

Run for your Life - Leseprobe

There's only one street running through the little town of Naschitti. Naschitti is located in the New Mexican part of the Navajo Nation, the homeland of the Navajo Indians. The largest Indian reservation in the United States, the Navajo Nation is twice the size of Belgium but has got less than 3% as many inhabitants. It is located where the four states of Arizona, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico come together to form the so-called Four Corners region. The countryside is beautiful. Tourists come from all over the United States and Europe to see and take photos of the wide valleys, sharp cliffs and flat-topped hills called mesas. On their way to the next spectacular view, they don't usually stop in the rundown little towns like Naschitti. Why should they? There's nothing there they would want to photograph anyway.

Navajos are a proud but poor people. They've had a hard history. White Americans haven't been good to them. The result is reflected in the statistics: the jobless rate at nearly 50%, widespread drug abuse and drinking, the teen-age suicide rate three times higher than the national average, and the murder rate four and a half times the national average. Put simply, the statistics say that the homeland of the Navajos is a troubled place.

16-year-old Cassie Straydeer, who lived in Naschitti with her mother and brother, tried not to think about these things. But they were always there somewhere in the back of her mind, and Cassie sometimes found herself wishing them away, wishing for a better life – the kind she saw on TV, with large comfortable homes, green lawns and shiny new cars in the driveway.

Otherwise, the little Straydeer family was doing just fine, thank you. They got by on the welfare checks their mother received once a month from the government. It was enough to live on and Cassie herself earned a little money babysitting, enough for things like the BBQ potato chips she liked so much.

Today, as usual, she stopped in at the little corner store on her way home from school. Cilly Slipshaw was sitting where she always sat, behind the cash register. When she saw Cassie come in, she hardly looked up from her magazine to nod at her. Cassie said hi and went directly to the back of the store. A moment later, she was back at the cash register with a large bag of BBQ potato chips and a six-pack of Pepsi in her hand. Cilly looked up again briefly as Cassie paid and put the two items in her backpack.

As she hurried along the street on her way home, she was singing a song to herself and trying to think of what was on television that afternoon. When she noticed the dog, it was standing in the middle of the street not more than fifteen yards ahead of her. She stopped.

Her heart began to pound wildly. It was Thor, the Pit Bull Terrier belonging to old Sam Trujillo. Sam wasn't allowed to let his dog run free – Thor had attacked and injured several other dogs - but when Sam was hitting the bottle Thor sometimes got out of the house alone.

'Run!' shouted a voice in Cassie's head. Another voice said, *'Don't move!'* She stood very still, fighting to keep her nerves under control.