

SIGNALS

a play for the stage

by David Farn

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Synopsis

Armed only with her iPad and a searing vision of the future, Parveen is spearheading a telecoms revolution. Her Galahad is Ron, a conman on the run from the bin men. Can they find a way to overcome the fearsome Welsh Dragon, Owen Brecon, and liberate his captive daughter, Dawn?

Signals is a comedy about creativity, poetic inspiration, and our struggles to communicate with one another, with some serious points to make about the world we live in.

The Characters

Owen Brecon

Owen is an elderly Welsh poet. Once he was a rising star, ‘Wales’ greatest nature poet’, but lately has become embittered, reclusive and is not in good health. He lives in a small cottage in a beautiful remote Welsh valley.

Dawn Brecon

Dawn, in her thirties, is Owen’s long-suffering daughter. She lives in the cottage with her father, works in the local supermarket and is an avid chapel-goer. Loyal to her father, yet she feels she may have missed out on something, and yearns for a larger world.

Ron

Ron is in his thirties. He’s a bit of a drifter and moves from job to job without any real purpose. He’s clever and funny, and lives on his wits, but he is also a reckless gambler and a drinker.

Parveen

Parveen, also in her thirties, is a clever, ambitious, feisty woman in a man’s world. She is an executive for a global telecommunications company and a passionate advocate for their vision of the future.

The Setting

The play is set outdoors in rural Wales, in Owen Brecon’s small cottage, in a supermarket aisle and in the bar of a pub. In the original production, this was achieved with a simple composite set and lighting changes. The time is now.

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Signals was produced by Hands On NE and first performed at The Customs House, South Shields on November 3rd 2016, followed by a short NE tour.

The original cast and creative team were:

Ron	Steven Stobbs
Parveen	Danielle Miller
Owen Brecon	David Farn
Dawn Brecon	Kylie Ann Ford
Director	Dolores Poretta-Brown
Lighting & Sound	Peter Dawson
Set design	David Farn
Art work	John Brown
Publicity	Peter Dawson

Review

‘Brecon is more than a codger railing against technology. He, and the author, have important things to say.’

Peter Mortimer, *British Theatre Guide*

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Somewhere in rural Wales. A bit of crumbling drystone wall. Dusk. The time is now.

PARVEEN is standing by the wall, using binoculars to peer intently at something in the distance. She wears outdoor gear: cagoule, boots, map, rucksack and so on. By contrast, RON, sitting on a tree stump, wears casual clothes and is swigging from a quarter-bottle of whisky.

RON See anything?

PARVEEN Nah.

RON *(offering the bottle)* Want some?

PARVEEN No. And you shouldn't be drinking. You're driving.

RON Suit yourself.

After a moment she gives up on the surveillance and studies RON critically.

PARVEEN What's wrong with the car, anyway?

RON Dunno. Sometimes it goes, sometimes it doesn't.

PARVEEN Well how do I get back to the hotel? *(pause)* You'll have to phone your people.

RON My people?

PARVEEN Yeah. Get them to send somebody else out. With a car that works. With a driver that doesn't drink. Or answer back.

RON Alright. Calm down.

RON takes out his phone, with an ostentatious show of being calm. After a

moment.

PARVEEN Well?

RON Erm. I don't have any credit.

PARVEEN Dah! (*taking her own phone out*) Give me the number.

RON What number?

PARVEEN Your firm. The minicabs.

RON There is no firm. There's just me.

PARVEEN Oh, great! (*she dials a number*) Shit! No signal. There's irony for you.

RON Well. We are in the middle of nowhere. (*pause*) What you doing here, anyway?

PARVEEN I said. A survey. Badgers.

RON Bit dangerous, isn't it? On your own.

PARVEEN I can look after myself.

RON No, but your lot usually come mob-handed, don't they?

PARVEEN That's protesters. I'm not protesting. I'm doing a survey. It's science.

RON Oh. What do you call them, then?

PARVEEN What? Call what?

RON Badgers. What's their Latin name?

PARVEEN Terra - blanco.

RON (*shaking his head*) Meles meles.

- PARVEEN** How do you know that?
- RON** I'm interested. Well, used to be. Nature. When all the other kids were playing on their Nintendos, I'd be out collecting birds' eggs.
- PARVEEN** That's illegal.
- RON** And once, I made a plaster cast of a badger print. Still got it somewhere. (*pause*) You're watching that cottage, aren't you?
- PARVEEN** It's none of your business. You shouldn't be here. You were supposed to drop me at the lay-by, then go.
- RON** Look, I'm sorry about the car. But since we're here –
- PARVEEN** Take another step and I'll gouge your eyes out!
- RON** Whoah, whoah, whoah, WHOAH! You've got me all wrong.
- PARVEEN** Really?
- RON** Yeah. I'm just an ordinary bloke trying to make an honest bob.
- PARVEEN** An honest bob? Are you even registered?
- RON** Well –
- PARVEEN** Oh, fantastic! (*taking up the map*) I'll walk. I'll walk to the village. (*studying*) Jesus, it's miles! I'll hitch a lift. (*gathering her things*) What are you going to do?
- RON** Thought I might sit here for a bit. Enjoy the view.
- PARVEEN** It'll be dark soon.
- RON** Then I'll see the stars.

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PARVEEN Whatever. Enjoy your view.

She exits. RON sits, calmly sipping his whisky. After a minute, PARVEEN returns.

RON Thought you'd gone.

PARVEEN My purse is back at the hotel. And - and I heard a noise.

RON What sort of a noise?

PARVEEN Come with me.

RON Eh?

PARVEEN You're my driver. I hired you to drive me and you've let me down so the least you can do is come with me to the village.

RON It'll cost you.

PARVEEN You're going to charge me for the *walk*? Alright! Let's go.

RON Hang on. What's the hurry. This is nice. Look, you can see the moon.

PARVEEN I don't wanna see the moon. I want to see my hotel and a bath and a bed.

RON Well, we all want to see that.

PARVEEN You see this walking pole? One more remark like that and I'm going to impale your balls on it.

RON I see your point. Sorry. (*indicating the rucksack*) You got anything to eat in there?

PARVEEN What? I've got some fruit, cereal bars. Oh, and a pork pie.

RON Pork pie! Now you're talking.

PARVEEN (*taking it out*) Here, take it.

RON unwraps the pie and begins to eat it.

PARVEEN You're going to eat it *there*? Can't you eat and walk?

RON Very bad for the digestion.

PARVEEN Dah!

PARVEEN paces up and down impatiently.

RON This is good pie.

PARVEEN Just hurry up!

RON Want some?

PARVEEN No!

RON Listen!

PARVEEN What? What is it?

RON It's an owl. But what *kind* of owl?

PARVEEN I dunno. I don't know owls.

RON Don't know badgers, either.

PARVEEN Go on, then, name that owl.

RON You've to guess.

PARVEEN I don't want to guess, I want to go! (*pause*) It's a barn owl.

RON It's not.

PARVEEN Look, who cares? (*pause*) Tawny, it's a tawny owl.

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RON No.

PARVEEN I give up. I'm all out of owls.

RON It's the teat.

PARVEEN What?

RON The teat owl. Tea towel. Do you get it?

PARVEEN Tea towel? Oh. Very funny.

RON laughs. PARVEEN doesn't.

RON You know, sometimes my car, once the engine's cooled down, well it restarts no bother. But you haven't got to rush it. Bit like me. You just have to be patient.

PARVEEN You'd better not be having me on!

PARVEEN takes from her rucksack a sit mat and pointedly sits some distance from RON. After a while –

RON (*pointing*) Look! Over there! A deer.

PARVEEN Where? Oh, yeah! Wow! I've never seen a deer. Well, not like this.

RON You see. Patience can have its compensations.

They stare for a while at the invisible deer in the gathering gloom.

PARVEEN There it goes. That was magic! What kind of a deer was it?

RON Dunno.

PARVEEN Thought you were a bit of an expert.

RON Dunno everything. Dunno deer. Anyway, we *saw* the deer. That's what's important. And we saw it together.

- PARVEEN** *That bit's not important.*
- RON** No? Well, we'll see. (*pause*) What did you mean, by the way?
- PARVEEN** Mean by what?
- RON** Earlier, when you said 'there's an irony'.
- PARVEEN** (*ignoring this*) What are *you* doing here, anyway? Your accent's not local.
- RON** I've worked all over. Started out selling cutlery on a market stall. I can do a good Cockney. 'I'm not talking fifty parnds! I'm not talking twenny parnds! I'm talking *ten parnds*, for genuine hallmarked silver cutlery!'
- PARVEEN** And was it genuine?
- RON** For ten pounds? Not likely. It was shite. Dunno what it was made of. Mind you, that's *real* selling. Flogging something you don't actually believe in.
- PARVEEN** Don't you think you should believe in what you're selling?
- RON** Why, what are you selling?
- PARVEEN** What other criminal activities have you been involved in?
- GINNY** Sold fireworks for a bit.
- PARVEEN** Fireworks.
- RON** Not the sort *you'd* have. These were illegal Chinese imports. Came in old tea chests, loose in straw. Lot of people wouldn't touch them. These might go off in your face or not at all. Bit like life. I lost these two fingers to a big maroon that went off when it wasn't supposed to.
- PARVEEN** Christ!

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RON Could have been worse. Could have taken my head off.

PARVEEN Hang on. You've *got* all your fingers.

RON Have I? Oh yeah.

PARVEEN Is any of this -? Are you -? Did you actually ever sell fireworks?

RON Might have done. Might not. Depends whose asking.

PARVEEN Oh, for god's sake! (*pause*) You still haven't said what you're doing here.

RON Neither have you.

PARVEEN Is there any chance that car of yours might be ready to work now?

RON Let's see.

RON exits abruptly.

PARVEEN Wait! I need to –

But RON has already gone. PARVEEN quickly repacks the rucksack.

PARVEEN Wait for me!

PARVEEN hurriedly exits after RON. End of Scene 1.