

Riley Towers, Chapter 1: “The Date”

“... that's my space ... um ... you *need* to stay out of my frigging *space* ... SCUMBAG! ...”, Tess was upset that someone had taken her parking space - finding a spot on “the circle”, on a Friday night, is tricky shit, and this night is special ... (for her).

Tess is on her way to meet Tom, a “friend”, for martinis at Nicky Blaine's – an old, musty, cigar/martini bar that gave Monument Circle (the dead-center of downtown Indianapolis) a kind of “metropolitan feel”, in that sort of pre-apocalyptic douche way ... that's what people believed, and people are almost never wrong. But Tess is late and she is growing tired of driving in circles, around and around, as one often does when looking for parking in that part of town (one giant turning circle surrounding a statue to some kind of militaristic or totemistic bs – that is “the circle”).

“Tom's gonna be pissed ... CRAP, crap, crap ... now that other FUCKER took MY SPACE! FUCKING SMART CARS!”, she muttered under her breath as she exited the turning circle, giving up on her endless quest for free convenient parking. She decided to drive down a block and park in the more expensive city garage. Tess hated to give up on “convenient free-parking”, but she is also in a hurry ... and she hated being late, to any occasion or event, even more than losing out on free parking.

Tess Carlton graduated from Indiana University in 2008; she spent her time there, in Bloomington (Indiana), socializing, connecting, making friends, being excellent at “being a sorority girl” and maintaining a 3.2 GPA. She was Kappa-Kappa-Gamma, or KKG; she majored in marketing and communications and was generally, mostly, a decent enough student. Her current job, working for Indy Girl Magazine, allows her to afford a car payment on a new Honda (0% interest) and to pay half the rent for a one bedroom apartment, on the 9th floor, she shares with Nancy - a college friend - who is attending medical school in Indianapolis. It's a decent life for someone nearing 30 years old, decent when compared to so many other desperate folks she had left behind that summer day, so long ago, when she graduated. She's thankful for what she has, in her own way ... and she never allows herself to get “down with a frown” - she prefers being “up with a smile” ... her friends were often annoyed by her spunky nature (and her platitudes), and this has not changed.

Tess is running as fast as she can in heels, between the garage and Nicky Blaine's - but it is late summer and the recurrent Indiana rain storms are gathering, looming, down-pouring ... all over her, and her nice, light, yellow summer dress, and she was so close to Nicky Blaine's when the torrent began, but not close enough - “crap” is all she thought, crap.

The rain storm commenced 100 feet from the entrance and by the time she got there she was soaking wet; Tom was at the bar, on his second martini, likely pondering the age old question: "... is this a date, a drink, or a booty-call". It might have been all three, or none of the above, or irrelevant – Tess is a schemer.

Tom's almost 40 and divorced and a little overweight.

Tom has a great sense of humor, or ... at least Tom thinks he's "funny". When Tom makes jokes he often causes people to squirm, uncomfortably, because his jokes are predominantly off-center and a bit inappropriate ... but not to Tess – Tess grew up on a farm near Fort Wayne, "farm girls have iron-clad stomachs and they've heard it all", Tess would brag.

Tess felt like Tom had that "something special" and Tom had money and was a success in his own right (part of Tess' list). Tom was a senior editor at Indy Girl Magazine (IG-Mag as the young women of Indianapolis called it) and pulled in enough cash to afford the car payment on a new BMW and he also lived at Riley Towers ... alone (didn't have to share with anyone). Not sharing a nice apartment! - "that's success" for Tess.

Tess and Tom met during a social event at the apartment complex a few weeks earlier ...

Riley Towers¹ was having one of their monthly gatherings, designed primarily for young hipsters between the ages of 22 and 32, and Tom could still pass (his "crystal" hadn't turned red yet²). Tom, Tess ... they both work at the same place, but had never acknowledged each other – perhaps because Tom has an office and Tess works in "Cuba" (the giant maze of orange cubicals on the second floor of the Taylor Building – one of the newer structures erected 10 miles north of Indianapolis. This "gathering", the one where they first met, was being held at Charlie MacCool's Irish Eatery – one of several fashionable-drinking/eating spots on Mass-Ave (well know for their "loaded-soda-bread" or "load-a-bread").

Their first meeting went something like this:

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- 1 The Riley Towers were built several decades ago – made from concrete, rebar, and other such materials as to make them very sturdy and almost like bunkers or "pill boxes". They (the 3 towers) are some of the taller buildings just north of downtown Indianapolis. It is rumored, though no one can confirm this, that these towers were built on top of a World War 2 underground research facility – the truth about that facility is poorly understood or documented and the property was sold by the U.S. Government to Halion Corporation (for the purpose of building low-rent housing) during the "Great Society" program under LBJ (President Johnson 1963-1969).
 - 2 The "crystal turning red" is a reference to that great film "Logan's Run" (1976). The plot of this dystopian film is simple: in the future, a bunch of humans inhabit a domed city, a computer program manages the domed city, when you turn 30 a crystal embedded in your palm turns to the color "red" and then you have to report to "Carousel" where if you are lucky you will be "renewed" ... but no one is renewed ... "Carousel" is just a giant murder machine for killing 30 year old people (and keeping the city's population under control). If you don't want to die, you can "run" - and that's where the "run" part of the title comes from. And that's enough of that (watch the fucking movie).

“Hey ... you look familiar ... are you the ... uh ... barista at Starbucks on the circle?”

“No ... *ha* ... nope ...”

“I know you from somewhere ... you work at Cafe Patachou! You're like one of the weekend waitresses or something or other?”

“No ... hey ... is that your BMW?”

“Yeah, it's kinda stupid ...”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh ... I really don't know what I was thinking when I bought that thing ... I guess it's kind of an early mid-life crisis kind of car.”

“You're not middle aged?”

“Uh ... yeah ... I meant *early*.”

“You know we both work at IG-Mag ... I'm just on a different floor.”

“Really ... shit ... sorry ... I guess I made assumptions ... fuck ... I hate when I do that ...”, Tom was flustered. As a senior editor he prided himself on “accuracy”, but he did not stake such claims while ripped (drunk, wasted).

And, Tess, with a cute little smirk remarked, “... yeppers ... you sure did make assumptions ... but it's cool, we're all just people ...”

“Yeah ... people.”

And that was that ...

Now Tess is late for their first “official” date ... well ... she's twenty minutes late, which isn't so bad (just annoying for Tess). Traffic coming from the north of town was horrid that evening and normally she would walk to “the circle”, especially if the outing involved drinks; she had strict rules about drinking/driving. She's late enough to “have him thinking, drinking, and wondering”, and part of the same set-up. She didn't know if he liked her, in the way she is thinking about him, but she's never one to hesitate – this too annoyed people, most of whom, these days, are paralyzed by choices (and the fear that behind every “choice” lay a trap door ... leading to a cave ... with albino crocodiles starved for human flesh).

“OK, so I'm late ...”, Tess said with an adorable smile.

Tom looked up from the bar, his martini in hand, and a “green apple” (a drink) for her, waiting, in front of the stool next to him.

“HELL NO, not late ... but rather ... arriving ... and you look great ... I hope I can say that?”

“You just did and you look dashing ... and arriving it is my good sir ... what is that you're having?”

Tess knew the drink he was having and acted oblivious.

“A dirty martini, for a dirty old man ...”

“You're not that old ... perhaps a little dirty though ... and I'm not that young ...”, she winked ... he smiled ... and she pulled out the stool at the bar and sat down beside him and began sipping her apple flavored alcohol. Her dress was wet ... and what made it worse is that her dress is composed of a sheer fabric, almost (not quite) see-through when wet. She had worn it to work, assuming that the weather would cooperate. She never brought an umbrella ... anywhere. She assumed God would look out for her, and getting wet was just that – a little water, nothing to stress about. Tom didn't mind. He looked down at her red cheeks, her hair that was flattened by the rain, her dress that was adorably, tightly, sticking to her figure, and Tom's grin grew. “Shit, this is a date ...”, is what Tom's thinking. “Fuck, I look like shit”, is what Tess is thinking – and her nervousness made her even more endearing to Tom.

It's 7:45 PM, a Friday night in Indy – and many couples, at this bar and others, were playing games ...

The two of them talked, smiled, laughed, jostled – all part of romantic envelopment; each trying to gain the upper hand and neither sure the other was “that interested”, and both becoming further enthralled as a result.

Tom is nine years older, and this is “borderline” for Tess – but she would willingly cross the border under the right conditions. Sure, Tom's a bit stout ... but it is a hearty kind of Midwest “stoutness” that made him rather handsome. His arms are large, but not fat – more muscular. His hair is black, and his eyes are a dark blue. As she sizes him up, from closer inspection, Tess could see him as “kind of like that Robert Mitchum guy my grandma likes” ... Tess saw the appeal.

Tess had a bad habit of picking up on nearby conversations whenever she was in a public space ...

“Hey ... is this a spider bite?”, asked the trollop down the bar; she was flirting with the bartender and not getting very far. Tess hated spiders, as most normal people do, and she couldn't help but look at that welt on that woman's arm – reddish, raised, “it sure looked like a spider bite”.

“I've heard of spiders and spider issues up around 38th and Meridian ... you know ... in some of the older buildings and shit ... but shit ...”, the bartender plays along, probably for the practice,

probably because the young woman was attractive, in a little-black-dress-slutty kind of way.

There had been a rash of “spider bites” that summer – amongst the homeless mainly, the poor off of Keystone Ave., and ignored by the hipster cadre who frequented the Mass-Ave scene. A professor at IUPUI (Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis), and a local expert on the subject of “spiders” (Arachnologist), Dr. June Moore, investigated this issue for the Mayor's Office – and it was determined that it was mostly a wolf-spider hatching this year that exceeded what was typical for the summer months ... “and there was nothing to be concerned about, and people should just stop worrying” ... totally. That was the position of the journalistic team at the Indianapolis Star (the local newspaper and micro-brew advertising daily).

Tess tried to keep the dialogue rolling, and Tom did his best to assist – but nonetheless, pauses, breaks, cracks in their discourse arose; they stumbled a bit, despite Tess' research and trolling of Tom's FACEBOOK page and other “google” sources.

“So ... any new purchases?”, Tess knew that Tom is into buying silver, physical silver, kind of a nut that way.

“Oh, uh ... yeah ... I hit APMEX³ last week, I've got a whole bunch of Maple Leafs⁴ heading my way ... man ... I do feel weird talking about it.”

“Why?”

“Oh ... people look at you weird when you mention physical 'silver' or 'gold' ... it's like, shit ... they think you live with 200 cats ... somewhere remote ... and keep samples of your own urine in jars ... like some weirdo ...”

“Well, I think it's cool – and not at all weird.”

“You do, really?”, Tom looked quizzical when she said this.

“Yeppers ... totally.”

Tess isn't really into silver or gold or half the stuff Tom mentions; it isn't that she didn't get it, she did “get it” – it was more a question of priorities. Tess liked Tom because Tom met most of her criteria for marriage, and she is a simple woman in many ways:

1. He needs a good job.
2. He must be nice looking.

3 APMEX is an on-line distributor of precious metals. “Gold bugs” and other types visit this site to convert their cash into physical silver or gold which is shipped ... and then buried ... at undisclosed locations ...

4 “Maple Leafs” are Royal Canadian Mint Maple Leafs – 1 ounce silver rounds, coins.

3. Gotta be available (divorced or single, though she preferred “never married” types).
4. Under the age of 40 or no more than 10 years older than her (whichever seemed a more relevant factor).
5. Enough taste to fit in when needed, not so much that he was full of himself or an ass.
6. And taller than her – that is very important (Tess had a “thing” about short men).

Per Tess' criteria, Tom is hitting on all cylinders ...

Tom and Tess drank a few martinis, and “apple-tinis” (for Tess), and enjoyed themselves. Nicky Blaine's stays open late – and their menu offers crust-tini and bruschetta and prawns and cheese/fruit trays and other hipster faire designed to allow normality to fill every crevice of a wayward soul's wretched emptiness ... so everyone could pretend that “stuff was ok” (and everyone knew stuff wasn't ok). Tom and Tess were simple enough people, attempting to live “normal lives”, during an age of over-turning and upside-down and ass-backwards and other kinds of heinous shit that nobody wants to dwell on ... while on a date, on a Friday night.

Tom and Tess were like most ... scraping by in a crazy world that was getting crazier at an increasing rate of crazy.

Tom, Tess, and the rest of the semi-youthful clan at Nicky Blaine's were drinking themselves silly, laughing, smiling, conjuring up visions of each other and themselves that didn't suck so much – and the drink, and evening, was wearing hard.

It was getting late, 2 AM – in an hour the bar would be closed, so they decided to head out, back to the “towers”, home ...

It was August and the humidity was turning to a sticky-fog at this time – condensing on the windshields of cars parked outside. Sure, it was still 65 degrees out ... or 70 - but going from 85 to 65 was a lot, body-temperature-wise. So, Tom and Tess meandered their way up from the recessed realms of Nicky Blaine's and onto the streets.

“Hey-ya ... where'd you park?”, Tom mumbled, not knowing if he was too loud or too quiet.

“Down that way ... um ... I think ...”, Tess pointed, more or less, in the direction of the monument at the center of the circle, where there stood a statue to memorialize the sacrifice of soldiers during that terrible time in American history – the U.S. Civil War.

“What? - nah ... you can't park there ...”, and Tom chuckled a bit ... and Tess smiled ... and Tom grabbed her hand and Tess led the way. She knew where she was parked, she had emptied out

every other “apple-tini” when Tom wasn't looking. She was a country girl, hard core, and she didn't want Tom to think she couldn't hold her spirits – nor did she wish to get so drunk she lost control (another country girl thing). Tess was a little buzzed, perhaps they should have taken a taxi, but she knew where she was going, and Riley Towers were only about a mile away. Her “drunken stumbling” was an act and Tess was setting her trap, little by little ... a woman's trap.

Tess and Tom made their way to the parking garage with the “new” street lamps lighting their way, and these improved lamps were mostly L.E.D. and therefore dim, almost not helpful, even inconsequential. This made Tess think about a magazine article she once read, about North Korea, and how at night the Korean peninsula looked strange – half lit-up, bright ... the other half ... the “North” ... dark, foreboding. She had noticed, in recent years, the lights getting dimmer – and maybe that was just in her mind. But the L.E.D. street lamps? - they mostly sucked.

When they arrived at the parking garage elevator they could sense, by the graffiti and the arrant smell, that “reality” was always nearby, as apparent as the nasty grease accrued on all the elevator buttons ... “press 4 ... I'm on level 4 ...”, Tess whispered, and clasped Tom's hand tighter – Tess didn't like touching those oily buttons.

The elevator creaked and groaned its way up ... and the door made a horrible noise when opening, as if from some Vincent Price 1950's horror film, er, whatever.

“That's weird ... that sound ...”, Tess was a little reticent about parking lots this late (or early).

“Worry not my lady, I shall protect you!”, and Tom, fortified by 6 dirty martinis, was putting on as much bravado as he could. He had walked to the bar, and so he was happy to have the ride home – no matter what happened next.

Tess' car was easy to find. They got in, and she carefully maneuvered the vehicle out of the the lot. The streets were mostly empty, mostly one could hear the noises of stragglers, CHUD, MORLOCK, tregs, and the rest of the under-realm folk that inhabited the streets at 2 AM in Indy. Tess heard nothing, her windows were rolled up and the air conditioning was on. “He's coming home, and now I seal the deal”, and this date looked propitious for Tess ... they weren't going to “do it”, but she would put him to bed in a maternal way and leave him wondering if they did “do it”.

She turned down North Street, heading for the “towers”, and some strange, brownish, greenish lumpy looking thing ran out in front of her car ...

“WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?”

The car swerved when Tess jerked the wheel, Tess reacted as best she could ... but whatever the

hell it was, she ran it over (Tess really, really, hoped it wasn't one of those cute Mass-Ave dogs – the one's that have gay men for parents/owners).

Tom was almost passed out, but he could hear the “ca-dump-clump” noise from underneath Tess' Honda – as drunk as he was, he immediately became alert, “fuck, what was that?”. Then, in the very next breath, Tom passed-out peaceably again.

Tess pulled over to the side of the road. There was plenty of space, this late at night. She wasn't too far from American Legion Mall – a big green-parkish-space for hobos.

“Shit ... fuck ... shit ...”, Tess was frozen. She didn't know how long they were there, parked by the side of the road, but it sure seemed like hours ... it was barely minutes.

Tess wasn't being negligent, sure, she was a little toasted – but not drunk, not really. But, if she were being honest with herself, she sort of broke her rule – the one against “drinking and driving”. She hoped it wasn't a kid ... or some old person ... or someone's pet.

She didn't know what it was and someone had to take a look ...

“Hey ... are we home?”, Tom was fading, but momentarily alert.

“Uh, yeah ... no ... I think I may have hit something ...”

“A dog or something?”

“Yeah ... a dog, er ... something ... I don't want to see”, Tess was shaking.

“Hey, I can go take a look.”

“Hun, I think I should just drive home.”

Tom loved dogs too, and was wary of seeing a dead dog.

“Tom ... be careful ... don't touch anything ... everything is so greasy out right now ...”

“Don't worry hun, I'm ex-military”, Tom had been a boyscout once.

Tess was freaking out, so she turned the radio on - and “Synchronicity 2”, by The Police, was playing ...

Tess watched as Tom walked around to the back of the car and she could see in the rear-view mirror puzzlement on Tom's face ... he shook his head ... and then looked back at Tess, with a very concerned look on his face ...

Many miles away

There's a shadow on the door

Of a cottage on the shore

Of a dark Scottish lake

Many miles away, many miles away ...

Tess' parents loved The Police – especially this one song ...

Now, with Synchronicity-2 playing, and the darkness looming so strong in those early morning hours, Tess wondered about the lyrics – as a marketing major, she had to study some psychology at IU (Indiana University), and she dabbled in a bit of Jung (Carl Gustav Jung) while studying there ...

Tess knew what “synchronicity” was – well, she thought she knew. This idea of 2 or more events, figures, objects, coinciding at some moment in time – revealing “some deeper meaning to shit”, as Tess would say.

And then Tom cried out ...

“WHAT THE HELL!”, and in a flash Tom could no longer be seen in the mirror, he was gone from view ...

Tess had looked away for a moment, to ponder her thoughts around 'Jung' and other crap, and was startled, disoriented, because Tom had seemingly vanished.

Tess rolled down her window, “TOM ... YOU OK?”.

Nothing ...

No response.

Tess had a hatchet in the backseat – she had bought one a few weeks earlier, at Home Depot, because her dad was concerned about her safety ... so a hatchet made sense. She grabbed it, the hatchet, opened the door, and made her way to the back of vehicle – where Tom was, presumably, and the brownish, greenish, lump of “whatever” that had leapt in front of her car.

The thunderstorms of yesterday evening were mostly gone by this juncture, but the sky was not clear – there was a warm hazy, foggy, damp, miserable murk hanging over the city ... suffocating it. Tess walked slowly, tensely, grasping the hatchet with both hands – not quite sure what she would do with the hatchet if something were askew. Though the distance was only a few feet, it took Tess almost a minute to inch her way to the back of her car in order to see what had just happened ... she really didn't want to know what the hell it was, or other kinds of fearful stuff that would only serve to feed her sleepless nights (and her “burgeoning” gray hairs⁵ – she had seen 1 or 2 recently). But Tom was in

5 Tess didn't really have that many gray hairs. As with many at her stage in life, around the age of “30”, she obsessed over the little signs that “youthful forever land” had an ending – and then came middle-age, and old-age, and death. Sure, she knew older people, and she knew it was natural – but that didn't mean easy. So, a couple of gray hairs did freak her out.

trouble, and she had to be a brave country girl ...

What she saw was fucked up.

Tom was lying on the ground next to what appeared to be a hairless dog or coyote or other kind of rabid, diseased, grossly degraded, dead animal. Tess was relieved she hadn't killed a person, and she was further relieved she hadn't killed some “cute Mass-Ave dog”, the ones people had in lieu of human children ... her relief was short lived.

Tess' dad had fought in the first Gulf War back in 1991. Her dad took lots of pictures, and some were really crazy – like the pictures of the camel spiders that inhabited the region. Camel spiders were large, really big, several inches in diameter – they were furry, and mostly not dangerous to people (just scary looking and annoying from what her dad had said). What Tess saw, right there, on Tom's chest looked like a camel spider – but the fur or hair on that spider, the one on Tom's chest, was black (so black that she almost didn't notice it in the darkness). The spider twitched as Tess stood over Tom's body, and then moved a bit ... Tess could see that the spider had bitten through Tom's shirt, and that he was bleeding. Tess was paralyzed with fear, for a moment, but she was Kappa-Kappa-Gamma, and a farm girl, and from Fort Wayne, and “no frigging spider was going to devour her date!”

Tess swung the blunt side of the hatchet at the spider, knocking it off of Tom's body; she then took the hatchet, and with both hands (and bending over) drove the blade into the center of the stunned (but still twitching) spider. The spider was dead, a goo poured out of its abdomen – and Tess dropped the hatchet on the ground.

Tess knelt over Tom, shaking him, and checking to see if he was still breathing – he was. She kept shaking him, for several minutes, screaming ... and a small throng of homeless men and women were gathering nearby, on park benches, to observe the ruckus while drinking their malt liquor. None of these vagabonds helped, why would they? - they knew the likes of hipster-trash when they saw it (and they knew these same assholes would simply walk by as one of them stroked out). But they did enjoy the show, it was probably the best entertainment they'd had in a while.

“Errrr ... hey ... what happened ... shit?”, Tom was coming-to or waking up, he looked dazed, in shock, but he was able to sit up and move.

“SOME GODDAM SPIDER BIT YOU TOM!”

“... what ... ?”

“FUCK, YOU DID'NT NOTICE?”

“... a, yeah ... hell ... let's get out of here.”

“DO YOU WANT ME TO TAKE YOU TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM?”

“NO, no, no, no ... no ... it's just a spider bite ... I'll be fine.”

Tess helped Tom stand up and make his way to the car. Tess started the engine, and they slowly drove off – leaving one dead spider, and one dead “something dog-like”, lying in the road behind them. Her Honda wasn't really damaged, just some congealed blood and puss and greenish/brown stuff covering her front bumper. They were only a few blocks from Riley Towers, and they both needed to “call it a night”.

“... eh ... ah ... hmmm ...”, Tom scratched his chest – there was pain from the bite, and a welt forming, not unlike the one the young woman from last night was displaying at Nicky Blaine's.

“... you ok hun?”, Tess was in full maternal mode.

“Yeah, it just feels ... I dunno ... a little weird ... itchy ... and I'm a bit flushed, probably just in shock from the whole thing ...”

Tess clicked the garage door opener and drove her car into the warm embrace of their apartment complex. She parked, shut off the engine, and sat for a moment staring into space – she was in shock too. Tom, who was messed up and still very drunk, just sat and stared for a bit as well ... a big, blank, stare.

“... hey”, Tess muttered.

“Uh-huh ... yeah?”

“You want to do this again, you know, another date?”

Tom turned to look at Tess, sitting there - her hands still clasping the wheel of the parked car, pausing for a moment.

“Sure ...”

“Great ... great ... that's great ... I feel like this wasn't the best first date ... you know?”

Tom looked at floor of the car, grabbed his face with his right hand, rubbing his cheeks ...

“Yes, this date did suck ... I mean ... it didn't end well.”

“Maybe next Friday night? Movies? My apartment? My roommate Nancy will be volunteering at the shelter, handing out shots or giving people injections or something medical ... I can cook ... I make a mean frozen lasagna”, Tess smiled a little, looking into Tom's haggard face.

“I think, yeah ... I think that would be nice ... I can rent us a movie off of Amazon or something ... a comedy I think.”

“Yes ... a comedy ... something funny.”

“Yes ... er ... funny.”

Tom and Tess made their way to the elevator, they both lived on different floors and Tom got off first – they hugged, no kiss, but it was clear to Tess there would have been a kiss ... if not for that thing she hit, and that fucking giant spider.

When Tess opened the door of her apartment she could see Nancy was still awake, studying, and stressed.

“Nan, what's up?”

“Nothing, nothing, just cramming for Physiology exams ... DID YOU KNOW I HAD TO MEMORIZE THIS BOOK?”

Nancy held up what looked to be a 300 pound tome, and Tess was glad she had finished with school.

“Any who, the exam will be tough, but I'll be ready.”

“I know you will do great Nan ...”

“Probably ...”, and then Nancy settled back into her studying.

Tess opened up the sleeper sofa in the living room, and then she laid down without even taking off her dress (she even left her shoes on). She tried to block the events from memory and she was too tired to explain any of it to Nancy – and Tess knew Nancy would insist on taking her to where it happened (and that wouldn't do). Plus, Nancy had some serious and obsessive phobias regarding “spiders” in general; that whole summer she had been reading every article, and watching every YOUTUBE video, on the “Spid-o-Pocalypse” gripping Indianapolis. She was smart enough to know it was mostly hype and hysteria, but she was creeped out enough, and curious enough, to allow her schadenfreude to take hold (a vicarious and tantalizing fear that Nancy cultivated, her own special fetish).

Tess drifted off, and snored a bit ...

Nancy got annoyed by the snoring, and put on her head phones.

Outside the tower one could hear the well-dressed Forever-21 drunkards making their way back home ... yelling, singing, stumbling, tripping, requiring water and sleep.

The good folk of Mass-Ave were settling down for the night (or morning), and dreaming of a world where, eventually, they would pay off their student loans ... maybe (probably not).

[End of Chapter 1]