

The old Johnson place, a manor tucked in the nooks and crannies of the city, a relic from a bygone era. The city had sprouted up around it like a forest, yet nobody ever touched the land or the house itself. The city never sent inspectors, the banks never bothered to foreclose on it, and salesmen left it alone. In the dense concrete jungle of the heart of the city, the Johnson place was the only land free of urban grasp. The wood was dilapidated, yet structurally sound; nobody knew how long the house had been there, but it was built before public record. The dark wood door stood firm, a blockade to any would-be entrants; in the century since its abandonment, it had never opened. Despite this, on stormy nights, when the hour drew late, you could see lights flickering in the dusty windows. All of these oddities culminated in the Johnson place getting a sort of cult status, an urban legend amongst urban legends. The fact that it was constructed on a common thoroughfare only added to the rumors that circulated around it. There was one passerby whose interest was particularly piqued, a passerby who was on her way to work.

Namira had recently moved to town to take up a secretary position at a wealthy banking firm; it was a comfy position, but it was woefully boring. Every day consisted of the same thing, over and over; she sat at a desk, answered phones, and organized mail. While she could easily stand in do it, having a small ottoman beneath her bulky body helped keep the fatigue away. You see, Namira had a bit of a spooky persuasion to her as well. She was an arachne, a half-spider half-woman; she had a human upper body, a rather lithe torso currently draped in an overly tight dress shirt. Her generous bust strained the buttons of her top; the white fabric was wrinkled and cinched, with patches of flesh visible in the gaps. Normally this would be considered improper work attire, but her upper torso was never what got people's attention. Her spiderlike features were the thing that turned people's heads; people were transfixed by the three sets of red eyes on her head, two of which were hidden by her black bunned hair. If they managed to get past her eyes, her spider assets would draw their attention. She sported eight legs, all covered in hard, black chitin; her legs were fastened to a soft, round cephalothorax. Behind her thorax was a bloated abdomen that looked more like a blimp; it trailed behind her like a tractor trailer wherever she went.

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"Ptolemy Holdings. Namira speaking. How may I direct your call? Mhmm.... Okay... Okay, well, we don't handle real estate issues at this office. I'd be happy to direct you to a... I can't get a copy of your deed; you'd need... Because your local branch would have your deed." Namira's voice trailed off as the line went dead, another rude client unwilling to put in the slightest effort.

She sighed, eyeing the clock while she scrolled videos on her phone; the minor distractions of the internet were growing weary. She was dying for lunch; the closer the clock hands moved to that sacred twelve, the slower they seemed to move. She mindlessly rearranged her papers, shuffling files between folders to busy her hands and mind. Finally the

clock ticked over to twelve, and she was free; Namira flicked a switch on her phone to redirect calls and put the sign up. Namira skittered through the office; she had a tub of leftover Chinese with her name on it.

The sterile white lights of the office made the gray cubicles of the office seem like a boundless maze. She could only find her way to the break room thanks to the astute senses of a spider; any other newbie would find things more difficult. She broke into the bland break room, scuttling herself to the fridge and heating up her leftover takeout. She leaned against the wall, taking weight off of her legs; while she waited for the microwave to ding, she observed the other visitors to the break room. It was the standard, bored affair: women trading stories over lukewarm coffee and stale donuts. There was one storyteller that caught Namira's attention, a rather hefty lamia from accounting by the name of Frida. Frida was the office gossip, always pinned to someone else's desk over her own; being a numbers girl meant she could afford such lax days, it made Namira jealous. She was currently talking the ear off of the office's system admin, a short-stack cyclops known as Wendy. Namira's mild annoyance was currently being overridden by her interest in Frida's subject of gossip.

"I swear I heard it. I live a couple buildings away from that Johnson place." Frida exaggerated greatly, shoveling a donut down her craw.

"I'm telling you, nobody has been in that place for a half-century." Wendy replied with incredulous denial.

"It happened; my neighbors heard it too. We were all on the roof..." Frida was interrupted by the system admin.

"Why were you on the roof?" Wendy had an air of suspicion to her.

"We were drinking beer. It's hot out." Frida tucked another donut in her cheek.

"On a workday?" Wendy was more incredulous than was needed.

"Let's get back on topic. Who cares if I drank on a work night. Anyways. We were on the roof, and the clock turned three; we started to hear sounds. It was kinda quiet, sounded like chewing. Someone was eating noisily. Then we heard moans, like a woman was jacking in." Frida continued her story, taking another sip of her coffee.

"Jacking in?" Wendy cocked her eye, sipping her coffee as she waited for an explanation.

"Jacking in, flicking the bean...masturbating. Someone sounded like they were having a good time." Frida gestured wildly as she tried to hammer the point home. "Anyways, that moaning turned into creaking and groaning. Like a balloon or an old ship. The creaking kept

getting louder until ***kaboom***. We heard something that sounded like a bomb went off, the air got a bit more humid and things sounded drippy.”

“So you heard someone watching a movie.” Wendy chuckled to herself.

“God, you’re frustrating, nobody lives there. It. Was. A Ghost.” Frida threw her arms up in frustration.

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Namira let the rest of the conversation fade into background chatter as she retrieved her leftover Chinese. Something about Frida’s story tickled her fancy; she always went by the old Johnson place and wondered what went on in that place. The possibility of some kind of explosive sex ghost was intriguing, even if it was just some kids pulling a prank. It would be an excuse to break up her nightly routine of reading and ordering not-so-healthy takeout. She dug into her meal, eating with gusto; only having a thirty-minute break left little room for relaxation.

Namira worked through her day as quickly as the clock would allow her; there wasn’t any way to speed it up, no projects to muscle through, just her versus the clock. Today her trip home had an extra bit of zip to her step; the bustle of the city became a blur as she skittered home. Her apartment was big enough to house someone of her size, but not large enough to avoid the feeling of being cramped. The plain brownstone was still in the process of being lived in; the boxes from her move still sat half unpacked. Her couch, her television, her computer and sofa: those were about all she needed to get going. Today made her regret not finishing the unpacking process, as now she was tearing through the cluttered boxes for the necessary supplies.

“Come on. Where is it? I know I packed it. Why do I own rope?” Namira pulled out a loop of braided rope, tossing it aside in confusion.

Namira was looking for her urban exploration kit, an old collection of bits and bobs her friends had assembled in their video-making days. She threw junk out of the boxes until she found the kit; the kit was all of the essentials one needed on a day out. The moderate length case had a club-sized Maglite, extra batteries, water, a cell-phone battery and a handheld camera. Namira held the kit close to her chest, feeling the weight and heft of it; so many happy memories came flooding back when she held it. Despite being abandoned and left for years at this point, the kit had warmth to it. Namira set it down on the table, giving it a few happy smiles while she changed into something more travel-friendly.

Namira ripped her silk dress shirt from her chest, almost snapping the buttons; she felt like a magical girl or a superhero. Shedding the trappings of her secretary alter ego and donning the costume of Namira the free. She pulled her skirt from her waist and skittered to her closet,

looking for the perfect mix of comfort and durability. She decided on a simple white tee and long-sleeve cotton flannel; she pulled some tough jean-leggings up her pedipalps. The denim tubes slid easily up her black chitin; honestly, she didn't need to cover up her pedipalps, but it felt naked to go without some kind of covering. Namira looks at herself in the mirror, observing how everything hugged her curves. Her eyes narrowed at a small little divot around her bust, a small lump poking out from her white tee.

"How'd I forget that?" Namira muttered to herself as she dug under her shirt.

She dug through her cleavage, fiddling with the straps on a concealed clasp; with the deftness of a professional, she undid the latch of her bra. She pulled the lacy underwire through the neck of her shirt and let the black lace sail across the room. Before she could take her leave, she felt a sudden wave of exhaustion hit her. A fatigue similar to a sugar crash; she could scarcely keep her eyes open.

"A small nap first. Then I'll head out." Namira let out a big yawn, stretching her arms as wide as she could.

Namira groggily scuttled over towards the couch, fluffing up a seating pillow before draping her body across the couch. She felt the weight of slumber dragging down her eyes, her lids rising and falling; each time they opened, they opened a little less. Then the claws of slumber took hold of her body, and she faded into unconsciousness.

Namira made her way through the streets, garnering as many looks as she normally did; the occasional glare and stare coming her way. People acted like they'd never seen a giant spider woman before, but their stares grew more focused as she approached the gate of the old Johnson place. People gasped as she opened up the unlocked gate; the rusty metal creaked loud enough to echo through the streets. Never in her life had she seen a busy street go completely silent in an instant; the cars themselves had come to a halt. Namira looked back with a sort of confident grin; being the center of attention was kind of nice. She strode through the gate with a renewed confidence, letting the gate swing close behind her. The path to the manor was littered with cracked stones; the faded walkway had seen far better days. The bits of grass and underbrush had poked their way through the inches-thick stone; nature always wins out in the end. The closer Namira got to the manor, the more the sky seemed to darken, a storm seemingly rolling in as she approached. If Namira were a superstitious type, she'd assume the manor itself was warning her, sending an omen to chase her away. Unfortunately for her, it was no omen; the sky cracked, and a bolt of lightning shot across the air; the small mist of rain was forming on the ground.

Namira doubled her pace, taking shelter under the porch just as the downpour hit; the rain hit like a truck. There was no lead-up, just cloudy skies into immediate torrential downpour; water was coming off the porch in sheets. Namira looked at the door and the rain, waiting a few moments to see if something would let up.

“Guess there’s no turning back now.” Namira shrugged as she nudged the door open.

The door swung open with little sound or circumstance; the wooden barricade moved with well-oiled motion. The interior was dark and shadowy; the only light came from the scant bits of clouded sun that filtered through the dust. Namira produced her flashlight; the solid steel felt heavy in her hands: the rumors of using it as a club were true. She clicked on the light, letting the golden ray pierce the stifling dark; the foyer looked surprisingly intact. Dust clung to the carpet in thick gray layers that shifted with the breeze, but everything was intact. She tested the wood before taking her steps; the boards creaked but didn’t bow. She moved forward with renewed confidence, closing the door behind her as she started her exploration.

The house was dusty but otherwise well kept; the furniture inside seemed to be ancient, older than Victorian. The ground floor was a bevy of rooms for entertaining companies: a ballroom fit to house an army, a banquet hall spacious enough to feed a city, and a kitchen larger than most apartments.