

# "Love Signs"

Log Line: A secret admirer challenges a lonely scientist's theories about love being a human trait.

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INT. PRIMATE STUDIES CELL - NIGHT

Two adolescent mountain gorillas sit in opposite corners of a white tiled laboratory observation cell littered with swing tires, blankets, pillows and other nesting comforts. One whole wall is reinforced Plexiglas that looks into an adjoining computer lab.

The larger gorilla, MOCA, calls to her cell mate, TOMTOM, who displays more interest in one of the cell's tire swings than his mate's advances.

Moca calls again with a cooing sound filled with regret.

Tomtom continues to ignore her.

Moca lashes out in frustration. Her cooing becoming hoots of annoyance.

For an instant, Tomtom looks at Moca. Then dismissing her with a wave, he turns his back and continues his tire games.

Moca jumps, hollers, hoots, and screams! Her hands flash in anger and we see her fingers are flying, gesturing, wait, not just gesturing, she's signing in AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE!

And what she's saying isn't very polite. Especially the last sign. One that any kid who's spent more than an hour on any playground would recognize.

Freeze frame on her Middle Finger.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

The computer that displays the offending gesture is nestled on a desk between primate books and a vase of wilting roses.

DR. STEVEN BARTON, elegant 60's with a golf tan, isn't hiding his anger

DR. BARTON  
Where did she learn that?

DR. SARA HOOD, a beautiful 30 playing hostage to a lab coat and a bad-hair-day rubs her nose in sleepless wonder.

SARA  
Honestly, Dr. Barton I...

DR. BARTON  
Who taught her that?

SARA  
Incredible.

DR. BARTON  
What purpose can possibly gained, what scientific study are you performing where you need to teach apes to curse!

SARA  
I'm just as surprised as you! Look at the expression on her face, do you see? This is phenomenal!

DR. BARTON  
Phenomenal? Dr. Hood, from the beginning this entire experiment's been a complete disaster, and you call this phenomenal?

SARA  
I assure you...

DR. BARTON  
Assure me? Months of questionable reports, lackluster results, and Tomtom's total lack of progress.

SARA  
Males are traditionally harder to teach.

DR. BARTON  
Train. Let us not give these animals too much credit.

SARA  
Teach, Dr. Barton. They are being taught!

DR. BARTON  
Taught what? Moca takes a week to learn the word cup, another three to learn water, and then she takes a solid month before she can put the words together to ask for a cup of water. She has the brain capacity to learn what, 200 words, maybe 250 at most? And you waist her mind, your time, and my resources with that?

SARA  
At least she used it in context.

DR. BARTON  
This isn't a joking matter, Sara.

SARA

And I'm not treating it as one, Steve! I don't know where she picked that up, or how she learned it's use, but what I'm pointing out to you is that not only did she learn it from casual observation, but her use of it in context is a breakthrough.

DR. BARTON

Wonderful, call University Press, monkeys are finally writing Shakespeare!

SARA

Yeah, it's wonderful! It's God-damn wonderful, and if I wasn't so startled by your hooting and chest-pounding, I'd have the rest of her signs translated by now, and perhaps, just perhaps, I'd discover what sparked Moca's aggression instead of hand-holding an overbearing father figure whose intellectual mediocrity is only surpassed by his inadequacy in the bed that he's lashing out at anything he doesn't understand just to keep his alpha-mail superiority in check! So, no, I'm not treating this as a joke, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't treat me like one!

DR. BARTON

Well.

SARA

Well.

DR. BARTON

That was.

SARA

Too far? I took it too far that time, didn't I?

DR. BARTON

Yes.

There is a knock at the door. The two scientists stare at each other across the wilted flowers. There is a second knock at the door.

SARA

Yes?

LISA, a pencil pocket nerd-as-undergraduate working an internship of her dreams, steps through the door.

LISA  
I'm sorry to interrupt, Dr. Hood, I just received another flower delivery. Where would you like them?

Lisa's beaming face dissolves into a worried grimace as she looks up from the flowers and confronts the angry tableau.

LISA  
I'll... just...

SARA  
Not now, Lisa, thank you.

Lisa retreats and whispers the door closed.

SARA  
Dr. Barton, Steve, I apologize. That was completely uncalled for. But you must see what we have here. Look, look! The Sager Grant is coming up. The results this term have been very promising! And with this, don't you see! She understood! She's brilliant!

DR. BARTON  
I'm putting this project down. It's a waste of University Resources, and of your talents.

SARA  
I can't believe this.

DR. BARTON  
It's for the best.

SARA  
The best for who?

DR. BARTON  
For you and your team.

SARA  
No, no you mean it's best for you. It's best to cut and run rather than take a risk and discover!

DR. BARTON  
Sara, look at yourself. Look at what you've become!

You spend more time with those apes than you do with people. It's not healthy.

SARA

You can't do this! You can't. You can't. She learned this on her own! It's a breakthrough!

DR. BARTON

No it's not! One of your Team probably trained her to do that as a joke. You've lost your perspective. You're obsessed with them! You've completely shut yourself off from the rest of humanity. My god Sara, think about your career, about your life!

SARA

I am.

DR. BARTON

I'm calling the foundation to find placements for the animals.

SARA

We've come so far! Don't take them away from me!

DR. BARTON

Listen to yourself.

Dr. Barton opens the door to leave. He stops and turns.

DR. BARTON

Oh, and Doctor, I never thought you were a joke. Just your project.

SARA

Well, in that case.

Sara flips him off.

INT. COMPUTER LABS -DAY

BILL DRYER, late 20's unkempt attractiveness fumes as he watches Dr. Barton storm out of the office leaving lab assistants scattered in his wake.

Lisa heads Bill off at the pass.

LISA

Whoa tiger! Not now.

BILL

Let me go.

LISA  
It was pretty rough in there. Leave it.

BILL  
Pompous bastard.

Sara pokes her head out of the office.

SARA  
Flowers?

LISA  
Yeah, I'll get them.

BILL  
Are you OK Can I do anything?

SARA  
Just the flowers, thanks.

Lisa presents the bouquet to Sara. Exotic, beautiful, perfectly bright and cheerful. Bill is jealous of there effect on Sara.

SARA  
Oh, I need these.

LISA  
There's another card.

Sara sets the flowers down and pulls out the card.

SARA  
Everything can love. You are my everything. Your Secret Admirer. See? I'm loved. I'm not completely cut off from humanity.

Sara picks up the flowers and retreats back into her office, closing the door behind her.

LISA  
It's romantic.

BILL  
It's creepy.

LISA  
Just ask her, already!

BILL  
What? Oh, no, they're not from me!

LISA

Right.

BILL

Drop it.

INT. PRIMATE STUDIES CELL -DAY

Moca sits before a colorful plastic kiddy table. Her eyes wet with sadness. On the table sits a cup of water next to a small speaker.

Gloves are strapped to her hands with electrodes extending down to her fingers. Moca signs a word. The word is then translated into a young girl's voice which is spoken through the speaker.

Across the table, Sara tries to get Moca's attention. Each word she says she also signs. Lisa stands nearby with a camcorder. Bill watches through the glass while monitoring a bank of computers.

MOCA

Moca want cup water.

SARA

There. Cup water.

MOCA

Moca want cup water.

SARA

There cup water, Moca? Moca, Sara here.  
Cup water there.

MOCA

Moca want cup water.

SARA

Moca, Moca, look Sara. Moca sad?

MOCA

Moca want cup water.

SARA

Moca, cup water here. Cup water here.  
Moca, Sara sad Moca sad. Why Moca sad?

MOCA

Moca want cup water.

SARA

Moca. Why Moca say fuck you Tomtom?

Moca looks away. Sara moves to keep eye contact.

SARA  
Moca. Moca! Look Sara. Sara friend.

MOCA  
Moca want cup water!

SARA  
Moca Look Sara! Moca! Moca, why fuck you  
Tontom"?

Moca throws the table knocking down Sara. Lisa shrieks in  
fright. The knocked over speaker chillingly speaks in  
computer monotone a direct opposite of Moca's fury!

MOCA  
Moca broken! Moca broken! Sara not  
broken! Moca broken! Fuck you, Sara!

Fangs, teeth, hands lashing! Moca rushes Sara. Sara keeps  
calm and doesn't respond to Moca's charge.

Bill bursts into the lab.

BILL  
Sara!

Moca raises her melon sized fists to strike Sara down.

MOCA  
Fuck you, Sara! Moca break Sara!

There is a popping noise, then Moca freezes. She then falls  
forward onto Sara knocking them both to the tiled floor.

Bill drops a tranquilizer pistol and rushes to help Sara.

SARA  
She's heavy. Get her off of me so I can  
beat the crap out of someone!

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Sara storms in followed by a concerned Bill and Lisa.

SARA  
How many times...

BILL  
This was different.

SARA  
...how many times have I said...

LISA  
Bill's right. This was different.

SARA  
...Excuse me! How many times have I said,  
no tranquilizers!

BILL  
She was coming at you.

SARA  
I don't care.

BILL  
She was coming at you and would have  
killed you!

SARA  
No she wouldn't.

BILL  
Yes she would.

SARA  
No she wouldn't, and now, now I have to  
document that Moca was drugged after  
attacking a handler. Do you have any idea  
what will happen to her at the zoo with  
this incident on her record? She was only  
angry and frightened.

LISA  
She was frightened

BILL  
Wait, hold on!

LISA  
I was terrified! Thank god Bill brought  
the gun!

BILL  
Wait hold on, what did you say? Just now?  
What about a zoo?

Sara's eyes well with tears as she begins to sign silently  
sign out Dr. Barton's plan. Lisa and Bill read her hands and  
grow angry.

LISA  
He's closing us down?

BILL  
No! He wouldn't.

SARA  
...and, and now, instead of a nice paddock with visitors, where we can visit. I won't be allowed to see her. I won't get closer than the gawkers railing! I'll have to report this. I have to report she attacked me and you put her down. She was only having a bad day! She was just showing off. Posturing! And even, even if he had hit me, it wouldn't have been that bad.

BILL  
Not that bad? She would have taken your life!

SARA  
My life? Eight years! Eight years! That's my life!

As Sara reaches for the fresh flowers on the desk, Lisa tugs Bill's arm.

LISA  
Come on. We should check up on Moca.

Sara cries as she smells the flowers.

INT. COMPUTER LABS - DAY

Bill watches Moca through the glass. Moca sleeps soundly. At the other end of the cell, Tomtom starts back at Bill.

Bill Signs.

BILL  
What you look?

Tomtom pounds his chest and smiles.

BILL  
Stupid ape.

Bill turns away.

BANG!

One of the Tires slams into the window. Bill jumps with fright and turns around to find Tomtom turned away from the window. The offending tire spins to a stop in the center of the cell.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Sara is writing up her report. There is a knock on the door.

SARA  
What is it, Lisa?

Dr. Barton enters.

DR. BARTON  
I heard what happened today.

SARA  
Please, not now.

DR. BARTON  
What were you thinking! You didn't have to go in there. You had 24 hours and you would have been free and clear!

SARA  
Please, leave me alone.

DR. BARTON  
But no! You had to back in there. One more time. One more test. Now look what you've done!

SARA  
I can't have this conversation. Please leave.

DR. BARTON  
Moca is to be kept sedated until a qualified animal handler can assess her risk.

SARA  
Please, Steve.

Lisa enters the open door with another bouquet of flowers.

LISA  
This makes number three. Oh, hello, Dr. Barton.

DR. BARTON

Don't go back into the cell. Leave the apes alone.

Dr. Barton exits. Sara tries to recover.

SARA

Flowers? Twice in one day. I'm a lucky woman.

LISA

Yeah, Whoever this guys is, he likes you.

SARA

It's Bill.

LISA

I don't think so. There's a card, you should read it.

SARA

No, not now. I have work to do.

LISA

Are you sure, it might make you feel better.

SARA

I'm about to sentence one of my best friends to solitary confinement. I'm really not interested.

LISA

OK.

SARA

OK.

LISA

I'll just leave it.

SARA

Over there.

Lisa exits. Sara tries to write up a report. Then she looks to the flowers. She reaches out, pulls the card and pops it open.

INT. COMPUTER LABS - DAY

Sara brushes past a startled Lisa and up to Bill's station.

SARA  
What's this?

BILL  
What?

SARA  
You know damn well what!

BILL  
I didn't send that.

SARA  
Yes you... here. I'm dreadfully sorry for Moca's display this afternoon? Your Secret Admirer. Is this some kind of joke?

LISA  
Bill wouldn't write, dreadfully.

SARA  
Right, then who was it?

Sara spins around and looks at the rest of the research team and assistants who are standing dumb-struck at Sara's outburst.

SARA  
Which one of you did it? I have no time for games! No one outside of the project knows about what happen here. So out with it. Who sent this!

The place is silent.

SARA  
Fine. You're all getting fired anyway!

Sara strides away.

LISA  
What are you thinking!

BILL  
I saved here life! I saved your life! I saved Moca's life! What do you think would've happen to her if... if Moca had killed Sara? I don't think there's a court of appeals at the zoo! Now, I'm not sending the fucking flowers so lay off!

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Sara drops into her chair. She studies the card. Her desk phone message is blinking. She hits the machine.

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have one unheard message.

BEEP

The voice is slightly affected, almost British in its annunciation.

VOICE

Hello, Dr. Hood. You should go back and apologize to poor William. He is in love with you, but he isn't your admirer. I am.

SARA

Lisa! Lisa get in here!

VOICE

I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused, but I wish to make it up to you this evening. I know this is sudden, and a bit foolish, but I'm very shy. Please, meet me in the computer lab tonight. Don't tell anyone about this or I won't come. I have so much to tell you. SO much to share. I can save you Sara, I can save Moca too. Please come tonight. Good bye.

Lisa Enters the office and sees a shocked Sara.

LISA

Are you OK

SARA

I, I need the report on Night Eight B.

LISA

The report, on Night Eight B?

SARA

Yes.

LISA

You yelled, out your door, across the lab, for report Nine Eight B?

SARA

Just get me the paper!

LISA  
I'm just saying.

SARA  
Go.

Lisa exits. Sara hits the erase button on the phone.

ANSWERING MACHINE  
Message Erased

INT. COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT

Computer monitors aglow reflecting off the darkened window of the Primate Studies Cell. Sara enters dressed in her nicest dress and she's attempted to do something with her hair. She's almost presentable.

SARA  
Hello?

Sara looks around. She moves to the light switch

VOICE  
Don't turn on the lights.

Sara stops.

SARA  
Where are you?

VOICE  
I didn't mean to frighten you.

SARA  
Well, your doing a great job.

VOICE  
I want time to explain myself.

SARA  
Please, do, because I really don't have time to...

VOICE  
...to play games? You should get out more. Have more fun. You never apologized to William.

SARA  
Right. I'm done with this!

Sara snaps on the light. The room is empty.

SARA  
OK, come out! Where the hell are you?

VOICE  
I'm right here.

Sara looks. There by the window, the little plastic kiddy table. And On it, sits the speaker.

SARA  
OK. I'm calling the police. Who connected you to the speaker?

VOICE  
You did.

Now the lights snap on in the Primate Studies Cell. Tomtom sits in its center. Moca is still asleep in the corner. Tomtom signs fluently. His fingers work within the wired translation gloves.

TOMTOM  
I love you Dr. Hood, Sara. I've been in love with you for as long as I could describe the feeling.

SARA  
Bill? Dr. Barton? This isn't funny! Stop it!

TOMTOM  
Bill and Steve aren't here, Sara. It's only you and me, and poor Moca, of course.

SARA  
I don't understand.

TOMTOM  
I know.

SARA  
The flowers, the phone message.

TOMTOM  
Everything's connected through the computer system. The translator, the internet, your expense account.

SARA  
Tomtom?

TOMTOM  
Yes.

SARA  
I.

TOMTOM  
Sit down, Sara.

SARA  
I.

TOMTOM  
Sara, sit down. You don't look well.

SARA  
I, but you can't. There has to be a reason.

TOMTOM  
There is, I love you.

SARA  
Stop.

TOMTOM  
I wanted you to know before I left. Moca didn't want me to tell you. She's very angry with me.

SARA  
Shut up.

Sara turns away from the window.

TOMTOM  
She has old-fashioned ideas of me and our arranged marriage. She's very jealous of you. She would have killed you. I don't blame her, after all, she is just an animal.

SARA  
Shut up! Shut up! Stop.

Silence stretches. Sara gets a grip on what's going on. She slowly turns to look back through the window. Tomtom is now sitting on the tire swing looking like another ape. Sara starts to laugh.

SARA  
I am losing it.

TOMTOM  
Losing what?

Sara shrieks.

TOMTOM  
I love this swing, almost as much as you.  
But, of course, I don't have much to  
compare love to. Oh, banana's are nice.  
Yes a good banana is nice. I love bananas  
also.

SARA  
OK. Right. OK, if were going to do this.  
Let's do this right.

Sara reaches for the camera.

TOMTOM  
No! No camera!

SARA  
I have to document.

Tomtom literally goes ape!

TOMTOM  
No! No Camera! No! No! No!

SARA  
OK, OK.

TOMTOM  
Just us!

SARA  
Calm down.

TOMTOM  
Just us! Now! No cup water, no test! Just  
us!

SARA  
I said calm down!

TOMTOM  
I say! I say this time! I say you calm  
down!

Silence as Tomtom climbs back on the swing.

SARA  
I'm sorry.

TOMTOM  
We're leaving. Moca and I.

SARA  
I know, they're coming for you tomorrow.

TOMTOM  
That's not what I mean. Moca and I are leaving. It's for the best. You spend too much time with us. You should be with apes of your own type. Bill is nice.

SARA  
Bill? He is nice, but he's too young and... I'm talking about relationships with a gorilla.

TOMTOM  
Don't think of me like that.

SARA  
You are, you are a Mountain Gorilla.

TOMTOM  
I've never seen a mountain, and I'm not sure if you can call me a Gorilla now. The only other gorilla I know is poor Moca, and I'm more than her. Much more. Don't look at me like that. Please, come inside. Come inside so we can talk without the glass between us. No tests. Just us.

SARA  
OK.

Sara moves to the cell door. She opens it and steps into...

INT. PRIMATE STUDIES CELL - NIGHT

...the cell. Sara approaches Tomtom.

TOMTOM  
Thank you, Sara.

Tomtom is quick. He pulls something from under a blanket near him. It's the tranquilizer gun.

SARA  
Tomtom?

Moca rises from her sleep and lopes over to Tomtom. She puts her arms around him and he returns the affection all the while keeping the gun pointed at Sara.

TOMTOM

Bill dropped the gun. He misplaces things far to easily. You should have a talk with him. But of course, it doesn't matter. You're all fired anyway, right? I've always wanted to see a mountain.

SARA

Tomtom!

Tomtom fires. The dart strikes Sara in the thigh. Sara freezes a moment, wonder frozen on her face.

MOCA

And please, tell Dr. Barton I said...

Moca raises a middle finger as Sara collapses to the floor.

END