

# A Gentle Haunting

*Childhood fever dream*  
*Comfort of the foghorn*  
*A sea fret closing in from the Irish sea (unspoken)*

...

Just past the slaughterhouse<sup>1</sup>, under the motorway bridge, away from the shoreline and up into the hills...

...I've been walking (or so it seems), with no recollection of how it all ended - or in fact - began.

Emerging briefly out of the *anaesthetic, from which none come round*<sup>2</sup>- I am dazed.

Dizzily transient. Giddy at my lightness.

Steadying myself - I hold on to that first flickering filament of white and metal and flesh and cloth... the *soft shock*<sup>3</sup> of eyes: bonded, imprinted.

Only five minutes ago (or was it next year) the artist and I were deep underground - in the pitch-black belly of some Scottish mountain, heartbeats and voices shimmering around us.<sup>4</sup>

The cold penetrating our bones.

In that darkness - we felt sound ricocheting off oily walls like trapped bats.

A small terror, a little - beauty.

The pitter-patter of a human heart germinating heather and gorse above our heads - an inconceivable chain reaction.

Stepping out into the frost-dampened bracken, all golden as our shadows stretch effortlessly for a mile or more. We pause. Our song welcomes the dawn.

A small shiver as I remember a girl, a little mayfly...a little echo.

I will live my life fully, till I can't, then I won't.

But here and now, I walk out once more - breathing the chill air. Up from the coastline<sup>5</sup> of my birth, to those said-same hills.

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<sup>1</sup> The slaughterhouse is set back from the city of Lancaster on its outskirts alongside the prison and now close, Victorian county asylum. This rural road leads from the city up towards the Forrest of Bowland and Yorkshire.

<sup>2</sup> From the poem *Aubade* (1980) by Philip Larkin (1922 - 1985). In the strictest sense of the term, an aubade is a morning love song (as opposed to an evening serenade) sung by a departing lover to a sleeping woman.

<sup>3</sup> *Soft Shock* is a song by the Yeah, Yeah, Yeahs from the 2009 album, *It's Blitz!*

<sup>4</sup> Described in the book *Critical Care* (2017) by Clive Parkinson which describes the work of Vic McEwan and their shared pilgrimage to Inchindown in the Scottish Highlands, with the recorded heartbeat of Elisha Carter.

<sup>5</sup> The coastline is that of Morecambe Bay and particularly the headland around the village of Silverdale.

Standing on the edge of a northern town, smelling the cold tar bitumen oozing from telegraph poles.  
I'm seven or fifty-seven - and I want to breathe it in - touch its warm stickiness.

Deep summer childhood, riding in the oil tanker my father drove around the north, delivering that  
black slurry to quarries and factories - Shap Fell and Accrington.<sup>6</sup>

Not so very long ago, my lover and I leapt from the rim of the earth - hand in cool hand - eye-to-  
beautiful eye. Paper figures igniting - in some little terror/bliss.<sup>7</sup>

But I'm ahead of myself.

...

35 million heartbeats ago, the world was a seemingly different place.<sup>8</sup>

A gravitational wave rippled through you and me and everything we know.

Seven billion years ago - a tangible pushing and pulling caused by that irresistible nature of two black  
holes, conjoined into one giant entity, its mass 142 times that of our sun.<sup>9</sup>

As gravity stretches to infinity - it seems the laws of nature cease to exist.

I'm giddy at the thought - and almost concertina to the ground.

The cells in my body - in the roots of ancient trees - are shifting and changing.

I step out into the blue again.

In a study, some time ago, I see an artist lying slumped at his desk.

I put my hand on his shoulder, his soft crumpled jacket - a warm room bright with the morning sun -  
*Full of life. Such a morning as many people have died on.*<sup>10</sup>

From his past he whispers: *Life is a tiny dream in an eternity of non-life.*

Complexity is nourishment.

It seems that sometimes, in the scrabbling for the easiest, quickest and most simple solutions to  
what we don't understand, we forget that it's ok to not to understand.

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<sup>6</sup> George Parkinson drove for Gilbraith Tankers and when opportunity allowed, his sone would stow away.

<sup>7</sup> An allusion to the multiple 'romantic' suicides on the Japanese island of Izu Ōshima, where in the active volcano of Mount Mihara more than six hundred people jumped to their deaths in 1936.

<sup>8</sup> The average number of heartbeats in a year.

<sup>9</sup> In the early morning hours of May 21, 2019 an *event* referred to as GW190521 happened. Scientists have estimated that the amount of energy released is the equivalent of more than a million, billion atomic bombs every second for 13.8 billion years - the age of the observable universe. Over those same months a virus was evolving.

<sup>10</sup> When the artist Keith Vaughan (1912 - 1977) killed himself by overdose, he left a remarkable suicide note, from which this is taken. He was found by his friend Veronica Gosling at his desk, pen in hand. This is followed by a second quote from Vaughan taken from the journals he kept.

*One for sorrow,  
Two for mirth,  
Three for a funeral  
And four for birth.*<sup>11</sup>

Living is quite beautiful, *but life sometimes is sad.*<sup>12</sup>

...

The quickening speed of the earth has knocked me off kilter.

Untethered, a subtle breeze lifts me off my feet...

Up into the chill cobalt sky, hands and limbs stretching out - and ...

Like a kite snagged on a pylon, I'm a thinning presence in a darkening sky.

But from up here, I have never felt so alive.

A fleeting confluence of space and time and place and imagination.

Below, the trees are so beautiful, skeletal, blossoming and full leaved - swaying seemingly endlessly, here and now.

But we'll move beyond blue you and I, lifted higher - particles of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus, sulphur.<sup>13</sup>

*Floating in space, drifting in time.*<sup>14</sup>

This is my gentle haunting.

...

*a soft hand on my shoulder - and all is well (unspoken)*

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Created for ArtState for Vic McEwan's exploration — *One for Sorrow, Two for Joy* on Friday 6th November 2020. All mobile phone footage of the landscape around Clougha Pike and Silverdale in Northern England was recorded between January and September 2020 by Clive Parkinson. The closing extract is from the 1962 Andrei Tarkovsky film, *Ivan's Childhood* and other footage at the start of the film is YouTube found footage. Original music is by Charlie Parkinson Sheen. The opening choral extract is by Zdeněk Liška taken from the film *Marketa Lazarová* (1996).

<sup>11</sup> One for Sorrow is a traditional English nursery rhyme made popular by the 1970's children's television programme *Magpie*. Its origins date back to 1780 and superstitions connected with magpies, considered to be a bird of ill omen, and in Britain, at least as far back as the early sixteenth century. This extract is taken from Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities on Lincolnshire* (1777).

<sup>12</sup> Flaming Lips lyric from the song *Giant Baby* on the album, *The King's Mouth* (2019).

<sup>13</sup> All life that we know of is made of six essential elemental ingredients: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus and sulphur.

<sup>14</sup> Spiritualized lyric from the title track of the album, *Ladies and gentlemen we are floating in space*, (1997).