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Contains: *Weight Gain*

The Medium

Of all the requests she'd gotten, "My house is making me fat" was a new one to Sara. It wasn't the most ridiculous claim made in a request for her services, but it was high on the list. Sara followed her GPS to the address Amy gave her, pulling up to a dilapidated house—nearly a mansion—that looked like it hadn't been touched since the Victorian era. When she rapped the massive iron knocker against the door, a small cloud of plaster dust nearly fell on her head. Just as Sara was about to pull out her phone and verify the time and place, she heard footsteps nearing the door from within.

The heavy oak door swung inward to reveal a massively overweight young woman. At least two decades her junior, the woman had glossy brown hair, bright eyes, and must have weighed at least three hundred pounds. This had to be her client. "Hello, Amy?"

"Are you... Madam Sabrina?" Amy asked.

"Yes, dear. May I come in?"

"Of course!" Amy shuffled back from the door with slow, ponderous steps. She wore gray leggings with a few holes in them and a tee shirt that was skin-tight around her rolls and curves.

Sara stepped into Amy's house, immediately sensing a preternatural presence. "You said in your email that you live alone, yes?"

Amy gestured for her to follow, and they made their way into the next room. "That's right. I inherited the house from my Great Aunt."

Following Amy's waddling gait, Sara found herself in the house's kitchen. It wasn't a complete wreck, but dishes were piled up beside a stack of empty takeout containers, and the counters wanted a good cleaning. She watched Amy walk to the stove, where she poured batter into a griddle lathered with shimmering hot oil. While the pancake cooked, Amy leaned over a plate holding two half-eaten pancakes and forked a bite.

"Well," Sara said, "there does seem to be some kind of presence here with us."

"Really?" Amy asked through a mouthful of food.

"Indeed. I believe I should conduct a seance. If there are spirits in the house, malevolent or benign, I may be able to channel them."

Amy flipped the pancake on the griddle. "Okay."

"Is there somewhere I can set up? A table, ideally, near the center of the house?"

"There's a dining room through there," Amy said, pointing with a metal spatula.

Sara found the dining room where Amy had indicated. Only a wide arched doorway separated the two rooms, so she was subjected to the sounds of Amy cooking and eating while she set up her equipment and reagents. She took items from her bag and placed them on the table: candles, smudge sticks, sage, burning bowls, and, of course, a cliché crystal ball, which was, in reality, nothing but a glass sphere the size of a volleyball. Sara struck a match and lit several candles, then switched off the electric lights in the room. She used the candle's flame to light incense and the sage, waving each around in front of her to waft the smoke.

"We are ready to begin," she called toward the kitchen.

"Alright, just a sec," Amy called back.

Sara waited. Communing with spirits was rarely an instantaneous activity, but she found it oddly annoying that her client was so focused on her breakfast after the panicked email she sent. However, given the size of the girl, Amy's claim that the house's spirits were causing her to gain weight might not be as ridiculous as Sara had assumed. Finally, Amy waddled into the dining room. Her body was a parade of jiggles and wobbles, from thighs the size of Sara's waist to a pair of breasts bigger than her crystal ball bouncing on Amy's protruding belly. Sara wondered how long the

young woman had been eating before she got there. She had to have put away at least four pancakes since she arrived, and she carried a plate with three more. Each steaming cake was slathered in peanut butter and drowned in maple syrup. Her clients often did unusual things during seances, but this was the first time someone had brought a plate of food. No matter, she'd come all this way. She had to put on a show if she had any hope of getting paid.

After chanting a few lines of ancient Egyptian with some Aramaic sprinkled in, Sara intoned, "Spirits of this house, I am Madam Sabrina. I know you are here with us. Speak to me."

Standing around the table, invisible to the two seated women, were Mildred, Mrs. Benson, Tiffany, and Una.

"What this gypsy doing?" Una asked.

"Oh my gawd," Tiffany said, chewing on a wad of gum, "You can't just assume she's, like, a gypsy."

"What should we call her, pray tell?" Mildred asked, her condescension barely veiled.

"She said her name was Madam Sabrina," Mrs. Benson said, "Though what kind of madam dresses like a Romani, I'm sure I don't know."

Tiffany clicked her tongue. "You guys are the worst."

Sara continued her ritual, reciting lines and adding a quaver to her voice that seemed to impress most of her clients. "Spirits... please... speak to me. Speak to us."

"Can she indeed hear us?" Mrs. Benson asked.

"Oh yeah," Tiffany mocked, "She can totally hear us."

"Truly?" Mildred asked.

Tiffany popped a bubble with her gum. "Not!"

Una laughed, "Always funny!"

Mildred fixed Una with a glare. "It most certainly is not."

"I daresay she can't hear us," Mrs. Benson declared. "Sure, and I've never met a living who could. Have you, Una?"

Una shook her head, unkempt hair flailing.

"We are here to aid you," Sara continued, "Pray, tell us what unfinished business keeps you here."

"What keeps us here?" Mildred asked with fists on hips. "What kind of question is that?"

Mrs. Benson said, "You've seen people get sucked off, Una—"

"Don't call it that," Tiffany interrupted.

"What usually causes it?" Mrs. Benson finished, ignoring Tiffany.

Una shrugged, "It always different. Most ghosts get sucked off right away."

"Well," Mrs. Benson said, "What's keeping us here?"

Tiffany snapped her gum. "How should I know? I've been, like, stuck in this dump ever since that bachelorette party."

"I want to see that my last relative is well," Mildred said.

The three looked at the cavewoman. Una shrugged again. "I always here. But I also want Amy to do well. Eat lots of meat."

Mrs. Benson's back straightened. "I served the family of this house all my life. I shall continue to do so as long as I am here."

"If I don't get to eat good food anymore," Tiffany said, "I can at least watch someone else enjoy it, you know?"

Madam Sabrina's seances didn't always show real results. Honestly, it was nothing but a show nine times out of ten. But this time, she heard something. Snippets of words, a mix of feminine voices.

"...healthy...woman...nutritious...lady...serve...appetite..."

Every time Sara thought she could pick out one voice from the others, focus on just those words, Amy's chewing broke her concentration.

“Apologies, I believe the spirits are trying to speak. I’ll need total silence to be able to hear them.”

“Oh,” Amy said through a mouthful of pancake, “Shorry.”

“Ladies, please,” Mrs. Benson said, “She’ll never hear anything if we’re all talking. One woman should speak.”

Three sets of eyes looked at Mildred.

“Very well,” Mildred sighed, “This is superstitious nonsense, but perhaps we can put Amy’s mind at ease.”

Mildred bent down beside the stranger’s head, speaking slow and over-enunciating. “Can you hear me?”

“I’m getting something!” Sara exclaimed. “Yes, I can hear you.”

“Woah,” Una said.

“My name is Mildred. I am Amy’s Great Aunt.”

“I hear a woman named Mildred.”

“That’s my Great Aunt!” Amy said.

“Just as she told me. What is it you want, Mildred? Why are you here?”

Mildred stood to her full height with a scoff. “This is my house; where else would I go?”

“Ask her why she’s making me fat,” Amy said.

Mildred scoffed again. “She’s not fat, simply healthy.”

More voices filled Sara’s ears.

Mrs. Benson said, “A proper young miss needs plenty of food.”

“And meat, don’t forget meat,” Una added.

“I vote pizza... or Taco Bell,” Tiffany chimed in.

“The most important thing is balanced meals,” Mildred said.

"Hmm," Sara mused. "I think you may be right, Amy."

"What do you mean?"

"I can hear at least four voices here, and they all seem very invested in making sure you eat well."

"Ugh. Can you get them to leave?"

"Can't," Una said.

"If we go past the front gate, we end up, like, right back inside," Tiffany added.

"Are you trapped here?" Sara asked.

"I don't know if I'd say 'trapped,'" Mildred said.

"I don't think they *can* leave."

"Well, can you at least get them to stop whatever they're doing to make me fat?"

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Benson cried.

"Ungrateful."

"Stuck-up."

"Freeze when winter come."

The four ghosts stormed out of the room.

Sara grimaced, an expression Amy didn't miss. "What?"

"They've gone silent, dear. But if what they've said is true, they can't have gone far."

Amy rested her head on her palm. "What do I do now?"

"Well," Sara said, "Now you know the why of it; that must be some comfort, at least."

"I mean, yeah, but they're not gonna stop, are they?"

"Something that might help is to bear in mind that the spirits of the deceased lived in earlier times."

Amy fixed her with a flat stare. “‘It was a different time,’ really?”

Sara shrugged. “In this case, it’s entirely true, like it or not. Culture changes, and these spirits likely have not caught up with the times.”

“I guess...”

“You might enlist the services of a psychic therapist. They may be able to reach the spirits in ways I cannot.”

“That sounds expensive.”

“Very likely.”

Amy breathed a long, drawn-out sigh.

Sara decided to try a different tack. “Amy, it’s important to remember that spirits have no power over you. They cannot *force* you to do things against your will. Also, these spirits are not malicious; I believe they truly have your best interests at heart, however misguided their ‘suggestions.’”

“I guess you’re right.”

“My advice, now that you know the cause of your dilemma, is to exert your own willpower. Some counseling or therapy of your own may be beneficial. Understand that, when you have the urge to over-indulge,” Sara glanced at the half-eaten stack of pancakes meaningfully, “Those urges are coming not from yourself but from those with whom you cohabit.”

Amy sighed again. “You’re right; that does help.” She pushed back her chair and stood, picking up her unfinished plate and carrying it to the kitchen trash.

Sara blew out her candles, snuffed the incense, and started packing up. Amy had her laptop open and was researching gyms in the area when she walked back into the kitchen. She pointed at a handful of bills on the counter, “Thanks for coming all this way. At least now I know.”

“It’s my pleasure, Amy. Be well.”

When the house was quiet again, the ghosts tiptoed into the kitchen.

“She gone?” Una asked.

"It appears so," Mrs. Benson said.

"Look at this!" Mildred gasped, seeing the pancakes in the trash can. "Wasted food?"

Mrs. Benson said, "That won't do at all."

Una shrugged, "It not meat."

Amy dismissed one fitness center when she saw the monthly rate and another after checking her maps app and saw how long it would take her to get there. Her mind kept drifting to the half-stack of pancakes she'd dumped in the trash, and her stomach grumbled hungrily despite the small feast she'd already eaten that morning. "I know what you guys are trying to do, and it won't work," She said to the empty room.

"I don't know why she always puts peanut butter on them," Tiffany said, "Chocolate is, like, way better."

In anticipation of her guest's visit, Amy had filled a bowl with chocolates before she started making pancakes. As she browsed online for hand weights and yoga mats, she unconsciously plucked one from the bowl, unwrapping it with one hand and popping it between her lips.

"Still not meat," Una observed.

"Well, she *is* trying to better herself," Mildred said, "She should be rewarded for making healthy choices."

Tiffany watched Amy suck on the chocolate, bite down, then reach for another. "Plus, I bet they're real tasty..."

Amy didn't have the budget for a gym or even good workout equipment. As chocolate melted on her tongue, she decided to go look for gear at the thrift store. She found some promising exercise videos on YouTube. But it was too late in the day to go shopping now. She'd go tomorrow. It was almost lunchtime, anyway.