

"31/10"

by
Stephen Volk

No. Don't want to go back to that place. No way. No how.

Cut to:

September 12, 2002.

Ruth Baumgarten telephoned me with the BBC's idea. She didn't want anything to do with it, but she felt duty bound to pass on the request to me, just in case. I hadn't heard from her in eight years or so and when she hung up I knew I wouldn't hear from her again.

There are certain TV producers with diaries marked in green and yellow highlighter pen, the better to anticipate upcoming anniversaries in which to cash -- the fiftieth anniversary of World War One, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kennedy's assassination -- but Ruth, the producer of *Ghostwatch* and once a close friend, I can safely say, is not one of them.

We had all agreed long ago that GW was a one-off, never to be revisited. We should be so lucky. As if anyone would listen to us, the mere creators of the programme.

In the wolfish hunger for so-called reality TV after three mega-successful series of *Big Brother*, it wasn't difficult to see where the Powers-that-BBC was coming from, in its Greg Dyke-driven quest for ratings.

The proposal was a simple one. Put forward, no doubt over a lunch at Groucho's by a producer I'd never heard of, who had been twelve at the time of the original broadcast, and who now, at twenty-two, was inexperienced enough to embody the yooof audience BBC1 desperately wanted to attract. At that stage yours truly, the humble writer, of course, was not deemed necessary to consult, even though technically the concept was still legally my property, though the rights in the programme itself rested with the Beeb. Nevertheless at this meeting, otherwise known as a lunch, the produceress, in designer glasses way more trendy than Parky's in his 1992 Specsavers commercials, evidently pitched a sequel: *Ghostwatch 2, Return to Studio One*. And they clapped till their hands bled. Or at least didn't say no.

My own reaction to the proposal was predictable.

My body went into spasm.

I didn't jump at the idea. I didn't rise to the occasion, or the bait, in writing, by phone call, by e-mail. Pleading, moaning, cajoling, didn't shift me one iota. I don't know what did, in the end.

I think the fact that fear, real palpable terror bubbling up from inside -- a pure, physical, ectoplasmic surge in my gut -- said, *Aha! I have you!* And I wanted to prove it wrong. I wasn't afraid. Not now.

Not ten years later, for God's sake.

FLASHBACK

Almost all of the people involved in *Ghostwatch* I had lost contact with, for obvious reasons.

The aftermath of the original live programme from the haunted house in Northolt is well-known and well-documented. The outrage caused ripples in Parliament as well as the hallowed halls of BBC management. The horror caused by the innocuously named "Mr Pipes" -- the malevolent ghost of cross-dressing paedophile Raymond Tunstall (or was it the older, more demonic Victorian bogey-woman Mrs Seddons?) -- had held the nation in a strange-hold that Halloween night, 1992, and had given our Great British credulity and preconceptions a good old shaking.

I don't mean to sound flip. I have taken to using this kind of language. It is the equivalent of the black humour used by paramedics and policemen.

It protects me from the truth.

Michael Parkinson never now talks about the events of 31st October 1992. His agent circulated the quotes used in the newspapers the following week, in which Parkinson countered attacks of irresponsibility with the remark that "some people believe the wrestling." In fact during this time, the unflappable talk-show host was recovering in a private clinic in Buckinghamshire away from the glare of publicity, his mind and memory seared by what had happened to him in that television studio, staring into space, repeating over and over, "Round and round the garden, like a teddy bear..." Within weeks, ostensibly fully recovered, he re-entered public life, but in the intervening years he never sought to re-experience those ninety minutes of Hell via therapy or indeed via videotape, and to this day the mere mention of the word "Ghostwatch" is banned his presence. The entire event is a blank, and if it ever existed in his memory, it has been recorded over, possibly eradicated forever. You only need to watch him these days to know that is true.

Pamela and Kim Early moved to the USA in a strategy no less secretive than the FBI witness protection scheme. Kim is now twenty and, under a different name and with a Mid-western accent, studying towards a career in biological sciences. Pamela, her mother, died in a household fire in 1995. She had since re-married, in a paradox worthy of the pages of *Fortean Times*, a fireman. It is reported that she visited many psychotherapists over the years and indeed studied and became one herself, specialising in helping people with "spiritual intrusion problems." She was in the process of writing a book about guardian angels.

The fates of both Suzanne and Sarah Greene are unknown.

It is now well-known that Sarah's transmission on Children's BBC a few days after the fateful broadcast, reassuring younger viewers that she hadn't disappeared, or died, horribly, inside the Glory Hole, was of course recorded by a look-alike, as were a number of subsequent TV appearances on holiday programmes and the like.

In actual fact, when the Northolt police forcibly broke into the house in Foxhill Drive and pulled the door off the Glory Hole under the stairs into which Sarah had ventured to rescue a sobbing Suzanne, they found it empty except for the smell of cats and developing fluid. And a thorough search of the house from top to bottom, to the extent of near-demolition, revealed nothing of either person's whereabouts.

Studio One at BBC TV Centre was immediately closed down. The power was cut during the poltergeist-induced chaos and the doors sealed pending an internal investigation which, predictably, drew no conclusions. The paranormal rarely does -- maybe that is its purpose and its essential nature. In the ensuing weeks, superstition was rife. Broadcasting House had proven itself a haunted house. People refused to work there. Certainly people refused to work in Studio One. It was declared out of bounds. A few tabloid photographers had tried to get inside, to no avail. They tried to write a bogus story, but the BBC lawyers clamped down on them, and they were gagged. It was, after all, an episode of public service broadcasting that Auntie would prefer to forget had ever happened -- and wished to God it never had.

Cut to: Ten years later.

Now they wanted me, the poor writer, Stephen Volk, to accompany five other selected special guests and go into that studio -- boarded up and unused for ten years -- on Halloween night, 2002, at 9.30pm. The exact anniversary, to the minute, of the transmission of the notorious *Ghostwatch*. And do it again.

GREEN ROOM

31 October 2002 – 2pm – BBC TV Centre, Wood Lane

"There's no such thing as ghosts," says the PA, Pippa, cheerily. Everyone just looks up at her. She blushes. "Sorry."

Cigarettes stub out in quick succession.

"All I know is," I say as the Make-up Girl powders my billiard-ball shaved head, "I want that bloody auto-cue out of there."

We sign our release forms, whatever they are. To whom it may concern, blah blah. Pact with the Devil. *I promise to pay the bearer ...my soul?* Maybe we'd done that already. Some of us.

4pm

Alan Demescu's beard looks a lot greyer now and he has the look of a gaunt Bosnian refugee about him, as we clammily shake hands. *Somebody for God's sake smile*, I think, almost out loud.

These are the other participants in this fandango.

Emma Stableford. Remember her? The viewer who first phoned in having alerted the audience -- if not the studio team -- to the presence of "Pipes" standing next to the curtains in the girls' bedroom in Foxhill Drive.

Emilio Sylvestri, the CSICOP arch-sceptic whose acerbic appearance on GW by satellite link from NYC boosted his fame and arse-holiness no end, making him the doyen of chat shows in the US as well as a regular on *So Graham Norton*. Sylvestri, who had made the most of his involvement in the *Ghostwatch* tragedy (or fiasco) in his catch-all debunkfest *Tales from the Script* (Prometheus Press, 1993), greeted me with a bonhomie that presumed I could ignore his past record of cheap jibes and castigations against the production team.

Wrong.

Mike Smith declined the tactless request for him to take part. As did Uri Geller, an early short-listee who was nixed after his lack of longevity on ITV's *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*. Jade Goody apparently had been approached, but said she had been "scared shitless" by the original *Ghostwatch* in 1992, having watched all but the last 10 minutes when her mother switched off the TV set.

At the time of transmission, the BBC phone lines were jammed with calls, many of them from angry and terrified viewers. One such call came from the Reverend Edmund Edward Gryffin of Brynmawr, who berated the BBC for "tampering with Satanic forces," for raising demons beyond its control and for being in league with the Devil, no less. In the intervening years he had become no less vitriolic in his convictions, and today, joining us as spiritual guide (yes, exactly) few of us were going to argue with him -- on a metaphorical level, at least.

During the original broadcast, according to the BBC duty log, three pregnant women were so shocked that they went into labour. The good old BBC had traced one of these women, Berenice Gannon of North Berwick, Scotland, whose daughter Louise was born at 10.30 that Halloween night, at precisely the moment of *Ghostwatch's* final fade to black. Apparently, with the slamming of the Glory Hole door, baby Louise took her first intake of breath. Louise -- or as she preferred to be called, by her second name, decided months prior to her birth -- *Suzanne*.

I decide I'm going to call her Louise.

"All right, Louise?"

She says, "Look what I've got. Remember him?" A BBC props buyer has given her a cuddly toy rabbit, exactly the kind Kimmy had in the original *Ghostwatch* house. The one whose pin-button eyes she, or Pipes, or Mrs Seddons, had mysteriously plucked out before drowning said toy rabbit in the kitchen sink. *Shit. Whose bright idea was that*, I wonder. "Bubby wanted to come back, didn't you, Bubby?" she says, matter-of-factly.

"What the hell..." I mumble, knocking back my orange juice in the Green Room. *I'm only the writer.*

STAND BY

9.25 - Five minutes to lift off.

I can imagine those deliberately hokey graphics, those ghost-white swimming letters, being lined up on the video playback. "Roll VT." They say in my ear-piece. "All systems go."

Dr Lin Pascoe is in there, looking at the bank of TV screens as the director cuts between them.

TX

9.32

Flashlight beams cut through the dark. So far, so *X-Files*. Unbelievably hokey. *Hey, kettle, pot, black, who am I to talk about cliché?*

Divers in the wreck of the "Titanic," the six of us walk inside. There are three brave (short-straw?) cameramen at three studio cameras, and now the cameras raise their heads like cows in a field to look at us, framing us up as we enter.

Over to the left the phone-in alcove has a layer of cobwebs over it and I am unsure whether they are genuine or a thoughtful embellishment of the design department. My flashlight scans. *Please*. It finds the bedsheet-ghost image, the painting by Gottfried Helnwein I saw many years ago in a Vienna gallery and recommended to the designer, in its frame over the Addams Family fireplace. Then, as now, fat pumpkins glowing orangely either side of the mantelpiece. Grinning skulls, eagerly, mischievously welcoming us back for round two.

We hear the Control Room in our ear-pieces. "Cue SFX."

The Studio One door slams with sarcophagus finality. Real or pre-recorded.

"Take two, Mr Volk," Emilio Sylvestri drawls. "This time with feeling."

"Shut the fuck up," says Alan Demescu under his breath.

I say: "That'll be bleeped for a start."

"Language," says the director in the headphones, disembodied, invisible. "Luckily we're not gone live yet. Still rolling the intro." *Language, always the BBC's priority over sex and violence. Language. The writer's domain. Bad language. Good. Evil.*

Demescu murmurs "Sorry" to Louise Gannon, the little girl.

Louise says, "I've heard a lot worse than that. A *lot* worse!" She wears red Kicker-type shoes and a rucksack in the form of a fluffy white seal cub. Her blonde hair has a few dreadlocks in coloured strands and she has talked mostly so far about Gareth Gates and Britney Spears.

"What happens now?" asks Emma Stableford.

"Who knows?" says Alan Demescu.

"Mr Pipes, perhaps," says Sylvestri, with a sneering intonation the equal of Ned Sherrin, fluttering his fingers in the air and rolling his eyes mock-spookily.

"Be careful what you wish for, it might just happen," says the Reverend EEG. "That was the moral of the original, Stephen. Correct?"

"Only fiction can have a moral," I say. "Something that really happens can't. Fact can't. Correct?"

"Correct," says Alan Demescu, the scientist in the baggy pullover.

"Are we on yet?" asks Louise.

I study the cameras. One has a red light in the dark. I remember the red eye of Raymond Tunstall, of Pipes. Of Kimmy's drawing. "Oh yes. We're on." Says Emma Stableford. "It's *Stars in Their Eyes*, Loo-loo. Who are you playing?"

Louise laughs. It echoes. *Christ, it echoes.*

"You know," she says, grinning, her thumb nail twisting against her teeth and jiggling her hips from side to side, childishly bashfully but not bashful at all. Acting bashful. Bashful like bashful is what we want her to be.

9.43

It is so silent it makes you want to shout. But we don't. None of us do. We whisper. Why are we whispering?

I ask: "Why are we whispering? This isn't a church."

"It is," says Louise. *Echoing.*

Giggling, like it's a joke. Not understanding what jokes are yet. Ten years old. Exactly ten years old, I realise. *Her birthday, of course it is. That's the whole point. That's why she's here.*

Children understand what jokes are at ten years old, don't they? Children understand good and bad, right and wrong, don't they? Do we? Now? What are we doing? Do we even know? Ever?

9.47

Then it comes.

Then I hear it.

The words.

I knew they would come and I knew they'd come from the child.

"When's Pipes coming?"

Quiet in the Control Room. I'm thinking, they love it.

They're not speaking because they love it. This is peeing in the shower. This is getting drunk and falling over. This is Jade's tears. This is *"minging."*

"I think we should pray," says EEG.

Of us all, he is the one playing (praying?) to the cameras. He's the one who is really in church now. The one who protests about obscenity is more obscene than any of us.

He kneels in the middle of the television studio with tightly clasped Christian hands, corny as a Mickey Rooney movie.

He is the first, then Louise kneels down beside him. Then so does Emma Stableford and so do I. The only one who remains on his feet is Emilio Sylvestri - the sceptic.

And he loves it.

9.59

One thing in common with 1992: nothing happens. Hardly anything happening at all, for a long time.

Why are people watching?

Why are they interested?

Why are they looking at us?

What do they want to see?

Now it is campfire-like. Emma Stableford is telling a story from her childhood about something eerie on the Yorkshire Moors. Very friend-of-a-friend. *Very Fortean Times*. I eye Emilio Sylvestri and he eyes me.

Alan Demescu and I talk about *Ghostwatch*, the pre-production, the myth, the actuality, the aftermath: really re-playing the many Q&A session we have all done over the years, ad infinitum.

All Q and very few A's at the end of the day.

10.07

The sentinel pumpkins grin like a gummy audience. One inter-cranial candle flickers as if flecked by the demonic thoughts swirling therein, and goes out. The vicar re-lights it with a lighter in the shape of a woman.

We are playing cards now. Strip Jack Naked. And the ten year old thrashing us every time. Is this game supposed to be based on chance? If so, the laws of chance are staying away tonight. Maybe they don't like Halloween. Maybe Halloween doesn't like them.

We switch to Snap and, every time, Louise gets excited and yells SNAP and grabs the cards, irrespective of whether she is right or wrong, and laughs uproariously.

Till she says: "Oops, I think I've wet myself."

I smile. "I don't think that's allowed on BBC1."

"What's a baby farmer?" she asks me. "Do they plant babies in the ground and watch them grow? Is it like test tube babies and Dolly the sheep? We've got a sheep in school and he's called Dolly."

"He's called Dolly?" says Alan Demescu, raising a bushy eyebrow.

"It's just a word. Two words," I tell Louise. "It doesn't mean anything."

"Everything means something," Louise says, shuffling the cards, the wisdom hanging in the air. "When is Pipes coming?"

When is Pipes coming?

10.10

"Scooby Scooby do, where are you?" sings Emilio Sylvestri to the sea of darkness we're swimming in.

I say: "God's sake, I think we've come on a little way from that, don't you?"

"I was trying to lighten the proceedings."

"Please do," says Emma Stableford, the housewife.

"I'm c-cold," says Louise Gannon. "Are you? Is anybody else cold? I'm f-freezing."

"Oh," says Sylvestri, with a mock-sympathetic dip in his voice. "Fasten your psychic safety belts, folks, I think we're in for a bumpy ride."

"What is your problem?" snaps Alan Demescu, eyes flaring but voice staying calm. His lips pull tight like elastic bands. "What do you think, that we all made it up in 1992, that it was all fake? That it's all some massive hoax like the moon landings? What do you believe, Sylvestri?"

"Only that people experienced some delusion on a grand scale. On a scale of eleven million viewers, to be precise. But just because David Copperfield makes the Statue of Liberty disappear on ABC doesn't mean it isn't still there when you look the next morning." Sylvestri was always good with the one-liners.

"And what about Sarah?" I say. "What about Suzanne? Are they part of the hoax too? Where have they been for the last ten years? Just lying low to make the most of a good joke?"

"People have reasons to disappear," says Sylvestri. "People disappear for no reason at all. It doesn't mean we have to call Mulder and Scully. It doesn't mean we scuttle into the little funk hole in the desert with the sign saying IRRATIONAL BELIEF – PLEASE HIDE HERE TILL IT'S SAFE. There's a rational explanation for everything, strange as it may seem."

"God save us from rational explanations," says Alan Demescu, turning away and shaking his head as he walks into the shadows.

"God save us from God, for that matter," says Sylvestri, pleased with himself disproportionately.

He walks to the centre of the space, to the big reel-to-reel Revox tape recorder and presses "PLAY." Its wheels turn and we hear the guttural, encaphemous voice we all heard, to chilling effect, during the original *Ghostwatch* broadcast.

"Switch that off," says Demescu. "Switch that damned thing..."

I beat him to the OFF switch. The echo, the reverb, the memory or trace of that voice continues, I'm sure, for a second or two after the tape spools stop turning.

"Roll VT," says someone in my ear-piece. "That was great, well done." Not telling us what was great, or what was well done.

I rub the back of my neck, staring at the ceiling, the nothing, the night sky of the meagre lighting rig.

What time is it? How far are we into this? I have no idea. I listen, they talk, I don't hear. What the hell is happening out there? Jesus, when is this going to end?

Jesus -- I look at them. Jesus -- are the rest of them as afraid as me?

10.13

"One minute more of VT. Stand by," said the voice in the ear-piece. "When we're back on air just keep the conversation going, as naturally as possible."

Naturally. I almost laugh. What the fuck is natural?

This from the director who had pep-talked us with: "Don't worry about content. There is no content, just character. Just talk, and atmosphere, and the audience. A la B.B., get it?" I took a second to decipher. She meant don't do anything, they'll watch anyway. Just like *Big Brother*. Geddit?

We are back for about forty non-eventful seconds, then they go to the compilation VT segment, as per the script.

Viewers have been voting for a week for they favourite top ten *Ghostwatch* moments, and now they are playing clips 5 to 3 in reverse order. The Welsh bloke whose sandwich did a nose dive off the arm of his chair gets a look in. They interview him, a sound-bite, ten years later. This interspersed with clips of contributors recounting what they were doing, where they were and what they thought, on the night GW went out. Sara Cox, Johnny Vegas, Linda Robson, Ross Kemp, Christine and Neil Hamilton, John Simpson, Paul Daniels, Rolf Harris, Dr Susan Blackmore, Dr Raj Persaud, and Marjorie Wallace, chairperson of the mental health charity SANE.

10.19

There is no monitor in Studio One, and the six of us deep-sea videonauts hermetically are deliberately, we realise, without swapping this observation, sealed off from the outside world.

"When is Pipes coming?" asks Louise, again.

When is Pipes coming? When is Pipes coming?

Silence, and none of us likes it, so one of us fills it. I divert the question that hangs in the air by asking Louise what she wants to be when she grows up.

"An adult," she answers.

With which it's very difficult to argue. I laugh a sigh, sigh a laugh, whatever the phrase is.

Silence again, and nobody likes it, but this time nobody speaks and the silence wins.

I walk over and press the thin membrane separating the phone-in area from the studio proper, onto which the corny, ghostly *Ghostwatch* logo had been projected then eerily dissolved away into the ether at the top of the show. The thin veil between fact and fiction, sanity and insanity, this world and the next.

You have a way with words, mate. You ought to be a writer.

In the silence of the haunted studio I think of the endless Media Studies dissertations that *Ghostwatch* has spawned over the years. I had been told by one professor at Aberystwyth that every year without fail one of his students would put it forward as a thesis subject. Pages and pages, books upon books of analysis, observation, libraries of it. It's hard to imagine. Like the last shot of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. My favourite, predictably Freudian, interpretation of *Ghostwatch* came from the student who made the connection that "*Pipes*" when translated into French slang, meant "*Blow jobs*." The female adolescents were therefore appealing to the TV audience for blow jobs, and this, on an unconscious level, was what the masculine-centric audience was demanding to see.

Give that girl a first, with honours.

10.21

Louise looks down at the cards, plain playing cards, laid out in front of her on the studio floor.

"Happy Families." Ironic.

She shuffles them and deals them out in a line as if she is playing some improvised form of Solitaire. I watch her, knowing that her mother Berenice is somewhere, out in the control box, sitting next to Dr Lyn Pascoe, watching all this. A mother who leaves her child in a haunted house with five strangers. What kind of mother is that?

Mother. Mother Seddons. Mother Seddons will get you.

"I know what this spells," she says, looking at the row of playing cards.
"S-A-R-A-H... Sarah..."

"All right, very funny," I say.

"Yes it is very funny," she says.

"No it isn't."

"Yes it is. He says it is. *Pipes* says it is." She holds up a card. "Pipes is the King with one eye. Pipes is Camera One."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," mumbles Sylvestri.

Wait -- then the banging starts. Banging – there's another little Freudian double-entendre. And wait – it isn't just *similar* to the banging in the Foxhill Drive on Halloween 1992 -- it is the *exact same* banging. It's like someone has switched on a tape recording and it's the *same noise* coming amplified from some great big stadium sized speakers in the dark.

Emma Stableford immediately holds her ears and screams like an infant and starts shaking. Everybody goes rigid, looking at each other without moving.

It's the producers, I'm about to say, it's a joke, like Craig Charles jumping out of the kitchen cabinet in the original. It's not happening. Not really.

"Control Room, please, stop messing around, there's a child in here," Demescu says to the air. "Stop playing silly buggers."

"What's wrong?" shouts Dr Lin Pascoe in the ear-piece. Too close too the microphone.

"The noise, stop it, turn it off, now. It's not funny!"

A hair of a pause from Pascoe. "Noise, what noise? We can't hear anything. What can you hear? Tell me exactly what you can hear. Can you hear me? Can you hear what I'm saying?"

"Silly buggers," laughs Louise. "Silly buggers!"

Then bingo. *The cards spray up into the air, like a fountain*, Alice in Wonderland fashion. One spins sideways – changing direction in mid-air – hitting Emilio Sylvestri in the face. It cuts him like the slash of a mugger's razor blade. He bleats more in puzzlement than horror, probably just feeling the warmth, but when he looks at his the trembling fingertips he instinctively raises to his cheek, they are stained with blood -- his own.

"*Silly buggers, silly buggers, silly buggers...*" crackles in the air, not matching Louise's mouth any more. The lip sync going wrong. The lip synch going wrong *in real life*.

"Jesus she did it Jesus how Jesus sleight of hand," Demescu is gabbling, grabbing Louise by her stick-like arms, shaking her madly, twisting her wrists behind her back like a rough LA cop. "She palmed one with an edge did you see did anybody see she she she -- "

"*Pipes is here, Pipes is coming! He's coming! He's coming! He's here NOW!*"

Emma Stableford is standing rigidly, hyperventilating, with outstretched hands like a blind person trying to find her way, pointing into the dark.

"*There! There!*" she is yelling. "*There! There! I see him! I can see him!*"

The banging again, sonorous as thrashing drums, from the pipes, from Pipes, from everywhere, from inside our heads.

"*I can see him again!*"

I look into the dark place and I see the shape of things not there. I see nothing and the nothing walks out. And the nothing is wearing a long black coat like a Catholic priest's soutane, paedophiles all of them like life imitating art, God help us, everywhere now, demons flying out of every tabloid. And *here*, behold. Watch, watch with Mother, Mother Seddons. Bald head, skull. Bitten and sucked face, the carrion of cats, but no longer the face of Keith Ferrari the actor who played Mr Pipes in our programme, whose first appearance was silhouetted and computer-enhanced in the folds of the children's curtains. This face with its one bloody eye, clawed out by hungry felines in the Glory Hole, is different. This face with its staring sky blue eyes -- *is Sarah Greene's*.

"It's what you wanted, isn't it? *Isn't it?*" screams Louise, in the voice of Suzanne Early. Missing Suzanne Early. Dead Suzanne Early.

And Pipes swims towards me in the dark as if dangling from a mobile gibbet, his drippy eye becoming like a ghoulish maw. The other eye Sarah Greene's piercing blue of a lost, lost soul, fixed on mine. And her voice, in a sing-songy lilt like a lullaby, direct to me and only me:

"*Round and round the garden... like a teddy bear...*"

The words my Grandmother used to sing to me before tickling me, as Pipes takes the open palm of my hand and runs his skeletal finger round its perimeter. How it is in my ear-piece too: a MILLION -- how many MILLION? -- nine MILLION -- ten MILLION -- eleven MILLION voices chanting:

Round and round the garden

*Like a teddy bear
One step
Two step
Tickle under there!*

I feel the fingers take a double leap onto my forearm then elbow, then they bury deep into my ribs, into my heart. The muscles contract and spasm as some iron hook turns and churns and guts me out, spinning my insides like they're entwined on wire and the wire connected to a lathe and the lathe switched on.

The pain explodes in my eye. A billion cats' claws explode tear through my brain. Every inch of my body shakes. I feel blood filling my left eye, I try to blink it away but only feel its warm piss-feel on my cheek.

Opening my eyes I can only see -- nothing. Pipes is gone. Vanished.

There is only us. The six of us, participants in primetime madness. Emilio Sylvestri backing into the dark with his hand over his mouth. Emma Stableford shaking and shrieking in terror. EEG with his eyes tightly shut, going Our Father who are in heaven hallowed be thy name. Alan Demescu waving his arms in cross-like shapes into the cameras, *switch off switch off switch off*. And Louise Gannon, the ten year old child born of *Ghostwatch*, born of my creation, ten years old, staring at me, and pointing at me, *directly at me* -- and as I grabbed her and shook her to stop, stop, stop saying it, stop, until she did stop -- pointing at me, creaming: "It's him, it's him, It's Pipes! He's here! He's *here!*"