

**Christopher Urban**  
**Spider-Man's Apartments**

214 Suydam Street; Bushwick, Brooklyn

The first one was on Suydam Street in Bushwick—a neighborhood I had promised my Aunt May I wouldn't move into, it having the highest murder rate in all the city at that time (this was before the heavy gentrification kicked in). But the price was unbelievable, two hundred dollars a month, and even Aunt May seemed to understand that at that unheard-of amount compromises would be made, especially if one's profession was photojournalism.

That year things were particularly tricky with Mary Jane and me. She couldn't understand why I never asked her to sleep over and the lack of invitations on my part had begun to spoil her mood. The apartment was a studio space, just one big room and, as this was before my true identity had been revealed to her, I knew my chances of coming and going in the apartment at odd hours of the night without her noticing were nil. That was the worst thing about the place, I remember.

The best thing: my commute wasn't very long. In fact, one night someone broke in and tried to take my TV while I was sleeping. Trying to rob me, in my own apartment! Spider-Man's apartment! Thank God Mary Jane wasn't there. The crime rate in Bushwick that year, the year I moved in, reached an all-time low: a ninety-eight percent drop. When my lease was up I left and MJ and I agreed to move in together.

"I don't care where it is, but no rats!"

In that Bushwick apartment of mine, the one night MJ *did* stay over a rat raced across the kitchen floor and she screamed. Never again would she sleep over, she said. I remember thinking how glad I was not to have been bitten by a rat.

119C Jefferson Street; Bed-Stuy/Clinton Hill, Brooklyn

We moved into a second floor apartment in a large brownstone in Bed-Stuy on Jefferson Street or maybe it was Bedford Ave (nobody remembers their second apartment in New York). It was my opinion that the space was more than we needed but MJ insisted, citing that the extra space was the very reason she formed an attachment to the place to begin with. And neither of us had, as I recall, great closet room in our previous apartments.

Unanswerable questions were still causing a lot of suffering in our relationship. But I was just so excited to see Mary Jane enthusiastic over something, anything, that I gave in to her wishes at once, signing the lease with nothing more than a good-natured shrug.

"You mean it, Peter? We're really doing this?"

"Why not?"

We never did use one of the rooms, the back one. Left it entirely empty. It was such a shame, I felt, that I suggested an idea at the time, a very modest proposal, of subletting the room to a young college student to supplement our income. MJ, who was always jealous of me

back then (and who could blame her with all my sneaking around) took this as final proof of my infidelities. “Who’s the skank, Peter? What’s the little whore’s name? I WANT TO KNOW!”

The upshot was we fought all night and later, about the time that I thought Mary Jane was walking out on me for good, calling the whole thing quits, I called her back and told her who I really was. She laughed. “Oh, if only that were true,” she said, and I could tell she meant it. For I could still remember the look in her eyes when she first kissed him—me, I mean—the Spider-Man.

I spun a web in the shape of a heart right in front of her.

“Do that again,” she said, taken aback. I did, but this time the shape of the heart came out lopsided. She adored it all the same. A few other, similar web-slinging demonstrations (and a back flip) were necessary to gain her everlasting belief that I was who I said I was.

The very next night MJ came up with a plan to solve our money problems once and for all. Her idea was that I would provide the *Daily Bugle* with never-before-seen footage of the Spider-Man. “Just think of all the shots you’ll get while all the other hacks out there can only dream of such career-defining photos,” she said, and added, “We’ll be rich!” I told her I would have to think about it. I had my doubts as to whether or not such a complex scheme could be pulled off or if it was even ethical. What, I wondered, for instance, would my Uncle Ben say?

We really did need the money, though.

“I’ll do it,” I said, finally. “For you.” We lay down in bed and I stroked her long red hair lovingly.

“No,” she said, putting her head on my shoulder. “Do it for you, Peter. Do it for us.”

“For us,” I said, as if we were about to toast imaginary wine glasses in bed.

Neither of us slept much that night in our excitement for the future. By morning I decided that the whole thing was too risky. It would only be putting myself, job, and true identity in permanent danger. I knew MJ would understand, and yet when she handed me my bowl of muesli and strawberry yogurt for breakfast with that grin on her face that has never once failed to warm my heart, going all the way back to high school math class when we were algebra partners together, I changed my mind. I had to.

“What’s a matter, Peter?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me.”

“It’s just . . . I’ve always wanted to live in Manhattan, that’s all,” I said, smiling.

Orange juice shot through MJ’s little nose, she laughed so hard.

22 Broad Street, 14th FL; Financial District, Manhattan

We had hot water that wasn’t, a ceiling that leaked if it rained for more than forty-five minutes at a time, and once, during the coldest stretch of winter, we went entirely without heat. And yet, there we were at long last living together in our own Manhattan apartment.

Manhattan!

The Spider-Man photographs were a tremendous success. Mr. Jameson was so beside himself that he could care less how I had gotten my hands on them. “More, Parker! Yes, now! Undoubtedly!” he bellowed, spilling hot coffee on his already ill-matching tie. It took all my

strength not to shut that big fat mouth of his with a precise webshot to the face. “Of course, Mr. Jameson,” I heard myself say.

The more photographs I took of myself for the *Daily Bugle* the more paranoid I became and the paranoia seemed to throw my Spidey-Senses out of whack. I would walk those ancient, winding streets of the Financial District with the horrible thought that they—whoever “they” might be—were after me, ready to jump me and take my camera and, at the height of this exaggerated state of mind in which I kept finding myself, I worried constantly about MJ’s safety. Were they stalking her too, I worried? Every morning I woke up feeling as if I had a bowling ball in my stomach. It was one thing for the Spider-Man to be wanted, another thing entirely for it to be Peter Parker.

And MJ said more or less the same thing to me the next evening when I came home late from work.

“Don’t you think I know that!” I said. Then I said, “Doc Ock wants me dead. The Sandman wants me dead. Even the guy on the corner selling hot dogs by the *Bugle* wants me dead, if it means he can get my camera and photos.” I still had the camera tightly strapped around my neck, too flustered to take it off.

MJ, trying to calm me, rubbed my shoulders and back, running her long painted fingernails lightly across my skin.

“And so does this fucking landlord!” I said, shivering. The thermostat said forty-four. A new low for us.

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