

KEEPERS - by Michele Winstanley

EXCERPT FOR SMITH'S SCRIPTS LIBRARY

SCENE 8

*Ape House. Early evening. The sound of screams fade to that of heavy rain. The hose trails along the corridor. One of the back den cage doors hangs open, a padlock hooked into it's mesh. Broken branches and blood-stained hay have been cleared out of the show den. **Chick** stands inspecting a ripped/broken hammock. **Oona** sweeps hay and twigs into a pile, ready to be loaded into a large black bin.*

Chick: [Gloomy] Look at that. I never even got to swing in it.

Maggie enters, using a mac as shelter from the rain. She unbolts the security gate and steps inside.

Chick: Alright?

Maggie: I've just been on the phone to the PPL - see if they can help us. They think Monkeyland might be able to take Florence and Max as a pair.

Maggie looks out into the paddock. She sees Toto, the juvenile male.

Maggie: Hey Toto? What a pallarva, eh little man?

Chick: Did they find out what happened?

Maggie: Cheche and Kiko got hold of the baby, Max was defending it, Dahti went for Max - poor little baby.

Chick: [Solemn] Yeah.

Chick: I wonder why she didn't hang on to it. It's supposed to be the strongest love, that between mother and child. My Mum knows a woman who found the strength to lift a small transit van that accidentally parked on her child's foot.

Maggie: Come on, I want to let them back in.

Chick goes into the back den. **Maggie** smiles at **Toto**. **Oona** approaches **Maggie**.

Maggie: [*Affectionate*] I know it's cold out there. Won't be long now.

Oona: [*Pause*] Will they be alright, do you think?

Maggie: Mm?

Oona: Max and...and Florence?

Maggie: Yeah, they'll be alright, don't worry. Chimps are stronger than they look. [*To Toto*] Aren't you? Yes you are, you're tough as old boots, you little monster.

Oona: [*Relieved*] Really? Really and truly?

Maggie: Yeah. Squabbles happen every day in their world, they're built to survive the odd Close Encounter.

Oona: Oh my God - really? - oh! I wasn't sure, you see. I thought it was a load of old flannel [*Laughs*]. Oh, I'm so relieved, I can't tell you. Cause I didn't know what to do. I thought he was just trying to keep me quiet, you know [*Laughs*]? Cause I was going to say: I'm a *pacifist*. I wouldn't want to hurt anything, even if it is part of the job.

Maggie: What are you talking about?

Oona: [*Losing confidence*] Derek. In there. Yesterday he...Well...he...

Maggie: What? He what?

Oona: He...went in there and...kicked her. Florence. I thought...he told me it was normal practise...

Maggie: [*Angry*] And you believed him? For Christ's sake!

Chick[*Off*]: [*Echoey*] Oh what! Bloody hell, look at that.

Oona: I didn't know what to do. He said it was part of the job. To keep them more manageable.

Maggie: Why didn't you tell me, Oona?

Chick *appears, holding a clump of black silky hair.*

Chick: You can still see the roots and everything.

Chick *shows the hair to Oona.*

Chick: Look. See?

Maggie: [*Venomous*] Bastard.

Chick: [*Taken aback*] What?

Maggie *slams the cage door, furious. Noise reverberates off the walls.*

Oona: [*Barely audible*] I'm sorry.

Maggie: Where's Derek?

Chick: Still up at the vets with Max and Florence, I think. Why? What's happened?

Maggie exits. Chick looks at Oona. Oona is clutching the clump of hair. All the colour has drained from her face.

Chick: What's going on?

Oona: I'm sorry.

Chick: Are you alright?

Oona: I...I think I'm going to faint.