

Lucy
and
Bonbon
a novel

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Don LePan



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To Alex
(1976–2007)

Preface

The story of the hybrid variously known as Bonbon Gerson, Bobo Gerson, and Beau St. Clair is one of the defining narratives of the first part of the twenty-first century. Any reader will be familiar with it at least in outline, and many will be familiar too with the great arguments it has given rise to. Has the existence of a hybrid “changed everything” in terms of how we define what it means to be human and what it means to be animal? Has it, in effect, moved the line that we draw to separate ourselves from other species? Has it even eliminated any such line? Or is the case of Bonbon simply a one-off—a strangely freakish case that we need not take much account of when we generalize about what it is to be human, about the so-called sanctity of human life, and so on?

This book will not settle those questions, and it offers no dramatic new information as to the outline of what happened—either in the Congo or in North America. Nor can I promise to take the story to a conclusion that will fully satisfy the curiosity of many readers as to what finally became of Bonbon; this book makes no attempt to answer all the questions, lend support to any of the wild hypotheses, prove or disprove any of the unsubstantiated claims. What it does do is bring together in a single volume, for the first time, the first-hand accounts of the participants in the story. Some of those accounts have already been published; others are unpublished

or little-known. Many are perhaps better known to those north of the border—where so much of this story unfolds—as they are to most of us here in America, or to the millions around the world who are acquainted merely with the more sensational aspects of the story. I hope that, excerpted and brought together as they are here, these bits and pieces will provide a coherent account that will give readers a real sense not only of what happened, but also of how it felt to those who were involved.

Lucinda Gerson

[The following is from the first section of a transcript of the handwritten notebooks in which Lucinda Gerson provides an account of her son's story—and her own. The publishers of the full account have generously allowed me access to the handwritten original—and generously allowed me to include substantial excerpts in the present volume. I should make clear that they have not divulged to me—any more than they have to the general public—how the notebooks came to be in their hands. This volume will thus not put to rest the controversy over the publisher's behaviour—any more than it will the ongoing controversy over the actions of Lucinda herself. But the notebooks have now been indisputably verified as having been written in her own hand, and they remain the necessary starting point for anyone who wishes to make an informed judgement concerning her behaviour in the past—or to speculate as to her whereabouts in the present.]

So there's two kinds of kind, right? There's, like, *what kind is it* and all that—*kind* like *type*, OK? Or *what kind of book is this?*, ha ha. And then there's *kind* like in *kindness* and *being kind*, and we all know about that even if we don't do it. Not near enough of it, anyways—we got to work on that, right? And if we got to work on it maybe it doesn't so much come naturally. So what about *human kind*? Which kind is that?

And then there's *mankind*, but I'm not even going there, ha ha.

Anyways, I can tell you what kind of people my family is. We come from Comber, originally, all of us—that’s near Detroit but on the Canadian side, on beyond Windsor. *Comber* rhymes-with-*sombre*, not *bomber* or with some guy running a piece of plastic through his hair. No bombs going off in Comber, I can tell you that much for sure—it’s flat country and there’s not a whole lot that people would call interesting, if you want to know the truth. Some people, anyways—the older I get the more I think there’s interesting stuff anywheres. But that’s where we lived all the time we were growing up, ’cept for the year when I was five, that was when Dad “tried his luck” in Montreal, but it turned out there wasn’t no luck there. Not for him, anyways, or for us, and we were back in Comber by the time I turned six.

My older sister, she loved Montreal and it pissed her right off that she had to move back with the rest of us. ’Course she didn’t say it like that, Susie’s always used good language, but that’s how she felt. She was always restless after we moved back, she wanted to move *anywhere*, and she started getting a lot of ideas about what anywhere was like from flipping through all the old *National Geographics* that had been sitting in the garage since our grandfather died. I say *flipping through* but that’s not right. Susie was a smart kid, she was reading them too, and not just the words under the pictures neither. Dad kept saying that he wanted us to be improved by those magazines, that he didn’t want us growing up and not being able to do anything ’cept working on the line at R&R Rubber Trim like he did, *nothing ’gainst the car industry but there should be something better’n R&R*, he’d always say. My mom would never say much when he went on like that, I think she was OK with dad making his eighteen dollars an hour at R&R, it was a lot more than she made at the Superette. Anyways, I reckon Susie got herself a lot more improved than I did, every which way. By the time she was nine she wanted to go to Africa like other kids wanted to ride a horse or have a dog to look after. And Africa for Susie had

to be jungle. Not the desert, not the—what do they call it, the plains—*savannah*, ha, I looked it up just then. None of that: it had to be jungle, had to be the real Africa.

Africa didn't fade away when Susie hit the teen years, neither. She skipped a year in high school, she did a four-year anthropology degree in three, and whatever else she needed beyond that she did in no time, it seemed like. There she was at 29, already with her professor job and the doctor degree she says most people don't get until they're halfway through their thirties (most people? Ha!), writing us from some camp near Lake Mai-Ndombe, near Inogo, near Kinshasha, yeah, I looked up those spellings too. Near a lot of other places I bet nobody's ever heard of. Trying to figure out if these chimpanzees who aren't really chimpanzees—bonzees, they're called—if they're what she calls a matriarchal society. If the women dominate the men, basically. They use sex to do that, that's the theory; they have it all the time and they seem to have a lot of fun doing it, but a lot of times one of them is using sex to control other ones, that's what Susie's thesis was. Like, as if it would be news that some people use sex to try to control other people. But anyways.

Alright, I was 27, OK? I'd spent a lot of time trying to figure out other things, including how not to be controlled by a man. And how not to control one too, I guess. *The personal is political*, as Susie use to say; she got that one right, but now she says it's sort of an old fashion thing to say. Anyways, the personal was still political for me—I guess I was old fashion, some ways. When my mother was going to throw out all the long loose skirts and dresses she'd worn in the 60s—*hippie clothes* she called them—I said *no, give 'em to me*, and I started wearing them a lot. Somebody said the other day that I still look pretty good in a long skirt and a tie-dye T, but that's another story.

My mom used to say that she'd been just about the only working-class hippie, she used to tell me that she sometimes wished she'd either had less of a brain so she wouldn't of seen no wrong in the

Vietnam war or any of that, or more of a brain so she would of gone to university and been more like—more like what? Like a regular hippie, I guess. She always wished she'd been able to go to all those places too—Kathmandu and San Francisco and New Orleans and them, all those places that weren't part of the regular world. Specially New Orleans, she'd watched *Easy Rider* a bunch of times and she'd keep singing that song, *All I want is to be free, and where that river flows, that's where I want to be*, something like that. But she never did get to none of them, not even New Orleans.

She was pretty happy when Susie went to university, I can tell you, and when Susie did so well. She sure smiled a lot about that and she'd tell anyone who'd listen all about Susie and how well she was doing.

Make love not war was another thing I picked up when my mom was about to throw it out—she had a couple of old posters as well as a few buttons with slogans on 'em like that. I think she still believed what was wrote on them but she never talked about it. Seemed like she was happy enough to get rid of the stuff. I didn't have any more space than she did, or any more money, neither. (I was mostly working summers at the Gas 'N Go, they always needed more help in the summers, but it wasn't like they paid more when they needed more help, I was just scraping by.) Anyways, there was something in me that would rather of gotten rid of cell phones and GPS gadgets than throw out that old junk from before I was born. Actually I think Susie would have felt the same way if she hadn't of been halfway round the world. Maybe not the old clothes—you never could get Susie into a skirt or a dress—but the buttons and the posters anyways. She had all of that book learning, but take that away and we thought a lot alike, the two of us, that's what I told myself.

I guess legally I was as much an American as a Canadian, but neither me nor Susie never thought we was American or Canadian. It wasn't so much that we thought we were both. It was more like

we didn't think of ourselves as either. *I want to be a citizen of everywhere*, she'd say. *Or of nowhere at all*. I wasn't as political as her, but I guess I sort of felt the same. Course she didn't get to be a citizen of anywhere except Canada, but she was always going over to Detroit to see some show or other, or join in some protest, or hang out with some guy she'd met in some bar on the Canadian side. She'd even go over to take in a Tigers game with people she hardly knew, and she didn't care a whole lot for baseball. That was the way it was for a bunch of years when I was growing up and it's not like I blame her. Like I say, Comber was pretty quiet.

I got to be American 'cause I arrived early. My mom was thinking she probably had just a few good nights left before I arrived—back then people didn't go all bananas if you were a woman and you wanted to go out and have a drink or three when you had a little one on the way. Most people, anyways; Dad didn't like to see a woman drinking if she was pregnant, not even a drop, *if she's got a bun in the oven, the mom has to be eating for two, and the dad has to be drinking for two*, that was what he'd always say. But Dad wasn't there that night, he and Mom had actually broken up, ha ha, they did that a few times, it was only after I arrived that they patched it up again. So anyways, Mom had left Susie with a friend and she was over at Chassy's in Detroit with a couple other friends taking in some band when her waters broke, and next thing you knew there I was, 20 inches long and six weeks early. And American. *Born on American soil*, they love to say that. *We love to say that*, maybe I should say.

You want to know something funny? After Chassy's closed down they put a zoo in there. I'm not kidding, that's where they put the zoo, right where Chassy's used to be on East Congress, right next to the Benevolent Society. The Benevolent Society's still there, maybe you know that. They fixed it up a little but it's still shabby and it's still selling second-hand stuff to people who need it. Maybe they sell just as much to people who *don't* need it, ha ha. But the

zoo, right where Chassy's used to be? Like I say, that's funny. I guess maybe you don't know why that's funny until you've heard a little bit more of this story, but I'm telling you it's funny.

It was after Uncle Harry died that I started to think that maybe I could travel a bit too. Some people used to say Harry hadn't been really rich, he'd just been *well off*. Eff off to that one, I say. Call it what it is—Uncle Harry had money, and he left a bit of it to us, and that was great.

Alright, so it wasn't *only* Uncle Harry leaving each of us some money that made me think of going somewhere. Things weren't exactly great the last year or two I spent in Comber. The only work I could get was shit jobs in the Gas 'N Go, or else Dave and Joan's Price Chopper Food Mart.

Me and this one guy—Estes Danby was his name, you wouldn't think anybody'd be called Estes in a place like Comber, but there was, and he had a decent job at the plant—back then Chrysler and them had that big car factory in Windsor. Estes was my guy—*Estes is the bestest* I used to tell him. And we were going to have a kid, maybe a few of 'em. We weren't going to get married and that wasn't going to matter, you didn't need to spend a fortune on a big day and a piece of paper. We were right for each other and we were going to stay with each other always and we had a nice little apartment over top of the jewellery store, Sellars' Jewellery, maybe you've heard of it? That Danny and Sylvie Sellars used to run—on Main Street? It was a nice little apartment, not so little, really, it was a two-bedroom, there would have been lots of room for the two of us and the kids. I mean, kids can share a room, does 'em good, I think.

But it all went wrong, didn't it? First he got me pregnant—and that was a good thing, don't get me wrong there, I wanted kids as much as he did and I didn't have no morning sickness or nothing, hardly any. But then his friends and his parents got to him about marriage and respectability and all that garbage. We had a few arguments about that but finally I let him buy me a ring from Sellars',

'course everybody always jokes about buyers and sellers and a girl going to the highest bidder, ha ha, but I didn't think it was too funny. Anyways we picked a date when we'd make it official at the registry office; turns out he thought it would be a good idea to have a name change too. Not him, of course—he wanted *me* to change *my* name and be a Danby, and I didn't want to be no Danby. I wanted to keep being me. It was a big deal, that fight, but this time I didn't give in, *I'll marry you but I won't do nothing to my name*, I told him, *I'm not going to be you*. I guess it was never the same afterwards, though we made all nice for the wedding, and we went through a lot of the motions of loving each other, and some of it wasn't just going through the motions neither. I don't mean just *that* way. I can think dirty just like anybody, but I'm talking about feelings too. Anyways, it didn't last. How do you effing know what's going to last?

So then there was the morning when I did have a lot of pain down there, but it was only nineteen weeks—it wasn't time yet, that was the thing—and Estes was at the plant so I got a taxi and then I called him on his cell but he wasn't picking up, and at the hospital it was hours and hours and then they told me no, the little one hadn't made it, there was no little one. Not then, anyways. Somehow that was the last straw for Estes. Of course he said *don't worry it's not your fault* and all those things—well, damn right it wasn't my fault, who put it into his head that it could have been my fault?

You don't want all the details—trust me, you don't. All that happened was the sort of thing that happens everywhere every day; it was just a shame that we'd gone and gotten married. Now we had to go and get separated and go and get divorced, and go and get two lawyers, 'cause they always say both sides have got to have their own effing lawyer, who has the money for that?

So you can see that I had a lot of reasons to be happy about Uncle Harry, not about him dying and all, but the money. The money and the being able to get away. Really get away, that was the thing. Not Toronto or Detroit or Toledo like I went to once. See

something of the world, maybe find out some stuff. Maybe be happier. Being happy's overrated, but it doesn't totally suck, either.

Go to India, I thought, like Mom had never been able to. And maybe go to Nepal—and for sure stop in and see Susie in the Congo. *Stop in*—that was literally what I thought to myself, can you believe it? And then of course I started talking to people. Dad was dead by this time (what with his smoking and that, and all the nights he'd *just stop in after work* at the Dominion House and not get home till eight or nine; he never made it to 50, not that I blame him for that, like Mom used to do all those years. I'm just saying), and so was Mom—that had been the shocker, a heart attack right out of nowhere, age 58—but I talked to just about everybody else, my friends, my ex-boyfriend Matt (the only one of my boyfriends who *had* turned out to be a friend), the travel agent in Chatham, and of course Aunt Ellen, since it was going to be her Harry's money that I'd be spending, 'course I talked to her too.

Anyways, you know what every last one of them said about the Congo part of the idea? They said I was crazy. *Just crazy, you don't just go there like that, not to the Congo, it's not for tourists, it's not for visiting of any sort, people get raped there, people get killed there, it's a wonder your sister ...* They went on and on, but like I told Aunt Ellen, I'm just about as stubborn as Susie is. Or as Uncle Harry was—she got a good laugh out of that. So I went ahead and booked a round-the-world ticket, first stop Kinshasha, except of course for the bazillion stops you had to make in airports before you could get to a place like that. And next thing you knew I was on a crapped-out old bus that somebody said they thought they'd heard might get to Inogo before dark. Every few moments there'd be a thump when we hit a pothole and you'd bounce up and then down again hard on the seats—they were hard and cramped, my rear end started to be sore in about five minutes, I can tell you that. The old woman beside me seemed to know where we were going but I couldn't make head nor tail of anything, she kept smiling and

making motions to the chicken she was keeping down round her feet, and that chicken kept fidgeting the whole time, she was quite a character—the woman I mean, not the chicken. Both of them, I guess.

At first I'd thought I wouldn't actually tell Susie I was coming. I'd just show up out of the blue, wouldn't that be a surprise? But everyone gave me a lot of reasons why that would *not* be a good idea, and it sounded like one of those times when what everyone says is right. So I'd wrote ahead, and the letter must have gotten there 'cause when the bus finally pulled in to Inogo, Susie was ... —it was pitch dark by this time, and I'd asked the driver about that, *are you behind schedule or what?*, but he'd just said *everything come soon soon, madam, you will be seeing*, and he laughed a big, hearty laugh, so maybe they were on schedule after all. And then after a pause he said, *you go see those people at their ape station?* I told him I was, and I asked him what he knew about the place. *The place? I am knowing it well*, he said. *But the people?* He shook his head. *These people—they selves is who they stick to*. He paused again, and then he added one more thought. *These people—they stick to they selves, and their apes. They maybe think we are the animals, what? We people of the Congo!* And he laughed his big laugh. After I'd been to the station, I think I would have thought of something to say to that, but not then I didn't. I just smiled and tried to laugh a laugh too. And then I went back to my seat and tried to look out again, into the dark night, but for a long time, all I could see was my own face reflected in the glass.

Dark or no dark, it wasn't hard to pick out Susie from all the others, she was wearing jeans and a white top like she always did, and of course her face is white too, I shouldn't say *of course*, 'cause I didn't even say what colour I am, did I? We hugged and all, and she smiled, but you know what? I actually wasn't a hundred per cent sure she was glad to see me.

It didn't take more 'n a couple of days before I could start to see why it bothered her to have me around. There she was, living way

out in the bush, but it didn't feel like bush, not really. There were five of them in all—it was *university-this* and *research-grant-that* and *post-dock-the-other-thing*. It must be some sort of embarrassment to have a visit from your kid sister who hasn't done any more than finish high school, really.

Of course I wanted to try and fit in. I told everybody I'd been to college and that wasn't a lie, not really, I just didn't say it had been a stupid little community college that nobody'd ever heard of, and I only went for less than a year. But people know when you're faking it with shit like that. Truth is, I reckon I embarrassed Susie just by being there.

Plus, it had been her thing all along in the Congo, and here I was, the little sister, come to horn in on her. "I know it's hard for somebody from outside to understand," she kept saying, "it's hard for somebody from outside to get much out of it. You'll probably find a lot that's more interesting in India."

And maybe I would. But this was plenty interesting too, living in little round houses with grass roofs—huts with hats, I called them—and spending all your time watching bonzees. You got to figure big apes would be big meat eaters, right? Meat, plus a lot of bananas. And Susie says chimps are just like you'd expect—they'll eat rats, monkeys, whatever. But not gorillas, and not bonzees neither. Basically, it's fruits and veggies they eat—vegetarian. No, more like that weird one—vegan, that's it. But not like, strict—I mean, they'll eat bugs sometimes. Worms. Don't see no human vegan do that, do you, ha ha.

OK, so maybe it's nothing special watching apes eat fruits and veggies. But the sex? They did it all the time, that was one thing. It'd be hard to count how many times a day they did it, and you could see every bit of it. And, whatever people say, who doesn't find that interesting? That was the obvious thing, of course people got off on all the sex, no matter how much they dressed it up in their fancy language. I tried reading some of the sex parts in Susie-style

fancy-language books—*Males are nearly always sexually receptive; whereas most other animals copulate only as an act of reproduction, bonzees appear to derive continual physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction from sexual contact, both heterosexual and homosexual ... That bonzees often copulate face-to-face has been widely observed, but bonzees engage in an extraordinarily wide range of sexual behaviours—they are by human standards quite adept and profligate in their sexual endeavours.* So on and so on, just like us except they do it a lot more often. And except with them, seems like the women always have the final say, even if the guys do a lot more strutting around.

Visitors weren't supposed to "interact" with them too much—even researchers weren't supposed to; this was, like, the opposite of Jane Goodall and them, you weren't supposed to "taint the research" by disrupting the bonzees' social lives. You were supposed to just watch them, mainly from this observation hut that was just bamboo and thatch built over a gigantic hill they said was made by termites, except I never heard of termites that would want to build a mountain. They must not be like any termites you get in Comber—Detroit even, or some of the other places you hear about, New Orleans and that.

You'd sit there and the bonzees would sort of know you were there but usually they couldn't see you and usually they'd forget about you and go about their business as if you weren't there. That was the theory anyways. And I've got to admit it was pretty neat, there were two groups of them and they were all interesting. Didn't take long before you could tell who was who, how they acted differently, had their own personalities. Of course Susie and the others had to give the animals names, you wouldn't want to call an animal like that K9 or R2-D2 or whatever. But they didn't want to give them normal names like Tom or Liz neither. So they'd started giving them the names of cities—they thought that was funny when they were in the middle of nowhere. And because it was bonzees, people

started thinking of all the “B” names. There was a cute young one they called Berne and a slow-moving older guy they called Bilbao, Bill for short, and there was a Bonn and a Brisbane, they were none of them places I’d been, I can tell you that.

There were two babies, one in each of the little groups that would come to this open area in the trees, and the bonzee babies were Bathurst and Buenos Aires. Bathurst was named for Bathurst, New Brunswick—one of the researchers was from right near there. For some reason they always called that baby Little Bathurst, not just Bathurst.

And there was one grown-up called Beirut, Bei for short, he was beautiful but troubled, maybe they’d been thinking of all the trouble when they named him. Bei loved to put on a show and to give a good time to anyone. He was ‘specially good with Little Bathurst, he would play with him and carry him anywhere, so much that you got to thinking Little Bathurst was a little spoiled. But you could see that Bei suffered too; he got picked on by one of the bigger males, one they never found a city for, they called him Udie, after some of the sounds he made. Udie was the biggest one and a few times I saw him rape Bei; they don’t call it that, *between males, forced mounting has been known to occur* is what they say. Like I mentioned, bonzees are always having sex and most of the time it’s friendly. Almost *all* of the time, in fact—which is a lot more than you can say for humans, right?

But not absolutely all of the time; sometimes you would get a male like Udie who was just—well, rape is what it was, and every time it happened Bei would be left screaming.

That was pretty hard to take, but you know what was almost worse? The way Susie and them just accepted it. Calm as could be. They didn’t get upset by it, they didn’t even seem to feel anything for Bei. Sure, they’d given Bei and the others cute little names, but when it came to *feeling* anything for what Bei must have been suffering—well, it was like they’d turned off their sympathy taps.

This was research, and if you started feeling anything for the research subjects, you had to stop yourself, you had to distance yourself. I almost wrote *you had to stop yourself having any human feelings*, but that's the thing about humans, isn't it? We've made it so's it can seem natural to be distanced. To be unfeeling. We've made it so's it can seem natural not to care. It's not just that, neither. We've made it so's it can seem natural to be nasty. Can't it? Natural for us humans to love nobody but ourselves and our own group and be nasty to everyone else. To hate everyone else.

And then I thought of all the human nastiness that happened in the Congo a hundred years ago, the people who'd been raped and killed and mutilated, going back to when that Belgian king had ruled it like it was all his and he'd had people's hands and legs cut off if they didn't do what he said and he had millions of them killed as well, I mean really, ten million people or something like that. And all the nastiness from less than ten years ago—all the killers and rapists and all of them, coming over the border from Rwanda and the refugee camps and whole villages being... I read up on it when I was eight miles high coming over here, I got a book, how other countries piled on, and how in the end there were maybe five million dead and who knows how many raped. It was just ended when Susie and them set up their research station, but stuff was still going on in other parts of the country, that's what everyone said. And everywhere there were people suffering, people who lost their parents, their children, who've been raped, who've been beaten, who were always going to have the scars. And Susie and them? I'd asked her about it all and she said yes, yes it had been a problem, in some ways it was still a problem, but she was talking about how hard it was for *her*, problems setting up a research station and running it, not about how hard it was for all the people who suffered through everything. It was like she didn't see them—what mattered was the research. All that nastiness, she just didn't feel it—just like she didn't seem to feel anything about what was happening to Bei.

Susie and them weren't hating Bei—it wasn't *their* nastiness—but they sure weren't loving him, neither! And the more I saw them just accepting what Udie was doing to Bei, the more I started to feel something like hate inside me. Hate for Udie, and hate for us humans—not specially for Susie and them, but for all of us humans. Yeah, I know it was stupid, but that's what it was and I couldn't help it. What I was feeling was something like love for Bei, and something like hate for all of us humans.

But I couldn't say that to Susie, could I? It was her life, it was what she'd dedicated herself to ... —well, I just couldn't, not even on the night before I was supposed to leave.

Susie had opened a bottle of wine and then another bottle and we stayed up late and at first it was alright, it was good, even, we were talking about Mom and how great she'd been but how big of a pain she'd been too, and how strange it was to have both of them gone, Mom and Dad, I mean, so that there was just Susie and me in the family, no parents and no children neither—she and me didn't have our own children and we weren't really children ourselves now that we didn't have parents, ha ha, you know how it can get when you're drinking. And then suddenly it seemed like Susie couldn't stop asking me questions but they weren't really questions. It was, like, *what are you going to do with your life, Lu?*—that sort of thing. When she started nagging me she started calling me *Lu*—that's what I used to like to be called when I was a kid.

When she'd picked me up in Inogo she called me what she's always called me since we were teenagers—*Luc*. As if I was a guy, *Luke Skywalker* or something, but I've never minded that, maybe I've always had a part of me who wanted to be a guy, ha ha. Lots of people call me different things. Lots of times people call me *Luce*, you spell it L-U-C-E but you say *Loose*, it could mean *running loose and wild and free* but it could also mean what Mom used to call *a loose woman*, ha ha. I never minded that neither, maybe I should of.

But now? Susie was using a name I hadn't heard since we were little. I didn't know what to think of that. I sure didn't like all these questions: *don't you really have to think about some big issues, Lu? You could go back to college and train for something. Or get a proper job. Is travel really going to help?* And really she was saying *you're stupider than me and you've been wasting your life, if you're not getting a graduate degree, you better get a job in the Ford plant like everybody else in Windsor*, except she didn't have a clue, the Ford plant was closing and everyone was being laid off and she didn't even think to ask. People don't ask the real questions, do they? At least hardly ever. We go on in our own little worlds and we—alright, what the fuck do I know about it?

Anyways, thinking like that made me sadder than I'd been in a long time and when we finally went to bed I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about all the things that Susie had said and all the things that I *hadn't* said but that I should have said, about her and her whole research project and about what humans are like, all of us, and about how Bei ... More than anything I kept thinking of Bei. I knew I would be going in to Inogo and Kinshasha the next day and then off to London and then to Mumbai, but it wasn't any of that I was thinking of, it was the other stuff.¹

Finally I got up, very quietly, and I crept out. I closed the thin little door ever so quietly, and then I was on the path to the observation hut. When the moon was out you could see everything and suddenly there was a figure coming into the clearing on beyond the observation hut. He turned and saw me and he started to come

1. [Editor's note] Readers are advised that the next few pages are taken up with Lucinda's description of her encounter with Bei. The description is frank—some might say graphic. It is not to my mind obscene in any way, but some readers might well, for entirely understandable reasons, find it disturbing. It may readily be avoided by simply skipping past this section and resuming the narrative at the next line break. (For those who choose not to read the description of the encounter itself, its nature and its outcome may readily be inferred from subsequent references.)

closer. Now he was walking on two legs just like a man would expect they are so short, the legs of a bonzee. I froze up for a second, I mean, here I was, late at night in the middle of nowhere in the middle of Africa, and here's this strange guy coming towards me, who wouldn't be a bit scared? But then I thought *no, he's a bonzee, there's never been no human attacked by a bonzee, daytime or nighttime, everybody says that*, and then I thought *maybe he's a little bit sad and a little bit lonely, sort of like me*, and then I thought that I wouldn't of thought that if I hadn't of been drinking a fair bit, but I had been drinking a fair bit, so there you go. He wasn't much more than four foot four, four foot five, maybe, and as he got closer I could see that it was Bei, he was all alone. And then I could see that that he was rubbing himself and for a second I was, like, *what is this?* but we all do it, we're all animals, and I thought of what Udie had done to Bei and how nasty animals could be and how nasty human animals could be, especially, how it was us humans who were the nastiest so much of the time and how we had to learn to be more loving, more like bonzees were, almost all of them, almost all of the time, we had to learn to be more like Bei. And I felt something in my heart, a warm feeling came over me, *it feels good, doesn't it, Bei?* I said to him, *what you do to yourself, what you do ..., and if people—well, who are any of us to say it's wrong? It doesn't need to be tied in with having children, does it, Bei? Or with competing with all the other boys, or with competing for anything, you don't need any of that, do you, Bei, you don't, you're a sweetie, aren't you?*—that's some of what I said, something like that. Maybe some of it I wasn't saying I was just thinking, maybe all of it. Anyways he couldn't understand anything I said if I did say it, could he? But those were the sorts of thoughts I had—no point in denying it.

And then I looked into his face and I thought of Matt and I thought of Estes and I thought of Rick and Joe and Sandy, I thought of all the boyfriends I'd had and I thought, did I even know any of

them? They would look at me, all of them, when they wanted something, when they wanted pleasure from my body, and they would look as if they were caring for me, as if they wanted pleasure *for* me, as if they ... —*love*, that was the word they all used. Did they feel it? Did any of them feel it, feel the ache that I would feel at night when I was falling head over effing heels for one of them? That longing, and then the ache in the end when they'd say *we're just not right for each other, that's all—its no one's fault*, and now here was Bei's face in front of me, innocent like a child and not trying to make me think anything about how much he cared for me, just wanting pleasure, wanting to give pleasure, wanting to be loved. When Susie'd talked about how only bonzees and bonobos and humans make love face-to-face, what were the words she used? Did she say *make love*? Maybe words don't matter, but the feelings matter.

We touched each other then, I touched him on the shoulder first and he touched my arm, and then we touched each other's cheeks, all the books say their faces are closer to the face of a human child than they are to the face of a chimpanzee, or a bonobo, or a monkey, any of them. He moved his face towards mine, and he had the nicest smile. I know you're going to think that doesn't sound right, *he's just an animal*, you're thinking. But I'll say it again—we're all animals, aren't we? And I'm telling you, and it's true, he had a smile, he had a sweet, sweet smile. *Had* or *has*? I don't know. Is he living now? I wish I knew.

And then we touched each other again, I didn't mean to touch him down there, I don't think I meant to. I had just brushed against him and he was making soft little sounds, he was so hard and he was making these soft little sounds and then we held each other close and his arms were around me and then we were lying down somehow beside the termite mound and my wide skirt had ridden up, high up above my waist and then he was inside me, and I think I really did want him to be there, though I never would of expected that'd be something I'd want. I know I didn't *not* want him to be

there, anyways. And I know tears were streaming down my cheeks but I didn't feel sad. I don't know what I was crying for, it was some sort of release, I guess. Anyways, I didn't push him away, I didn't tell him *no*. I held him closer, I held him very tight. Even now I can't think it was wrong. I can't think he did wrong, I can't think we did wrong, I can't think any of it was wrong. We held each other afterwards and he was still making those soft sounds.

You're thinking it must be gross, he must have been so hairy, but I didn't notice none of that. I might as well tell you, I'd pretty much been there already so far as hairy guys were concerned, I remember how thick it was all over Rick, not just his chest and his armpits and between his legs and the face he never shaved, but all over, heavy on his arms, his legs, over almost all his back. He wasn't the best lover, Rick, but it wasn't because of the hair, I can tell you.

I blew him a kiss, Bei I mean, as he loped away, and somehow I felt as light as the night sky, with all those stars and the moon. My feet took me back to the sleeping huts and I don't know where my mind was taking me.

☞ In the morning I had to go. I didn't say anything after breakfast but then when Susie was driving me in the jeep to Inogo—I don't know why but I thought I had to say something, and I said to her *they're not just dumb animals, are they?* Sort of as a question but I guess it came out wrong, anyways she was sort of angry with me, *you've been here this long and that's all you've learned?* And she told me about some of the bonzees in zoos and places where they were studied in captivity, she had told a lot of it to me before, all about another Sue who was a researcher and another bonzee, Zanzi, who had more or less learned to read, and all that. *The dumb animals are the human animals*, Susie said, she was raising her voice now, *those human animals who won't recognize that humans are not the only ones with thoughts. With feelings. With lives that*

matter, and she went on like that for quite awhile. *It's not just these animals that matter*, she was saying, *it's all animals, but these ones are so close to us, so close* and then I could see her face straining and see how much it all mattered to her, and somehow that ended up being the moment when I *could* say what I'd really wanted to say.

Could there ever be one that was both? That was what I asked. *Could one be born that was half human and half ...* —*Like a mule, I mean*, I finished, and she stared at me like I was stupid. *Don't be ridiculous*, she said, *of course there couldn't be, the science just isn't ... And besides, can you imagine some guy getting it in his head to—it's too crazy, there's no way in a million years that ...*

I interrupted her. We would be in Inogo soon, and my bus would be there, and I had to know. *It could be the other way*, I said. *It wouldn't have to be a guy who ... It could be ...*, and I guess there was sort of a funny pause in what I was saying and then she looked away from the road.

She looked right at me. *Lu*, she said, *sometimes you have a weirdly dirty mind. I mean really weird ...* and she almost missed a curve, and the jeep swerved and skidded but she gripped the wheel tight and she stayed on the road and she started to drive faster and I didn't tell her anything more. She'd always thought I slept around too much—she was never proud of me. More like ashamed, really, and I just looked ahead and finally I said it wasn't a big deal, I was just curious was all, a person had a right to be curious and a person couldn't be expected to know all the things that Susie knew. *I* couldn't be expected to know all those things, anyway, and maybe she found it hard having me there but I was glad I had come, really glad, and really grateful too. A lot of that was true.

I missed my period in Mumbai. And then I missed it again a month after that in Kathmandu and that was just when I was about to come back home. It was time to come back, anyway. I'd discovered I wasn't the sort of person to wander for months and months in places like that, though you can meet a lot of interesting people

that way. One time I spent the night with one of them, I mean we had sex, it was more like that than making love. Nari Singh, he was, and I made silly jokes about his Singh thing. He took it really well. I liked him. But we were pretty different—I mean, he was training to be a police officer, how weird is that?

Anyways, that night with Nari happened after the first time I'd missed my period so I knew it couldn't of been him. Whatever, I had to find out, so of course as soon as I got back to Comber I figured I would head off again, and find a way to say *bye bye* to Bei's kid before it even was a kid. I was going to just drive into Windsor where I knew there was a clinic but then I thought *what's the thing going to look like? Even at 15 weeks is it going to look a lot different than a normal fetus, I mean a normal human fetus?* And if it was, like, different, there would maybe be a lot of talk about it at whatever clinic I'd had it done at. And maybe I didn't want all that talk to be happening in Windsor, where there was a lot of people who knew me, and there was a lot of people who knew a lot of people in Comber too—if you could ever say there *was* a lot of people in Comber. So maybe it would be better to go across the border and have it done where there was nobody that knew me. Nobody at all.

afterword

So far as the story of Bonbon's early years is concerned, there is little I can add to the collection of excerpts I have gathered here—and this, it seems to me, is the natural point for such a volume to end. Any narrative that tries to piece together his later life (and that of his mother, and that of Ashley Rouleau) must be a whole other story—one that is forced at key points to rely on conjecture and guesswork as much as on any body of established fact. So I leave Bonbon here, with Lucinda and Ash growing smaller and smaller behind him, and with the river pulling him onwards, out of reach, across a line that none of them could see, to a place that none of them really knew.

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Don LePan has spent most of his adult life working as a book publisher; he is the founder and CEO of the academic publishing house Broadview Press. He has also worked as a taxi driver, a hospital cleaner, and a secondary school teacher. He holds a BA from Carleton University, an MA from Sussex University, and was awarded an honorary doctorate by Trent University in 2004 for his contributions to academic publishing. LePan is also a painter (a solo exhibition of his work was held in Brooklyn in 2008). *Lucy and Bonbon* is his third novel; his first, *Animals*, was praised by J.M. Coetzee as “a powerful piece of writing, and a disturbing call to conscience.” Born in Washington, DC and raised in Ontario, LePan spent many years as a resident of Calgary, Alberta, and has lived for briefer periods in New Orleans, Louisiana; Lewes, Sussex; and Murewa, Zimbabwe. Since 2009 his home has been Nanaimo, British Columbia.