

Vicarious

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So you want to know who I am. And more importantly, you want to know how I can do the things I do and still manage to live with myself. Well, I hope you're ready – neither of these questions can be answered with a simple statement. And if you still have any desire for such knowledge once you gain it, you should probably consider getting some professional help – because you're clearly as sick as I am.

Okay, so let's start with the first question. *Who exactly am I?*

Well, my driver's license says that I'm Derek Johnson. But I don't really think that's the identity you're interested in. Derek Johnson is just some pathetic, scared little man who works at a movie rental store and then goes home to watch tv alone until finally falling asleep. His life is a series of boring, meaningless days that fall one after the other like drops from a leaky faucet – ad nauseam.

No, I think the identity that you want to hear about is the other one. But therein lies the problem. The interesting side of Derek Johnson doesn't consist of *one* identity. It's more like a collage of personalities that have to take turns using one body – a body that's become no more than a timeshare condo for the dearly departed. I know what you're thinking. No, I don't suffer from a multiple personality disorder – at least not in the traditional sense. I don't *suffer* from anything. Actually, I'd have to say that others suffer from me - when I'm not Derek Johnson the pussy.

Anyway, enough about that guy. Let's get to the juicy stuff - the story about how other people give Derek Johnson a way to live an unforgettable life without having to do any of the dirty work himself.

I'm sure you're wondering how it is that I live the life of various different people without suffering from a severe mental illness. In fact, I bet you've already decided that I *do* in fact suffer from some sort of disorder, but I'm just too nuts to see it – that I've cooked up some half-baked story about possession so that I keep myself from succumbing to madness.

Okay, fair enough. But doing what I do pretty much requires a high degree of madness in the first place – and why would I hide one form of madness with another? And if I *were* suffering from a multiple personality disorder, at least that would be a legitimate sickness – a condition beyond my control that would still allow me to maintain my innocence.

Well, my particular brand of madness isn't so innocent. You see, I have to make a choice. I may not be capable of doing the things that my guests do while they're using my body – but I still have to make the choice to allow them in. The funny thing is, if I'm ever caught, I'll be punished as though I had truly committed the acts myself. And in a way, I guess that's the truth. I knowingly let blood-thirsty maniacs into my body to do their worst, so I'm culpable.

Whatever, though – it's my ride and I'm not gonna worry about the ticket collector while my rollercoaster cart is still clicking its way up the first hill. I'll pay when it's time to pay.

For now, I'm just gonna keep driving through this damned rain until I get to the city cemetery. That's where they bury the people who've been executed for unthinkable crimes, so that's where I need to be.

That's right – dead people. That fucked-up Picasso of identities that makes up the more interesting side of Derek Johnson is a long list of people who have come and gone - Criminals who did a lot of very bad things until finally paying the piper. The trick is in making sure that I select someone who never started repenting for their life of crime. They're useless to me. They turn out to be almost as boring as the real Derek Johnson.

You may be asking, *“But why not choose one of the great men of history? Wouldn't that be just as exciting without having to let someone commit atrocities while using your body?”* Well, I actually tried that. It turns out that a day in the life of a great man isn't so great. The excitement of such people comes from the sum of all their deeds. A single day for them was pretty much boring. No - If you want true excitement in the small amount of time that I'm able to give, you need someone with balls. You need a bad guy who's gonna rob a bank, murder a bunch of pedestrians, or whatever brand of sickness he preferred during his days on earth.

That's why I'm gonna make a little visit to the grave of Timothy Garret – the serial killer who had a penchant for college girls until he got caught. He was on his 23rd victim when the police caught him in the act. Number 23 escaped with her life because of the police – but I have a feeling that's gonna change once Timothy has a chance to set things right. Yep, tonight's gonna be an interesting night.

It's hard as hell to keep my excitement from getting the best of me, but I can't afford to get in a wreck or get pulled over. I don't need my prints on record. I have to keep on being the timid, harmless Mr. Johnson that everyone ignores until Timothy Garret jumps in. He'll have enough excitement for the both of us anyway.

So you'd probably like to know just how I go about opening the door for dead criminals to come in. Well, I wish I could say that I figured it all out with my superior intellect. The truth is, though, that it was an accident. You see, I was a somewhat demented teenager. I was obsessed with death and loved cemeteries. At the age of 16, I decided that I'd turn my obsession into art and went out to buy some paper and black sketching chalk. But when I did my first grave rubbing, I picked up a lot more than just a name and a date on a piece of paper. I actually picked up the soul of Benjamin Carrington. It turned out that the good Mr. Carrington liked women, and was fond of showing them just how much he liked them – whether they liked him back or not.

I thank my lucky stars that he was at least courteous enough to wear a ski mask while doing the deed. Otherwise my new hobby would've come to a screeching halt before it really got started. It all worked out, though – and I was hooked. No more worrying about how boring my life would turn out to be. All I had to do was learn some gritty details about dead people, make my choice, and go rub them straight out of hell. They did the rest of the work for me.

Oh, that's one of the downsides I guess. I tend to keep a few residual memories from those who enter my body, and you can guess where such people have been spending most of their time lately. There aren't many living who can say that they've seen hell. It took some getting used to, and I won't say that I got over it with my sanity in tact – but I'm still here nonetheless.

Anyway, back to the present. All I have to do is perform a rubbing of Timothy Garret's headstone, and then sit back for the ride. He'll have about six hours to get his jollies before being sucked back through the tunnel and into the fire -so he'll have to act fast.

“And how do you know that Timothy Garret won't do something stupid and get you caught?” you might ask. Well, the people that I let in always seem to know the deal. If they're careful, and don't get me caught, I'll be back for more. That means they get a free ride back to the land of the living from time to time – but only if they play it smart and don't get me thrown into prison.

Damn, this rain is crazy. I really hope Timothy's a good driver. Oh, that's another thing. I've learned to choose people who were living somewhat recently. You pull a man from the 19th century, and he's liable to go nuts from everything that's changed since he was alive. I don't have to explain the potential disaster that you're inviting when you put a set of car keys into the hands of a guy who died in 1847.

The cemetery is only about a mile away now, so I guess I'd better finish my little introduction. Once Garret jumps in here, he runs the show – and I imagine he's gonna have better things to do than tell stories.

You're no doubt wondering what good this does me. *“If I'm no longer in control, what do I gain from the things that happen while others are using my body?”* you might ask. Well, it's a delayed reaction of sorts. I'm not aware of what's going on while my guest is still inside, but I get to see every gory detail later - in the form of dreams. Once the dead soul is ejected from my body, I'm pretty much spent. I usually go straight home and, just like any other night, fall asleep in front of the tv. In my dreams, I relive those six hours as though I had done everything myself. I'm not even sure it'd be accurate to call them dreams. Dreams could never be so vivid. You could never feel the heat of fresh blood streaming down your arms or feel the muscles of your victim squirming and contorting under your grasp in a regular dream. This is so much more. This is the real thing, only delayed by about six hours.

Well, here we are – city cemetery. I guess I still have a little time to give you some details while I park and walk out to Timothy’s grave. Ah, I almost forgot. The other thing you wanted to know was how I manage to live with myself.

That’s not as hard as you’d think. Hurting other people vicariously doesn’t take much more resolve than driving by a wreck without stopping - or not rushing off to save a woman in distress when you hear her screaming. We all want to be bystanders when others are suffering. We all want to see the ugly side of this world without getting our hands dirty. Admit it – when you see something on the news about a woman getting brutally raped and murdered, your ears perk up. You wanna hear about the sort of thing that you’d never think of doing – because you’re too scared.

I’m no different, really. I just found a way to create the sort of news that we all love to watch. I found a remote control that tunes into the world’s darker channels. Yeah, I’m guilty of something – I’m guilty of being a slightly more proactive version of every other person in this world.

Well here I am. I hope you got all the freaky little details that you were hoping for, because it’s time to step aside and give Timothy Garret his little vacation.

Sweet dreams.