

SIGNAL FIRE

Written by

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... whoever they may be.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - EVENING

Dusk on a summer's evening. The light is polarised, the air is thick as water and quiet.

Three people walk through an undulating landscape of farmed fields and woodlands, criss-crossed with dry stone walls and old country lanes.

HEN is a man in his forties, wearing clothes so aged and grease-blackened it barely tells they were once jeans and a pullover. He is wiry and slight with lively anxious eyes.

BISTO is in his mid twenties. He wears a faded but once-colourful ski jacket patched with scraps of raw leather. A larger man more solid than Hen.

SUDS is a fidgety 18 year old girl wrapped in a knitted shawl.

They pass a van in a ditch. It's been there a long time, part reclaimed by the elements, covered in weeds and moss. Rusty paintwork says "Evening Standard - London's latest news as it happens".

SUDS

You're old. How old are ye?

BISTO

Shh, Suds. Leave it.

SUDS

Ee is old. And he's from city.
Why's he still alive?

BISTO

My partner doesn't have respect
that comes through spending time
with other people. I'll apologise
on her behalf.

HEN

It's fine. Don't apologise.

SUDS

Listen to him! Hear how he sounds!
He's like a joke.

They walk in silence.

SUDS (CONT'D)

Posh twat.

Bisto laughs. More silence.

BISTO
Where'd you say you were from,
then?

HEN
You can guess. London.

SUDS
London!

BISTO
(not sure how to put it)
How's London now?

HEN
It's okay. Not for me. That's why
I'm here. We had to get out.

SUDS
We! There's no "we"! You're just a
"he".

BISTO
(frowning at Suds)
You mean your partner.

Hen nods.

BISTO (CONT'D)
She'll be along, then?

HEN
I don't know.

BISTO
But you hope.

HEN
I hope.

BISTO
Well you say she's coming, so we'll
light the fire. That'll improve her
chances at least.

Hen nods.

EXT. HILLTOP - LATER

The three arrive at a hilltop surrounded by wide views of
subdued countryside. Not a light to be seen all around,
despite the deepening evening.

There's a large fire pit, a stack of wood, rusting sheets of corrugated iron, and a telegraph post.

BISTO

Come then. Help us build it.

He starts hauling branches and logs to the fire pit.

Hen joins in.

Suds bites her nails and stares provocatively at Hen.

BISTO (CONT'D)

Suds, you'll help!

SUDS

I'll do twice as much as him in half the time. So I needn't start yet.

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT

The fire is burning well.

Hen and Bisto finish up dragging iron sheets into a makeshift screen surrounding the fire on all but one side.

They stand flanking the open side. The fire is a beacon, sending light one way and blocking it on all others.

BISTO

Ay, look.

Far on the horizon, another fire burns on a distant hill. Obscure movements show that distant figures are pulling corrugated iron to block their fire, keeping it open on the facing side and the opposite side, sending the signal on.

BISTO (CONT'D)

(To Hen)

If she's out there, she'll have safe passage now. That's all ee can hope.

Hen squints into the distance. A third fire is visible, beyond the second. A tiny spark of hope, a long way away.

SUDS

(Shouting to the void)

Wankers!

BISTO

That's not wankers Suds. That's co-operation.

SUDS

Fucking idiots. We'll be seen, then what.

Suddenly there is a crackling of electrical noise.

A conical speaker at the top of the pole fizzes into life with loud distorted speech and feedback.

CHURCH RADIO

... And the night was made for silence. And the child was made to lie down upon the sign from the father.

SUDS (CONT'D)

Shit, you fuck shit shitfucks, I told you.

CHURCH RADIO

And it is known: he that does not understand and does not learn shall be made to understand and right hard shall be the learning...

BISTO

(Relaxed, watching the fires burning on the horizon)
OK. We've done what we can do. Now we go.

HEN

So you have this too.

They leave the hilltop.

Suds kicks over the makeshift corrugated screen onto the fire, throwing up a fizz of sparks.

SUDS

Fucking dead bitch. You don't even exist, you dead bitch. Waste of fucking time.

INT. FRONT ROOM - HOUSE - NIGHT

A small isolated two-up two-down cottage.

By candlelight, Bisto and Hen are seated on old furniture drinking murky drinks from dirty glasses - home-brewed alcohol. Suds is sat in a rocking chair knitting something, on the edge of the darkness.

BISTO

You're... old, then.

Hen smiles, nods.

BISTO (CONT'D)
You remember a life before?

HEN
Oh, I do. I was an adult. In my
twenties when it happened.

He drinks.

HEN (CONT'D)
Job in "I.T."

BISTO
What's that?

HEN
You'll never believe it.

BISTO
Go on.

HEN
... Computers.

They exchange a glance. Pause. They both laugh at the same moment.

Suds hisses angrily at Hen. Like an animal protecting territory.

BISTO
Calm down Hen. Give the man breath.
You can see he's not a threat to
us. Just calm down.

SUDS
He's fucking come here. From
fucking nowhere. He's made God
'nnoyed at us. You don't tell me to
calm down about him. You don't tell
me to calm down.

Bisto gestures at Suds to calm down, stay out of it.

She stays. The two men drink.

BISTO
So what was your name?

HEN
Before?

BISTO
Right.

HEN
Michael. Just... Michael.

BISTO
Why "Hen" now?

HEN
I like eggs.

They chuckle at this. A bonding moment.

HEN (CONT'D)
And you? Why "Bisto"?

BISTO
I don't know. I think it's because
I'm fat.

SUDS
He's fat! So fat!

She gestures, clutching imaginary fat on her own body. Belly, breasts, provocative.

BISTO
You shush now, Suds. Are you not
tired?

SUDS
(Muttering)
Don't you dare fucking tell me I'm
tired.

Hen passes a finger idly through the candle flame. He and Suds observe each other warily.

BISTO
Tell us what happened then. You're
here for a reason.

HEN
Ey?

BISTO
London. What happened as made you
leave?

Hen flinches. And decides to tell the story.

HEN
There's a riot... Blackfriars
tunnel got emptied out. "The Force
Of God", they're called now.
They're strong. Like an army.

(MORE)

HEN (CONT'D)
 Brutal and organised.

It's Adam's Principle all over
 again. You know that?

Bisto gestures: no.

HEN (CONT'D)
 Well...

There's people everywhere, churning
 out of the tunnel, screaming, and
 blood and filth. The Force cutting
 us down on the streets.

We got split up - my partner...

See, the Force had broken open the
 Unilever building. It's been
 barricaded for years. There's
 rumours of food in there. Food and
 clean clothes. Machine-made stuff.
 Products. It was... where we
 worked... before. We knew the
 building.

I tried to go with her, but... it
 was chaos.

I shouted to her. We came here
 years ago, see - to this place. Our
 first holiday together. I shouted
 "Meet at the cottage." And I said:
 "Love." She heard. She definitely
 heard. I think she understood. I
 hope.

I remember this room.

Hen is lost in thought.

BISTO
 What's Adam's Principle?

HEN
 The better the idea, the worse it
 is.

BISTO
 Ey?

HEN
 The better an idea is, the worse it
 will be for us.

(MORE)

HEN (CONT'D)

Great ideas are the most dangerous.

Cars. Clothes. War.

(Quietly)

God.

Computers. They were too good for us. That's why we should never of trusted them. We're stupid and lazy, so we love great ideas. We rush to put our eggs in.

And when they break, we break too.

Same as everything.

Now it's the Force Of God. People can't sign up fast enough. If they don't sign up, the Force will kill them anyway.

BISTO

(Guarded)

You won't say ill of God in this house.

Bisto nods towards the door on the other side of the room, gesturing with his eyes. There's something he can't say, and he's trying to make Hen understand that.

Hen shrugs. They sit in silence for a moment.

Suds springs up from her seat. Brandishes her knitting needle at Hen.

SUDS

(Deliberately, slowly)

I'm going to fuck you up. Stranger.

BISTO

Suds! There's no need! Calm self.

Suds screams, a defiant stupid, childish scream. Loud enough to echo beyond the house.

Suddenly, there is a crackling noise - like before on the hill. Somewhere nearby, a radio has come to life.

CHURCH RADIO

God knows when disputes break the peace. God hears all. Sees all. Knows all.

(MORE)

CHURCH RADIO (CONT'D)

Do not fight your brethren,
 friends, if the battle is unequal.
 If odds are unequal - one man upon
 two - God frowns because the will
 of men decides fate and this should
 not be.

Only when odds are even - then fate
 is in the hands of God. For only He
 should decide the outcome in the
 battle between brethren.

SUDS

(Anxious)

You've brought it on us! You've
 brought it! We never need telling
 like this. Ohhh, ohhh.

BISTO

Bed! All. Now. That's enough.

He gets up. Suds follows.

SUDS

(To Hen)

I'm only not killing you because
 you're weak. You heard that din't
 you.

Suds and Bisto leave the room. Suds squishes the candle flame
 with her thumb. Hen is left in blackness.

INT. FRONT ROOM - HOUSE - MORNING

Hen wakes with a start, still in the chair from the night
 before. Early light filters through tatty window shutters.

There is a scuffling noise outside.

Hen grips the sides of his chair. He slides onto the floor,
 alert, listening, looking for his next move.

Something outside moves past the window, casting a shadow.

Hen scrabbles low and fast in the opposite direction, to the
 hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hen looks at the cottage front door. Closed. He slides into
 the hallway, back pinned to the wall, staying low.

There's another noise, from the back of the house. Hen looks towards it...

Darts towards the bottom of the stairway, near the front door, and...

Freeze!

Bisto is at the top of the stairs, rifle aimed straight at Hen. They stare at each other.

Slowly, Bisto gestures for Hen to keep to the side.

Suds' head appears behind Bisto on the upstairs landing. She is terrified. None of yesterday's bravado.

Bisto creeps down the wooden staircase. Every step risks a creak.

BISTO

(Whispering)

It's in the back. Don't be twitchy.
Could be an animal. You coming
with, or stay?

Hen nods, he'll come.

Bisto goes first, sneaking to the kitchen in the back of the house, followed by Hen.

INT. KITCHEN - HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

All the windows in the kitchen are boarded up. Only shafts of grey light between slats. Bisto and Hen crouch by kitchen cabinets, Bisto with rifle raised, beside the back door.

The door handle rattles as someone twists it. Locked.

Hen looks at Bisto. Bisto is gripping his gun, whispering to himself.

Loud thud. Something dropped - could have been as big as a body.

There is a cat flap beside the back door, near Bisto's ankle.

A hand in fingerless gloves snakes it's way through the cat flap, into the kitchen. Bisto doesn't see it. There is a key on a hook to the side of the cat flap - the house secret key.

Hen sees the hand. His gasp alerts Bisto. Fast, Bisto grabs it by the wrist.

SAL (O.S.)
Hen?!

 HEN
Sal!

 BISTO
Jesus!

 HEN
Sal! Let go her.

 BISTO
You alone?

 SAL (O.S.)
Yes!

 BISTO
Sure?

 SAL (O.S.)
Yes!

He releases her wrist. Takes the key. Unlocks the door.

SAL is as grubby as Hen, and about the same age. She has a large sack with her.

 HEN
I thought I'd never see you.

They hug.

 SAL
London was hell. There was a fire.
The Force started it. Look.

One of Sal's arms is wrapped tightly in ripped cloth - a makeshift bandage.

 HEN
Oh God, Sal.

 SAL
I'm fine. If I can keep off
infection, I'm fine.

 HEN
Please God.

 BISTO
What's in the bag?

Sal looks at Hen.

Suds appears at the door from the hallway.

SUDS
(Courageous again)
What's in the bag, new girl?

SAL
No. It's nothing.

SUDS
You got goodies, int it!

Hen looks at Bisto. Bisto looks back and nods, with a commanding expression.

HEN
They're okay, Sal. And I owe them.

Warily, Sal drags the bag into the kitchen. She opens it up and pulls out some of the contents.

Heinz Beans with a weathered rotten label.

Tinned tuna. Tinned corn.

A plastic bag of faded T-shirts promoting "Windows ME".

SUDS
Goodies! You got goodies!

Sal looks at Hen.

SAL
I nearly got killed for these.

Suds walks over and prods her hard in the breast.

SUDS
Yeah well. Odds is evens now, new girl.

She steps back.

SUDS (CONT'D)
Ain't that right Bisto?

Bisto thinks about it. Slowly raises the rifle. The aim passes over Hen - who looks pleadingly back - and settles on Sal.

BISTO
Sorry Hen. She's right. Odds is
evens now. God's way.

Sal stares at the rifle wide-eyed. Eyes flick to Hen.

SAL
Love...?

SUDS
(To Hen)
Hello bitch.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

There is a post with a conical speaker facing the house: a
silent witness.

Inside the house, sounds of a scuffle are rapidly followed by
the flash and bang of a gunshot.

THE END