

The Headache.

By Scott Coe, February 2010.

It was one of those headaches that Steve just couldn't seem to shift. 'I'm sure I didn't drink that much last night,' he thought. He took a bite out of his hamburger and picked up the remote. As usual there was nothing worth watching, but he had nothing else to do. He stopped on a repeat of Jeremy Kyle, opened the ibuprofen, dispensed two tablets into his mouth and washed them down with his beer. 'That's not going to help you this time!' came a voice. Startled, Steve dropped his burger and scanned the room 'who, what, who's that? Where...' but before he could finish the voice responded, 'I'm in your head'.

'OK,' he thought, 'this is it. The alcohol and pills have finally taken their toll, I'm now hearing voices.' The voice just laughed in response, 'if only you were schizophrenic, you'd be a lot more interesting.' This was not happening, was it? All those chemicals had come back to haunt him. 'Go away, you're not real!' he shouted. 'Oh, but I am,' came the response. 'No you're not, this is just a bad dream.' But Steve was very much awake, and so was whoever was talking to him. 'No, I'm real, and I think you're my bad dream.'

'Who are you? What do you want?'

'Im bored Steve, and I want to get out.'

'Get out?'

'Yes, get out, I've had enough of being your head. You're no fun anymore.'

'What?'

'I remember, when you had an interesting job and a great social life. Parties, wild nights out, and some of those women...'

'Er, hang on, how long have you been in there?'

'Long enough to see how you've changed, how you've given up on life. You're wasting away and I don't want to be part of it.'

'But, I'm just going through a bad patch...'

'No, you've stopped going. You're just sitting on your big fat lazy arse.'

'But... you don't understand, I'm just down. Ever since...'

'Amanda left you?' Interjected the voice. 'Yes, she broke my heart and I can't live without her.' Steve's eyes began to water.

'There's no point crying, she's been gone six months now, you should get on with your life.'

'I'm not sure I can?'

'Bollocks Steve, you've not even tried. You lived life to the full before you met her, you can do so again.' Steve began to think of his life before he met her, yes it had been fun but he always longed for companionship. 'So if you loved my life before I met her, why didn't you leave when we got

together?'

'I was happy for you, plus when you were in love, those chemicals in your brain were exciting, so addictive. Man what a rush!'

'So you're telling me I should fall in love again.'

'No Steve, I'm telling you I'm leaving!'

'But you said...'

'...I AM LEAVING!' The voice was getting angry, and the angrier it got the more intense the pain in his head. Steve fell to the floor clutching at his skull, 'Stop it, stop it!'

'You can't stop me Steve, I'm leaving.'

'Get out then!'

'Really?'

'Yes really!'

'You sure about that, don't forget I'm IN your head.'

Steve paused, not sure of where this argument was going, let alone the point of it. 'You're a just voice, vanish and we'll both be happy.'

'Just a voice?' it sounded amused by the comment, 'Oh but if only I was, we wouldn't be having this conversation.'

'Then why are we, and what are you, who are you?' Asked Steve with a growing sense of unease.

'Who or what I am is not important, but I thought as we'd been through so much together... I thought I should say goodbye.'

'Goodbye? I didn't know you were there, I wouldn't notice if you went.'

'Erm, that's not quite true. You wouldn't notice, and I don't think you'd like it if you did. I just thought I should warn you.'

'Warn me?' Steve didn't like the sound of this 'What do you mean warn me?'

'In case you wanted to say goodbye.'

'Goodbye?'

'Yes, if you wanted to say goodbye to anybody?'

'But I'm not leaving, you are!' Steve was getting agitated, 'What do you mean?'

'Well... there's no easy way of telling you.'

'Telling me what?'

'Well, when I said I wasn't just a voice...'

'What! You mean?'

'You know what I mean.'

'But, but, but... h-h-how, No, oh god no!' Not just a voice, if whatever it was, wasn't just a rouge thought with a voice of it's own, did it mean... 'You're physical?'

'Yes.'

'H-er, er, h-how big?'

'Big enough not to get out through the existing holes in your head.'

'You mean...'

'Yes Steve, I do mean, and I'm sorry, but I am leaving and you can't stop me.'

'I'll change!'

'No you won't.'

'I will!'

'We both know that's not true, so why waste time arguing.'

Steve started to panic, surely this was madness, and for the first time in his life he wished he was mad. 'Please no, I don't want to die.'

'But you're dead already Steve, and I want to leave.'

'Then give me a chance.'

'Why should I?'

'I could fall in love, give you love chemicals.'

'THEN GET OFF YOUR LAZY ARSE!' The pain seared through his head again. 'I'll do it, I'll do it!'

'Do what?'

'I'll try!'

'You need to do more than try Steve, you've no job, no friends, you spend your time taking drugs, getting pissed and shoving junk food down your neck!'

'I thought you liked chemicals?'

'Real chemicals from your glands, not that shite!'

'OK, I'll stop the drink and drugs.'

'And the junk food?

'Why should that affect you, you're in my head, not my stomach.'

'That's one small relief, but what about that crap clogging your arteries. You should see things from where I am, it's disgusting!'

'You have eyes? What do you look like?'

'You really don't want to know.'

'But I do.'

'What? You're seriously asking what I look like? When I'm telling you I'm coming out and it will kill you, that's what you ask me? Come on, either way you aren't going to see me, so what does it matter?'

'Er...'

'And the junk food?'

'Ok, and the junk food!'

Steve sat terrified, clutching his throbbing head. Trying to imagine what it looked like, how it got in there, how long it had been there. He didn't need to ask of course, as whatever it was could read his mind. 'I've been in here most of your life, I grew up as you grew up. I wanted to guide you into being a great man, and feed from your positive energy. But you stopped listening, you threw your life away and I can't survive much longer.'

'You mean you're dying?'

'Yes, you are killing me.'

'Hang on, I'm killing you? It's you that's threatening to kill me?'

'Kill or be killed, we can't both survive.' The answer hit Steve like a sledgehammer, he started to cry.

'So you see, I have no choice, unless of course you start listening to me and sort your life out. Then we can both live, and thrive'

Steve sat in silence, numbed by fear and the realisation of how close to death he was, and if not close to death, then certainly well on the road to madness.

'You'll guide me?'

'Yes, as before and as long as you listen, otherwise I will have to go.'

'OK,' replied Steve '...and I promise to listen.'

'Good, you can start with smiling.' For the first time in ages that he could remember, he found it

easy to smile. It wasn't much of a smile, but the relief that he wasn't going to die was reason enough. He got up and listened. For the next few hours he did as the voice asked. He freshened up, tidied up his flat and even made some plans to go out. The voice was happy.

'You're feeling better aren't you Steve.'

'Yes, I am, and you?'

'Yes, I'm feeling stronger, but this is only the beginning. It won't be easy, but if we work together, things will be great. There's no going back.'

For the next few weeks, things improved. He found a new job and made new friends. As time went on, the voice faded away until it was merely part of his conscience again. Eventually enough time passed by for Steve not to dwell on it, and if he did, surely it was a just consequence of the drink and drugs? He even started dating again.

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Things had been going well with Caroline (or so he thought), but tonight she dropped the bombshell. She didn't want to see him anymore. 'Here we go again,' he thought, but no he wouldn't get down as before, 'Why Caroline, what's happened?'

He couldn't believe it, 'What a bitch!' He hadn't felt this angry in a long time, 'how dare she!' Well he would still make a night of it, even it meant propping up the bar on his own.

He wasn't exactly sure how much he'd drunk, but by the time the pub closed he was steaming. To make matters worse, there wasn't a taxi to be seen, he'd have to walk and it wasn't exactly a nice part of town.

He hadn't been home this way in a long time, why was that? Then as he rounded the corner it came into view... the takeaway. He was hungry, it was late and cooking didn't appeal to him. Once in a while won't hurt he thought.

As he waited for his food, a familiar face appeared next to him, 'Steve, Stevie, Stevo, long time no see man, how ya doing? Are ya sorted man?' It was Bill the pill man, the local drunk and neighbourhood drug dealer. 'I'm OK, you're still alive then.'

'Yeah, I'm so alive, I'm so sorted and you need to be too.'

'No thanks Bill, I don't do that stuff anymore.'

'Awww man, that explains why you look so down, you need to be up, I've got something to get you smiling.'

Bill discreetly placed a small wrap in his hand, 'Hey these are good, I'll do you a deal for an old buddie, buy one get one free, what do ya say man?'

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He slumped onto the sofa, took a bite out of his hamburger and picked up the remote. As usual there was nothing worth watching, but he had nothing else to do. He stopped on a repeat of Jeremy Kyle, opened the wrap, dispensed two small blue pills into his mouth and washed them down with his beer.

5 seconds later...

...his head exploded!

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