

Four Corners

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First few chapters preview

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1. DRIVING INTO TOWN

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It was a hot sticky southern afternoon.

Joyce Madisen, a pretty blonde, drove her '68 Mustang with the windows rolled up, and the air conditioner high. Her favorite Rod Stewart tape played and she sang along with the raspy voice; "if you want my body and you think I'm sexy, come on baby tell me so . . ."

She glanced at her gauges and saw the needle was almost on 'E'.

"Oh, shit. . . ." she said with no small disgust, "you would do this to me." She looked around and saw a sign coming up. Four corners, six miles. Joyce rolled her eyes heavenward and said, "Thank you! Thank you!" She eased back on the speed and prayed her fuel would hold out long enough to get her to the town she hoped would be her salvation.

Night was falling.

Joyce smiled as she came into town and pulled into the first gas station she came to. It had a cashier's cage with a small snack shop attached. There was a youngish, burly man wearing overalls, dark glasses and a plaid shirt with a not too friendly look to him.

She pulled up to the pumps. "Evenin', ma'am, what can I do for you?" He was about six foot even, and he was appraising her coldly from behind the dark glasses. . . .dark glasses at sunset?

"Fill me up, regular." Joyce said. "Do you have a restroom?"

He pointed. "Right around the corner, and they're clean. I know city folks are worried about things like that."

Joyce gave a nervous smile. "Thanks. That's nice to

know.” She got out of the car and walked backward a few steps staring at the man as he filled her car. He was big, with a bulge around his middle.

Joyce did her business then went back to her car. The big man watched her from shaded eyes, trying not to make contact with her. “That’ll be twenty-two fifty.”

“You take plastic?”

“Yeah,”

She handed her card to him and he went to the small cashier’s cage, made out the charge receipt, then came back and handed it to her to sign. As he did so, Joyce watched as the bulge under his clothes seemed to give a slight move, as if the bulge was trying to break loose from the restraint. She looked twice, and was sure the second time. Some thing was under his clothes.

The man took the signed receipt and gave her the customer copy.

“I guess you eat well.” Joyce said. “Is there a place around here I can get a meal and some sleep?”

“Right across the street at the hotel; funny y’all didn’t see it when you drove up.” The big man said. “Sign’s all lit up.”

“I guess when you’re not thinking, you don’t see things.”

“Reckon you don’t.” He watched as Joyce got in her car and drove over to the parking lot of the hotel and coffee shop. At the sight of the coffee shop, Joyce remembered how hungry she was. She parked, and then went inside.

Joyce wondered if she’d made the biggest mistake of her life. There was an empty stool at the counter that she took. She placed her purse at her feet, and smiled at the waitress who wore dark glasses like the big man at the gas station. Joyce smiled, but the woman didn’t smile back.

Were all the people in this town unfriendly?

“What’s on the menu?” Joyce asked, trying to break

the ice.

“Fish is good, fresh caught this morning. We got the best fried chicken in these parts, and there’s still some soup left, that’s corn chowder, made with fresh corn.”

“Of course fresh corn,” Joyce smiled.

“You from New York? You sound like it.” The waitress asked,

“Uhm, yeah, Manhattan; on my way back home from vacation,” replied Joyce.

“I hope you had a good time.”

“I did.” She looked over the menu for a moment, then said; “I’ll have the fried chicken. I really shouldn’t, but I have taste for it tonight.”

“You’ll love it.” The waitress took the menu and placed the order with the cook, who also wore dark glasses.

Joyce looked around as careful as possible.

Everyone wore dark glasses.

This made no sense. Joyce had the feeling that if she asked, she’d get a brush off. As she looked a little closer, doing her best not to look like she was looking, she saw the same peculiar bulge under the clothes. There was a family in a booth in the corner to her right. Even the children and she knew that only when the little boy got up and ran around the restaurant until his father, who had the same bulge as everyone else, got up and grabbed him by the arm and sat him down.

Joyce contained her curiosity as tight as she could. She hoped she could fall asleep tonight now that she had a major bone to chew.

The waitress set her food in front of Joyce who thanked her.

Suddenly, the waitress did a quick frantic wave to someone behind Joyce who turned to see what looked like a young man drop to the ground. Outside of the restaurant, the young man Joyce thought she saw scurried away in a

crawling motion, turned the corner of the building, then got up and ran across the street to the gas station.

“That fool’s gonna try and come in here naked!” The waitress said. “He bet me he’d do it too!” She turned away from Joyce and said to the kitchen; “Get that fool Purdy’s lunch! I don’t know what he thinks he’s gonna do trying to come in here like that! Marshall, you run over to where he is and give him this, and tell him if he does that again, we’re gonna have an extra piece o’ sausage for breakfast! You hear me?”

Joyce laughed as she dug into her food, and she kept an eye on Marshall who picked up two sacks with the food and left. She tried to follow him as he left the store, but didn’t turn her head as he left her sight. Why the excitement?

Joyce had the feeling something was up, and there was some kind of cover up that was going on. It was dark, and even so, Marshall wore a pair of dark sunglasses. It had occurred to Joyce that he never looked in her direction.

What if her frantic little wave wasn’t about a man’s nudity?

As she ate, that funny little feeling she always got when something was going on gnawed at her.

“She just started eating,” Marshall said as he approached the sheriff, Jim Mosley. “Marcy sent me out to get Purdy his lunch. He was gonna try to get in there naked like he said he would, and Marcy chased him off before he could get in on account of that woman. You know she’s sweet on Purdy, but she didn’t want that woman seeing him.”

“It wasn’t for him being butt naked, and you know that, Marshall.” Mosley said. “I saw her license plate. She’s from New York.”

Marshall looked at the coffee shop. “I hope this is just a stopover for her. Hate to see anything happen to her.”

“Me, too,” Mosley said. “If she leaves in the morning,

fine. I don't even want to think about what could happen.” He slapped Marshall on the back. “Go get Purdy his lunch. You know he works the late shift.”

“Yeah,” Marshall walked down about a quarter mile to a dirt road, then another quarter until the main road disappeared behind the trees that hid the building Purdy worked at from view. He walked up to the electrified gate pulling out a plastic identification card, sliding it in to the box's slot that hung next to the electronic lock. Two lights flashed, and he slid his right hand onto a panel with the outline of a hand on it. The gate slid open enough to allow Marshall in, and then closed. He made his way up to the door, stood in front of the camera, waited for the buzz, and then went inside.

“Hey Marshall,”

“Hey Dave,”

“Did Purdy order out?” Dave Marcus asked as he spotted the two sacks in Marshall's hands.

“Naw, but I brought you a ham sandwich, milk and piece of pie.” He handed the sack to Dave who happily opened it.

“Thanks for the pie. Jenny's been on me to lose some weight, and if she finds out I've some of Marcy's pie, she'll kill me.” Dave pulled out the food and placed it on the small table in front of him. “Y'know, this is one the things that drive me crazy with Purdy, his going to get some food and him not asking if I want anything.”

“Didn't Jenny make you a lunch?”

“Yeah, but y'know how it is; Low fat, low calories and low taste,” Dave said. “I just wish she'd let me eat normal. I'd be happier.”

“I'll bet.” Marshall said. “Look, we got a stranger in town, and she's at the coffee shop. I think she planning' to stay overnight, and then go on in the morning. At least I hope so.”

"I hope so too." Dave said "This is the only place I can let all four arms hang out with no problems."

"Well, I envy you. You can be comfortable; I got to be bound up like a turkey at Thanksgiving."

"Why do you think I took this job?"

"Cause your daddy got it for you."

Dave shrugged. "You've got me there." Both men laughed.

"Anyway, I'd better get back. When Purdy gets back, give him his lunch."

"Right, see you later."

"See you later." Marshall left, whistling. Dave turned back to his lunch when he heard the door to his right open. In came Purdue Jackson "Purdy" McClain. He was trying to retie his necktie, which he hated, but it was company policy that employees wear them. He finally made a sloppy knot as Dave looked at him in disgust.

"You just had to try that stunt, didn't you?" Dave said as the younger man went to the desk, saw the other sack and picked it up.

"I told her I would try it." Purdy was a dirty blond haired young man of twenty-three, who lived most of his life in Four Corners. Five foot eight, on the thin side, he had a crooked smile that complemented his bright hazel eyes. " 'sides, the bet's still on."

"Well, I'm glad that stranger didn't see you," said Dave as he lifted his carton of milk. "The last thing we need is some stranger seeing you trying to win some silly bet!"

"She didn't see me." Purdy said as he bit into his sandwich. "Since she didn't see me, ain't no harm done."

Dave shook his head in disgust. "Why do you have to learn everything the hard way?"

"That ain't fair. . ." Purdy started.

"I ain't talking about fair!" Dave exploded. "I'm talking about the lives of everyone in this town! Don't

you get it? We could lose everything if we're found out." He picked up his food and walked away. "You're too damn selfish to be eatin' with."

"Dave, aw, come on!" Purdy said as the older man went to the lunchroom. He slumped on his stool.

Damn him for being right.

2. TRUCKING GONE WRONG

Cody Macabee woke up. He closed his eyes again trying to make the room stop swimming.

It didn't work.

He also couldn't move. He lifted his head and saw he'd been restrained at all four wrists.

At least he still had all four arms. His double pupil eyes searched around the room.

A hospital....

He was in a hospital.

Cody figured he'd been searched, samples taken, and then strapped down.

Wonderful....

He laid his head back, took a deep breath. He had to assume that everything had been taken, and his truck. . .

He gave a heavy, depressed sigh.

It all came back in a rush. Driving down the interstate, he'd hit a patch of ice, the big rig jackknifing uncontrolled, with him fighting it, trying to get stopped, when the truck rolled. He hit his head against something, and was out.

Damn.

Damn again.

This was the last thing he or anyone else from Four Corners needed.

He was grateful for one thing; the liquid he was hauling wasn't flammable. But did any of it leak? They built those tanks to be as bulletproof as possible, but that didn't mean a spill couldn't happen.

Cody shuddered with the fear that what he hauled might get into the water supply. It was extremely toxic, and would burn flesh even if were diluted. He had to call home.

Cody pulled on the straps with all four arms. No good,

the anchors had to be welded to the bed, and the straps were new, and he didn't have the leverage. He stopped struggling.

Voices were coming down the hall toward him.

The door opened, and the bright light forced him to close his eyes and turn his head.

"Well, I guess you're awake." A man's voice said.

"Do you mind?" Cody said. "I can't see you."

"I guess with those double pupil eyes, you would be sensitive to bright light." The man said.

"Very good," Cody said. "You now have two dollars, would you like to try for four?"

"There's no need to be sarcastic. . ." the man said.

"Being tied down does nothing for my mood," returned Cody. "Why am I tied down?"

"Well, son, we're not too sure about you." Another man said as the room lights came on. "Here you are driving a truck. . ."

"Not against the law," said Cody.

". . . You've got four arms. . ." the second man continued.

"Still not against the law,"

"We tested the stuff you were hauling'. That stuff was so toxic it'll burn on contact. Where were you hauling it?" The second man asked.

Cody turned to the voice and a craggy face with balding head came into focus. The man the questioning voice belonged to had pale gray eyes and disappearing brown hair that was graying at the temples. "Did it spill?"

"You know that stuff is toxic?" baldy asked.

"Why do you think my company put a disposal facility twenty miles away from the plant? It was a safety measure." Cody said his eyes closing. "Did any of it spill?"

The four people that entered the room looked at each

other.

“I’m dealing with assholes here. DID IT SPILL? Do I have to paint a sign for you?” Cody was exasperated. “Lord, wood floats.”

“What do you know about it?” asked baldy.

Cody lifted his head and banged it against his pillow. “DID THAT SHIT SPILL?! THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO ASK ASSHOLE!! DID IT SPILL?!?”

The room went silent for a long time. The bald man said; “Look, you have to understand we are curious. . .”

Cody looked as if he was going to sink through the bed. “Lord, they must be government people, that’s the only reason why I can’t get the answer I need. . . Give me strength, please.”

“It didn’t spill.”

“Thank you. Finally...!” Cody said his body relaxing. “Can we have some names to go with these faces? I figure you’ve already gone through my wallet.”

The bald man looked at his companions, and their looks all said the same thing: Cody would say nothing until he knew who he was talking to, and very little then.

The craggy bald man spoke first. “My name is Taylor, Dane Taylor, Department of Unusual Phenomena. When your accident was reported, and you were found unconscious, I was called in.”

There’s a Department of Unusual Phenomena?” Cody was incredulous.

“Don’t laugh. What with aliens with star bases, and who knows what, we figure it’s best to be prepared.” Taylor said.

“That explains why I’m strapped down,” reasoned Cody. “I guess I would fall under your jurisdiction. I really need this like a hole in the head.” He thought a moment, and then asked, “Did anyone other than you and

the witnesses see me?”

“The trucker who found you did. Your shirt had been ripped, and he quite clearly saw your other arms.” Taylor told him. He glanced at the others in the room. All could see the wheels turning in his head.

“I take my one phone call is out of the question?” Cody asked.

“No, it isn’t. But we would like to ask you some questions.” Taylor said.

Cody sighed. “Look, I’m a mutant. I was born this way.”

The first man spoke up. “Uhm, my name is Doctor Thurston Harris.” He held out his hand then caught himself when he realized Cody couldn’t take it in return. “Do you know what caused your mutation?”

“No, I don’t.” Cody said. “I’m not a scientist.” Cody knew he was lying, but it was in self-defense. In truth, he held two degrees in chemical engineering, and one in biological engineering. He most likely knew more than this whole team of experts now in his room.

“You know, Cody, lying is not very good.” Dane Taylor said. “While you were unconscious, I looked you up; Three degrees, with two in chemical engineering, one in bioengineering. Why would a truck driver need that kind of education?”

Cody groaned on the inside. He was hoping they hadn’t looked him up while he was out. He felt the stares burn into him. “Mind if I plead the fifth for now? I really would like a lawyer present for any questioning.”

“Until we know different, you’re still a citizen of the U.S.” Taylor said. “One way or the other, we will find out.”

“Joy beyond words,” Cody spoke. “May I make my call?”

“Why not...?” Taylor said. He turned to Harris. “Un-

strap him . . .”

“You think that’s wise?” Harris was nervous about Cody as it was, he didn’t want to untie him at all.

“A man with three degrees is not stupid. Am I right, Cody?” Taylor said.

“I don’t care to be shot while making a daring escape. Too fifties and I would like to stretch. I’m staying put,” said Cody.

Harris was not happy and he looked at Taylor. “Are you sure about this?”

“If it makes you feel any better, Harris, I don’t trust you either. You look real eager to slice me up.”

“Now wait a minute!” Harris started.

“Un-strap him..!” Taylor said firmly. “We’ve got the trunk guns ready.”

Doctor Harris pulled set of keys out of his pocket, chose one, and then unlocked the straps. Cody got up slowly as Harris quickly backed away. Stopping in mid-rise to allow his head to clear, Cody took several deep breaths, his lungs filling to their limit, and then exhaling. He sat up, braced himself with his two lower arms while rubbing his head and neck with the upper pair.

A woman approached him. “You have double pupils in your eyes.”

“You have single pupils in yours.” replied Cody, removing the hospital robe to examine his sore left side. “Oh, man!” He touched it gingerly, “Barbecued. . .” He looked at Harris. “Where are my clothes?”

“I told you he was going to try to leave!” Harris said moving closer to the door.

“I’ve got more to fear from you than you have of me. I’d like to walk down the hall like a decent person. Do you mind you panicky jackass?” Cody said. He slid off the bed and went to the closet. “Thank you, Lord, my bag is here!”

Cody was completely indifferent to his nudity. His every move was economical as he dressed from the undamaged clothes in the tough canvas covered Kevlar bag. Out came the pants (he never did like underwear), then a four-armed shirt.

“Your other shirt wasn’t four armed. . .” the woman said.

“How many times in the movies or television do you see an actor wear clothes to disguise that he’s only playing handicapped? In my case, it’s the reverse.”

“Aren’t you afraid of peoples’ reactions?” She asked.

“What’s your name?”

“Ah, Doctor Theresa St. Thomas.” She said, a bit nervous.

“Well, Doctor St. Thomas, I have been seen, and there’s no way for me to deny what I am, not that I would. I’d prefer that no one knew, but I have no doubt that I have been seen by more people than you can keep quiet.” He zipped shut the bag, then finished dressing. “Damn.” He turned to Taylor. “I take it we leave now?”

“What do you mean?” asked Taylor.

“Don’t play stupid. You are waiting for me to be released, aren’t you?” Cody asked.

“Well, yes.” replied Taylor.

“Let’s get on with it. I need to make my call.” Cody reached into a side pocket of the bag and pulled out a pair of dark glasses and put them on. He opened the door and was grateful for the glasses. Camera flashes went off in his face and there was a woman with her cameraman who stuck her microphone in his face and said; “Katherine McKinley, CNN. Who are you, are you an alien, and are you part of a vanguard of some invasion fleet?”

“Tell me, are you really a journalist, or do you always go around asking silly questions?” Cody asked with disgust.

“Well, let’s face it, a four armed man in a trailer truck accident? That is a story, you know.” McKinley said. “Look, just a few questions, okay?”

“You know something?” Cody said, “People like you are like alcoholics, one question’s too many, and a thousand don’t begin to satisfy you.”

“Look, I’m just the first, and there a lot more outside.” She said as she and her cameraman kept pace with Cody. “You don’t realize you can give me an exclusive and get out the back way.”

“I can still get out the back way without talking to you.” said Cody.

“Really...?” McKinley told him. “I know the guy walking with you is from the DUP. Dane Taylor is one of the best they’ve got, and if he’s here, there’s a story. You’re it.”

A heavy silence hung over the hall as Cody thought about it. She would have to be right. If there had to be speculation, at the very least there could be something behind it. He didn’t have to tell everything. He spotted a clock on the wall. Four a.m., and already he hated himself for what he had to do to get out of there.

“Let me make a couple of calls.” Cody said. “That hand basket to hell is getting hotter by the minute.”

“Where are you placing the call?” McKinley asked as Cody fished for his wallet out of his bag.

Cody grinned wickedly and said: “Darlin’, that’s why you do research.”

The first went to his home to inform his father he was all right.

“Pop?”

“Cody, you all right, Boy?” Bodine Macabee asked anxiously as he silently gave thanks for his son being alive. “When we heard about the crash, we feared the worst.”

“Well, I’ll tell you right now, pop, I ain’t doing too well right now. You hear of a Department of Unusual Phenomena?”

“Oh, dear Lord..! They got you boy?” Bodine asked.

“I never heard of them.” Cody said.

“Boy they were set up after all the stuff happened in California, They investigate things like you and me and this town. I’ll get Billy over to their headquarters in Atlanta. I know you were seen, so all I can tell you is say as little as possible, you gonna call the company?”

“Yeah,”

“You do that. I’ll notify the mayor and Gertie. She’ll tell the rest of the town; any news people there?”

Cody looked at McKinley, a frown forming on his face. “Unfortunately, yes.”

Bodine went silent for a moment. “All I can say, boy, is just telling them as much truth as you think you can get away with. Lord knows they’re gonna blow it out of proportion any way. . .”

“Tell me about it, pop. I’m callin’ the company now.” Cody said. “Pray for us, pop.”

“Everybody started already, boy.” Bodine said as he hung up.

The second call.

“Dave?”

“Cody? Thank God you’re alive!” Dave Marcus said. He was sitting at a computer console that displayed a map showing where Cody and the big rig were. The light flashed alternate green/red. . . Signaling an accident, but the rig was intact.

“I don’t know how you’re gonna feel after I tell just how deep we’re in it. I haven’t seen the truck yet, but I’ve been told by the locals that it’s still intact. If it is, I’ll drive to the disposal site and they’ll take it from there.”

“Right; well, my board says the same thing. The

sensors say that nothing leaked, although someone took a sample amount from the tank, probably for analysis. All I can say is be careful, man. That stuff hasn't been neutralized yet, and I don't even want to think of what happens if we get into a disaster situation." Dave said. "If it were up to me, I'd have you sit tight until we got a team to you." He paused and thought about it for a moment. "I tell you what, sit tight, and don't let anyone near that truck. I'll have a team get to you within four hours to take over from you. They'll have a new tractor to pull it and haul your tractor back to the shop for any needed work. See if you can get a hotel room and call from there. You might want to get some sleep, this gonna be a long one, Cody."

"I know. Tell everyone I'm sorry." Cody said.

"Nobody's gonna blame you. It wasn't your fault." Dave said.

"Yeah, right," Cody said.

The two men let it hang in the air. Thirty years they kept the secret of Four Corners and its people. When he walked out the room he'd made the calls, now it would be all over.

Cody didn't like himself very much now. "Bye, Dave."

"Good luck, we're praying for you." Dave said.

It took Cody a while to put the phone back since he'd made his calls and there wasn't anything he could do until the relief team got here. Now he had to deal with the reporter, DUP man, and try to find a place to sleep.

He wished he hadn't forgotten the hose for his fan.