

Soft in the Head

A short story by Justin Newland

I was floating above my body, peering down on the top of my head. Cracks appeared between the sutures - the seams - of the fontanel. Something forced them open from within. Tranches of light pulsed between the gaps. A mysterious shape poked out of the top of the head. Was it a hand or a claw?

I couldn't tell, because I awoke with the mother of all headaches. There were shooting pains inside my head, like an electrical storm with forked lightening cracking against the skull. Rolls of thunder echoed so loud I hid under the pillow. Eventually, I took a handful of headache pills and went to work.

By lunch-time, the sun was glaring in my eyes so I put on sun-glasses raising considerable mirth in the office. By mid-afternoon, the sun-light was so strong that even with the glasses, I was suffering.

The day my boss sent me home was the day it started to go wrong.

That night I dreamt of a walnut, crunched into a tight nut. Each overlapping piece opened like flower petals - ending up as an almond. Nuts! I was dreaming of nuts! I thought I was going nuts!

I followed the circadian rhythm until one day I absent-mindedly forgot about my condition and opened the door to the delivery man. The light seared into my eyes like a laser. I blacked out. The next thing I knew I awoke in hospital. After a raft of tests, the doctor reported an unusual but harmless hormone in my blood.

"What does it do?" I asked.

"It's contributing to your photophobia which will pass."

"It's not that harmless then," I replied. "But - I'm going soft in the head doctor."

The Doctor harrumphed. "Is that right? I suggest you wear a skull cap to stop any of it falling out," he said and promptly ended the examination.

I retreated to my shadowy existence. Would anyone believe I *was* going soft in the head? I could press my finger into the top of my skull right up to the first phalange.

Soon after, I got a rush of ecstasy - not the drug - this was something my own body produced. Was this to do with this strange secretion? Whatever it was, I felt a serene well-being. The emotional rushes shrouded the head-pains but didn't stop my head getting softer. I could push my fist into my skull - what was I talking about? I didn't have a skull anymore. It was melting as fast as the ice-caps in the sun.

I was scared, very scared: my head was exploding in slow motion. The brain tissue was

protruding. I remembered what the Doctor had jokingly said and unearthed a roll of bandage which I tied gingerly round my head. I looked in the mirror: there I was - a turbaned Sikh!

That was seven weeks and fifteen bandage changes ago. The exposed part of my brain - the bit that's outside what's left of my cranium - is so large it wobbles like a jelly if I walk too fast. I fear it'll spill over the sides - I'll end up looking like I'm wearing one of those High Court judges' wigs.

I now inhabited a surreal plane of existence: I could read the runes of the future. I could have forewarned of many dangers, but who would give credence to a man with his brains wrapped in a sheet?

My head was cone-shaped, the un-convoluted brain jutting out of the top of the skull and slanting upwards and backwards at a forty-five degree angle. It reminded me of those elongated heads I'd seen on Ancient Egyptian statues in the British Museum. I'd seen one of them with an eagle emerging from the head.

Then objects started moving. It began with the telephone. It rang and I '*picked*' it up without moving a finger. I could move things - by the power of thought alone!

People heard about me. Hundreds sat outside my house. I invited a few of them in. Once they got used to my strange head gear, I spoke to them. They wrote down everything I said. Some got the same head pains. The healing began. A woman came in a wheel-chair. The next day, she walked in unaided. The blind could see. The deaf could hear. I healed a cancer without laying hands on the person. I healed another and then I was healing hundreds.

Until one night, the men smashed the door down. I knew they were coming but what could I do? I heard them talking. The potential bankruptcy of the cancer and health industries posed a severe threat to the economy.

I'm in a cell with white walls and ceiling. I hide to avoid the sunlight. The medication they give me is strong. When will they take this white coat off me? I can't even lift my arms to feel how soft the top of my head is anymore because they're both tied to my sides.

I'm working my mind to remove the leather straps. Then I'll be free, as will the eagle that I'm waiting to give birth to.