

They're In My Head

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*R*aining again. *Seems like it's always raining at times like these.*

Brandon Reese stared out the dirty window at the downpour outside. The rain came down in a torrent, coating everything with its constant fall. The window itself was reduced to a filmy view port to the outside world, one that looked like the glass itself was distorting and writhing, casting the outside into a skewed vision of normality. Brandon could relate to the window in that sense, what with his current muddled consciousness which felt as if it was distorting and writhing presenting, to him, a skewed vision of normality.

It always gets like this, he thought. By now he was used to the odd sensations that crowded into his brain whenever *they* came. He didn't know why it happened. But he knew it did and, more importantly, he knew what he had to do about it.

Turning away from the window, he walked across the spare room in the rented house that he shared with his grandfather, Joseph. Entering the family room of the home, Brandon noticed that, once again, Joseph had his bloated carcass sitting in front of the television set letting it rot his already addled mind. At 72, Joseph was anything but sprightly but lately it had gotten worse. Seems like all the old man did was sit on his ass all day and mumble about something on the news. Having to take care of Brandon by himself didn't do much for his energy levels no doubt but as far back as Brandon could remember Joseph was always pretty much lounging around and doing absolutely nothing.

Being nineteen and reasonably self-sufficient Brandon felt that he could not possibly be too much of a burden on good old granddad. *Of course, my presence probably always brings up the bad memories of Mom*, Brandon thought. From what he could remember Joseph never was a terribly friendly guy. His mother used to tell him that Joseph just didn't like kids that much. But even given that, he had always been cordial to Brandon, although that all changed after the accident. Since then it had been a series of years of Brandon feeling like he was always in the way, always a nuisance. And he could not miss the looks his grandfather gave him that made him feel as if everything that had happened was somehow his fault.

Brandon walked past Joseph, crossing in front of the view of the television, to get to the hallway. Brandon's shadow falling over Joseph caused him to stir. He looked up through his one good eye and in his usual sleepy voice said, "Whaddya doin? What time izzit?"

"It's ten o'clock granddad. I'm goin' out for a little bit," Brandon replied. *Surprised the old man even knew I was here*, Brandon thought as he walked into the hallway towards the closet. Joseph's voice followed him: "Going out? In this weather? It's raining to beat the band out there."

Brandon sighed. Every time he went out when it was raining his grandfather felt that it was his appointed duty to confirm that it was, in fact, raining. And, according to Joseph, it was always raining "to beat the band," whatever that meant. He then would have to explain to his grandfather how he didn't mind the rain; how, in fact, the rain relaxed him. He could not, of course, tell him about *them* or what he had to do.

Granddad would never believe him. Nor would anyone else for that matter. He reached into the closet and moved the boxes on the top shelf – the shelf his grandfather never looked at. He grabbed the small shoebox and removed from it the .357 magnum handgun as well as a box of hollow-points. Dumping the bullets into his coat pocket and tucking the gun into his waistband under his shirt, he zipped up his windbreaker jacket and made his way to the family room again. His grandfather would never believe he could pick up a gun like this much less have conned one of his friends “with connections” into getting it for him.

In the family room, Joseph was watching another one of those pathetic sci-fi movies with bug-eyed aliens, death rays, lizard-men, and who-knows-what-else. He always watched that crap. *If only he knew...*, Brandon thought. Brandon walked past the chair where Joseph was sitting and made a beeline for the front door. Joseph’s voice came from behind him: “Rainin’ out there, you know. Rainin’ to beat the band, it is. And you want to go out in it.” The statement was delivered with the usual biting sarcasm that Joseph employed so well when he wanted to indicate that you must be a complete and total idiot in his viewpoint.

Brandon kept walking, knowing the speech by heart. “Helps me relax, granddad.” He reached the door and opened it. Turning back to look into the family room he heard a woman’s shrill scream come from the television set and then some poor victim in the show yelling “They’re in my head, they’re in my head!” Brandon shuddered inwardly to himself and, with a stifled voice, said, “See you in a few, granddad.” And with that he walked out the door.

“Never understand why that kid only goes out when it’s rainin’,” Joseph said to the empty room.

Walking down the sidewalk, Brandon once again found himself angry with Joseph. *Granted he lost his daughter, but that means I lost my mother.* Brandon stopped for a minute and focused his mind. There could be no distractions. *There.* He could feel their disturbance; their very presence. He knew they were here again. He didn’t know how he knew this nor did he know why he was cursed with this ability to sense them. But the fact was that he could and he did; and his job was clear.

His hair was already plastered on his head from the rain as he walked to his car. *Seems like it’s always raining when I get these feelings. Maybe they only come out in the rain.* Getting in the car, he quickly turned off the radio and the heater. Even though he was already chilled to the bone, he could risk having no distractions. Sensing them required every ounce of his concentration. For some reason the feel of the rain coating every inch of his clothing, literally soaking him, helped him to concentrate.

He pulled the car away from the curb and began to drive slowly down Tambourne Lane, the small street where his grandfather lived. He didn’t know where to go exactly but he knew that as he got closer the pressure in his head and the feeling of disassociation would increase. Driving around he noticed the streets were totally empty; all the houses were locked up tight. For a moment Brandon allowed himself to fume at those people in their tidy little homes, sitting in front of a fire, eating a nice home-cooked meal, sleeping in their cozy beds safe in the knowledge that they would wake up to their families tomorrow. Brandon couldn’t remember the last time he lived like that. Well, actually, he could. Right before the accident. The accident that changed his life forever. Brandon

flushed those thoughts from his mind as quickly as he could. *Better not go down that memory trip*, he thought.

Driving down another street, he found he could not totally clear his mind of his thoughts. He resented the people living in their homes with an almost all-consuming rage. Didn't they know how much danger they were in? Couldn't someone else besides him sense the danger; feel the presence of the others? More than anything he was bothered by the fact that he was out here in this rain, driving around, trying to save the human race from certain destruction and no one knew a damn thing about it. He tried to clear his mind. He would never be able to find them if he let his mind wander. He had to concentrate.

Moving south along Ascot Boulevard he thought he picked up the strongest sensation yet. He could feel that he was on the right track. Silently, keeping his eyes locked on the road ahead of him, he unzipped the windbreaker and pulled out the handgun. *They may be more intelligent than us*, Brandon thought as he set the gun on the seat, *but they can't take a bullet any better than us*. Reaching into his pocket he grabbed for the bullets. Hopefully there weren't too many of *them* wherever he was going. At first they only came as individuals. But lately they seemed to come together in packs of two or three. Obviously a full-scale invasion was being prepared. He didn't know how much time he had, but the feelings he got of their presence seemed to be more and more frequent.

Reaching for his gun, Brandon began to load the bullets into the clip. Looking down as he was, he failed to see he was coming to an intersection. The glare of headlights from a fast-moving car in the other lane blasted by on this passenger side. Taken but surprise, Brandon slammed on his brakes. The rear wheels, slipped on the slick street, and could get no traction. The car began a dangerous sideways motion. Brandon could feel it going out of control. While attempting to turn into the direction of the skid, the other car, a large Blazer, blasted by him, it's driver pumping the horn. The two cars collided, the Blazers right front-edge clipping the rear end of Brandon's car. The driver stopped midway into the street at an odd angle. Meanwhile, Brandon managed to glide his car up onto a curb bringing it to a safe, if abrupt, stop. Shaking the fear away Brandon looked over at the other vehicle. He could see where the headlight and the front bumper crumpled in from the impact. He saw the other driver getting out of his car and coming towards him. Fear gripped his heart like a vise. *Could it be one of them?! Were they on to me? Trying to kill me?*

Brandon, grabbing the gun, got out of the car. He realized the clip wasn't in the weapon yet. He reached back in to grab it. The driver of the Blazer, apparently seeing the gun, ran back to his car, got in, and began driving away before Brandon could get the clip in the gun. He tried to sense the person within the quickly receding car. He couldn't tell if it was one of them or not. He hadn't felt the presence at the intersection but, then again, he was also fighting to keep his car from going off the road. He couldn't feel anything now though.

Standing in the rain, with the gun in his hand, he looked back at his car, half-askew on the curb, driver-side door wide open. *Just like it was seven years ago*, he thought. And he could feel the memories flooding into him...

He remembered the cold, wet night. His father driving, his mother sitting in the passenger seat, laughing about something that Dad was saying. Her laughter was strained. Brandon remembered she always was nervous about driving in the rain. And her husband was not and that seemed to make her even more nervous.

Sitting in the back seat, Brandon stopped reading his book. It was a new book that his dad had just given him called *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Looking up from the book, Brandon stared out of the passenger-side window and saw the rain pelting the window. The view outside was terribly distorted. It was almost impossible to see anything, even through the front windshield where the wipers were vainly trying to clear the rain as fast as it came down. He remembered Dad leaning over to kiss mother, telling her not to look so nervous. She laughed again, although it was a force laugh, and looked back to check on Brandon. “You okay, honey,” she asked.

Any answer Brandon could have given was drowned out by the blaring of a car horn. The memories came back in slow motion.

He saw his mother quickly turn to face the passenger side, the headlights from the oncoming car framing her face in a grisly silhouette – what would end up being his last image of her. She had time for a small shriek before the other car slammed into the passenger side of their own car. Brandon remembered being hurled to the driver’s side of the car, his head and back cracking into the door behind the driver’s seat, feeling immense pain in his chest, not realizing that four of his ribs had just shattered. He saw the whole passenger side of the car crumple inward. His mother’s torso almost seemed to deform in front of him as the bones in her body shattered from the horrific impact. The glass from the windows blew inward literally shredding her face. As the glass showered over him, the last thing Brandon heard before he lost consciousness was his father’s screams over the sounds of tortured metal.

Standing by the side of the road he remembered that horrible night with perfect clarity. He closed his eyes as tightly as possible to try to force the memories away. As usual, it didn’t work. Suddenly, with gut-wrenching lurch, he felt the presence of *them*. His gut twisted with the pain. Practically doubling over, Brandon stumbled to the car. Getting in and closing the door he drove off. The presence was incredibly strong; he must be very close. The feelings directed him down to a quiet suburban street. He stopped at a house with light showing through the front windows. *Here. They’re here.*

Brandon could feel it in the pit of his stomach. Slowly he got out of the car, cradling the gun. Here was where the bastards were hiding now. Probably plotting the downfall of the planet and the subjugation of the human race. He remembered how strange it seemed, after the accident six years ago, getting these odd feelings. He remembered how he realized something was entering his mind, some other mind. He didn’t know how. But he realized the presence was unnatural, *alien*.

Then he had the dream after getting out of the hospital. The dream where he knew (even though he didn’t know exactly how he knew) that the presence was evil. It was an alien presence on Earth. He couldn’t read the thoughts of the aliens but he could feel their intent. And it wasn’t good. He didn’t know what they wanted, but he sometimes had thoughts of a weird nature, where the entire Earth was a barren wasteland; everything ruined; and people walking around – but they were not really people. They

were aliens, walking around in the shells of what had once been human beings. Brandon did not doubt that these aliens, or whatever they were, wanted nothing less than the total destruction of human civilization. Brandon vowed that he would not let that happen. He would do whatever it took to stop them. He had done so thirteen times already and he would do it a million more if he had to. He would do it until he couldn't feel the presence anymore. Until he knew that the Earth was finally safe. After all – this was his home, and it was the only one he had.

Walking up to the front door, he made sure the gun was loaded and ready to fire. Such an innocent looking home. What a perfect place for the ugly presence of the aliens to hide. Who would ever suspect? Who would ever know what evil lurked among them until it was too late? Well, he knew. And he was going to do something about it. *Now.*

Brandon knocked loudly on the door and then rang the doorbell. He heard a male voice beyond the door: “Who is it?”

“Hi, ... uh, listen, my car broke down out here and I don't know where there's a phone. Could you let me in so I could call someone?”

The voice on the other side of the door hesitated for a moment before replying, no doubt scrutinizing him via the peephole in the door. “Uh, yeah sure, c'mon in.” The door was opened and Brandon saw the man standing there. He was tall, at least six-foot-two. Probably two hundred pounds, all muscle by the look of it. It was definitely a human male, but then that came as no surprise. The aliens always appeared in human form. But there is no doubt that this man was no longer human. Brandon could feel the terrifying presence suffocating him. As the man stepped back to allow Brandon entry, Brandon raised the gun. The man had a moment to register surprise before Brandon pulled the trigger.

The report of the shot echoed through the house. The man's head literally disintegrated from the impact of the bullet. As the body fell backward he heard a woman scream from inside the house. He walked in and he realized the presence was still in his head. The woman was definitely one of them too. He could see the woman in the doorway to what appeared to be the kitchen. The woman stared at the still form of her husband in mute shock. Brandon stepped further into the house and raised the gun. He fired. The shot took her high in the shoulder and spun her around, arms waving in an almost comical fashion. She went crashing back into the kitchen, out of sight.

Brandon, not sure how wounded the creature was, ran into the kitchen. The first thing he noticed was that the woman was struggling to rise. The second thing he noticed was that there was a little boy sitting at the kitchen table. Tears were streaming down his face but he appeared to be too frightened to move or even do more than offer soft sobs as he tried to comprehend what was going on around him. Brandon turned his attention back to the woman. The presence was definitely there. She was one of them. He pointed the gun at the back of her struggling form and fire twice. She flopped to the floor and moved no more.

The little boy at the table let out a wail and fell backwards, tipping over his chair. As Brandon checked to make sure the woman was dead, he could hear the little child crying behind him and scuttling backward until he came to a wall. Brandon turned to comfort him. How to make him realize that what he thought were his parents were really horrible creatures – malevolent beings not deserving life? As Brandon approached the cowering boy, he stopped as he, again, felt the presence. He realized with a start that the

boy was one of them as well. *How clever*, Brandon thought. *Hide yourself in a little kid. Who would ever suspect such an innocent little thing of being so damn evil?*

Brandon squatted down next to the boy. Roughly he jammed the barrel of the gun under the boy's chin. He could practically smell the terror from the boy whose crying now gave way to an odd sort of panting. *Good. You know it's coming. No family to protect you now.* He leaned in a little closer, looking the boy/alien right in its eyes. Coldly he said: "Hiding in a little boy like this won't save you, you son-of-a-bitch!" And, with that, he pulled the trigger.

Walking back to his car, Brandon quickly got in and drove away. He could see lights on in more houses now. No doubt they heard the shots and would call the police. He would no doubt be arrested if he were caught. The police would never understand what he was doing and why he had to do it.

They would simply say he was a raving lunatic. They would say he was killing for the fun of it, like they reported in the newspapers about the other killings. They couldn't see the people he killed for what they were: creatures. Terribly evil creatures. Only he could feel the icy presence that hid behind their human façade. Only he could stop them.

Driving back he realized that the creatures were not that smart. After all, the man just let him waltz right into their home. Why would he do that? And the creature possessing the child made no attempt to run at all. *Very strange*, Brandon thought to himself. He shook his head to clear his mind. He hated having thoughts like those. Thoughts of doubt. They always seemed to come after he had to kill some of *them*. Sometimes he even doubted what he was doing. Were the newspapers right? Was he just a serial killer? Was he just a lunatic randomly killing people when the urge struck him? No. He knew that wasn't true. He was killing to save humanity.

But then there were times he would doubt even that. Sometimes he would think that maybe he couldn't really feel a presence at all. If that was true, then maybe those really were just ordinary, innocent people that he was killing. Maybe these thoughts of an alien presence that wanted to destroy the world were all in his head. Brandon wondered about that sometimes. But he always managed to convince himself that it was not the case.

Nobody could be that crazy, he thought as he drove off into the night.