk was in several pieces,
the soil strewn all over the floor.
Guests were due any minute.
I lost control. I screamed.
I raised my hand to strike her.

Lucy looked me in the eye,
smiled her little-girl smile,
brought her hand to her nose,
with forefinger and thumb extended
using her signs to say: "I'm Lucy."

PART TWO: ME TARZAN. SHE DAUGHTER. YOU DEAL WITH IT.

Temerlin as superhero of his own imagination.
The rest of the world is populated with hopeless squares.

no pets allowed

Lucy sits in the cart as we shop at the grocery store.
Occasionally a manager will say,
“No pets allowed.”
We are indignant.
“Lucy is not a pet.
Lucy is our daughter.”

Tarzan fantasies

When I was an adolescent, Tarzan the ape-man captured my imagination.
I spent many an afternoon wrapped up in Tarzan fantasies:
<TARZAN YELL >
With the idea of the noble savage as backdrop,
adopting Lucy seemed perfectly logical.

“Mrs. Temerlin made all of the arrangements for Lucy’s adoption, flying to the East Coast on the day the infant was born. She fed the mother a Coca-Cola spiked with phencyclidine. When the mother fell asleep, the handler took the baby from her unconscious body. Mrs. Temerlin placed the baby in a bassinet and covered her face with a lacy blanket before returning home on a commercial airline. There were several humorous incidents on the plane as well-wishers asked to see the baby.”

a real kick

Lucy never tires of play.
She makes me behave in ways
that go completely against my grain.
I am surprised to hear myself whine, submissively,
“How how how could you doooooooo this to me?”*
I get a real kick out of calling her
“Precious darling,”
when I know she could tear me limb from limb.

obsession

When we introduced the kitten,
Lucy reacted violently.
We thought she would kill the kitten.
But then it began to follow her
and we saw her attitude change.
She would carry it on her back
like a mother chimp carrying a child.

She was obsessed with her "baby."
It was dangerous for anyone to try
to separate them, but sometimes
the kitten needed a break.

"Chimpanzees are five to seven times stronger than humans. They have denser bones, and thicker skin, making chimps and humans unevenly matched play partners."

satisfaction

Colleagues visited less.
They had difficulty relating to Lucy.
They were hesitant to say,
"I'm afraid of your daughter."
Relatives visited less.
They had difficulty relating to Lucy.
They were hesitant to say,
"I'm afraid of your daughter."
Friends visited less.
They had difficulty relating to Lucy.
They were hesitant to say,
"I'm afraid of your daughter," much less
"Keep that goddamn ape off me."
Easier to avoid us.

I had been brought up to be a conventional person.
I gained great satisfaction from breaking away
and living an unconventional life.

most clearly

The emotions Lucy exhibits most clearly are affection, anger, fear, tenderness, greed, jealousy, anxiety, protectiveness.

many people will not

I saw my daughter eyeing our guest's drink,
but not soon enough.

In a flash, she snatched it, swallowed half,
dug out the cherry
and handed it to our guest.

Lucy's act startled her less
than what I did next.

I had to show Lucy
this was unacceptable
in the world of human beings.
So I grabbed her and bit her
on the ear.

She knew she deserved it
so she didn't fight back.

I failed to notice
our guest did not touch what was left of her drink.

Many people will not drink after Lucy has used the same glass.

PART THREE: CRISIS

Wild mood swings: Lucy might be a problem. Lucy is so smart and hilarious.

Lucy's aggression is simply further demonstration of her "humanity."

Our family is perfect. Lucy is a problem.

Are we a problem for Lucy? There's no problem here.

Who can we trust?

Who can we trust?

Even when Lucy was little,
we had difficulty
finding committed babysitters.
After their first experience,
few people agreed to come back.

She looked guilty

We locked Lucy into her room
and left for work.

When we came home
Lucy was loose.

The next day we locked her in and drove away
but returned ten minutes later.
I caught her unlocking the door to her room with a key.
The minute she saw me
she put the key in her mouth.

"In behavioral terms, aggression is energy expressed in the direction of the environment. Hostility, on the other hand, is an expression of a wish to hurt or destroy. Lucy first exhibited hostility at five-and-a-half months. As Lucy has matured, she has demonstrated an ability to control both aggression and hostility. But she does not always choose to apply these controls."

A response to grief

When Steve brought his cat for a visit,
Lucy attacked the minute she saw it--
the first cat she'd seen since the death of her kitten.
Steve grabbed the cat and pushed Lucy away.
Lucy whimpered uncomfortably.
I had never seen her attack so savagely.
But I wasn't surprised:

"Aggression or hostility is often mobilized in humans as a response to grief or loss."

such great people

Lucy sat down on the couch
with Steve on the other end.
Jane was sitting across the room
and I was in my favorite chair.
I looked at Lucy eating her apple,
completely at home, completely relaxed,
completely grown.
I felt myself moved to tears.
Here we were, a regular family.
We had been through so much together
and yet Steve and Lucy had made it;
each had become so warmly human,
each of them such great people.

"Today Dr. Temerlin introduced Lucy to a colleague who is developing her own combination of movement and Gestalt therapy. At one point, Lucy ran toward Natasha, who took a step toward Dr. Temerlin for support. Lucy misinterpreted the movement and charged, springing at Natasha and biting her."

I hated Lucy at that moment

I hated Lucy at that moment.
It was only a small wound, but enough to be painful.
I hated Lucy at that moment.
Natasha was a friend and a guest.
I felt responsible.
I hated Lucy at that moment.

terrified of her own impulse

Lucy picked up the phone,
held it to her ear,
and started dialing.
I snatched it away,
afraid she would hit on
a combination of numbers that connected her with Tokyo or Tel Aviv.
She charged at me, angrily, screaming her head off.
The next thing I knew my arm was in her mouth.
Her scream of anger
quickly changed
to a scream of terror.
Before her teeth had broken the skin
she released my arm, started whimpering,
terrified of her own impulse.

final crisis (instrumental)

The tape reel has ended. After a pause, Temerlin rewinds the cassette he was unable to listen to at the top of the show. He pushes play. The below plays over underscoring.

“The remains of the chimp known as Lucy Temerlin were found in the Gambia last month. The cause of her death is inconclusive, although some of my colleagues point out she would have been easy prey for poachers. It’s true that Lucy would have been quick to approach any human that appeared on the island, whether friend or foe.

“The Temerlins participated in the cross-fostering study longer than anyone else; the bond between Maury Temerlin and the chimpanzee he referred to as his “daughter” was remarkable. They lived as a family for eleven years, after which it was determined that an island preserve would be the most appropriate place for Lucy to spend the remaining decades of her life..

We all made the journey together; I stayed with Lucy for the seven years it took to habituate her to life in the wilderness. Growing up in suburban America had left her unprepared and unwilling to sleep outdoors and forage for unfamiliar foods. She had to be taught—coerced—into doing all kinds of things that should have been utterly natural for her.

I went back to her island only once, and it wasn’t long before Lucy came running out to greet me. I’ll never forget her obvious delight at seeing one of “her people” again. [Now, looking back, I know that visit was a mistake.]

"Despite all the human behaviors she adopted, Lucy could never truly be one of us. Nor could she ever become a fully assimilated member of a wild chimp community. Perhaps another chimp turned on her. Or perhaps she had a final, terrifying encounter with a human—the species she felt closest to. I'd like to think she died of natural causes, although I'm not sure if the word "natural" can be applied to any part of Lucy's story, not after what was done to her."

completely at home (broken reprise from part I)

Lucy in her natural...

is a...

Luc....completely at home...

Lucy, Lucy never loses her balance, or seems...

Her movements...

...in her natural setting is a sight of great beauty.

Lucy is completely at home and relaxed.

Lucy never loses her balance, or seems uncentered.

...a flowing ballet of grace and dignity.