

KNEE HIGH BY THE 4TH OF JULY

By Jess Lourey

Chapter 1

It was the first Thursday in July, the hottest month in Minnesota. The thermometer was busting my hump at a moist 76 degrees, and it wasn't even 8 a.m. The Channel 7 news, the only channel that came in clearly at my doublewide in the woods, was predicting the hottest July in history. The humid, sticky weather made the whole state feel like a greenhouse, or the inside of someone's mouth. As a direct result, people who had to work were cranky, people on vacation were ecstatic, and crops were growing like a house on fire. Locals said that if the corn were knee high by the Fourth of July, it would be a bumper crop. We were two days shy of that mark and the corn was already shoulder high on a grown man. That strangeness should have been a warning to us all.

I stepped out of the shower into the sauna of my bathroom, wrapped my wet hair into a towel, and crossed the house to flick on the morning news. The droplets of water on my naked body felt deliciously cool against the heavy morning air.

Ring.

A phone call while the sun is still pinking the horizon never bodes well, particularly for someone like me who was lucky enough to have been within two feet of one fake corpse and two real ones in as many months. I let down my hair and rubbed it, stirring up the spicy smell of rosemary ginger shampoo.

Ring.

I tossed the towel over the back of a chair and reached for a pair of tattered jean shorts.

Ring.

I threaded the button fly and reached for a midnight blue tank top with a built-in shelf bra to rein in the booblets.

Ring. My answering machine clicked over, and whoever was calling hung up. *Must not have been important.* I unclenched my shoulder blades and went to brush my teeth. I squeezed out a pea-sized glob of Tom's of Maine cinnamon toothpaste, trickled a little water on it, and started scrubbing.

Ring.

Shit. I ran through a list of people I knew who could be dead or hurt, of money I owed, and of anyone who might be mad at me.

Ring.

The sigh came from the bottom of my soul. I was gonna have to answer that phone. A few years ago, I could have ignored it, but the older I got, the less reliable my denial mechanism became. I wondered what other cruel tricks my looming thirties had in store for me. That simultaneous wrinkles-and-pimples one was my favorite so far.

"Hello?"

"Mira James, please." The male voice had an East coast inflection and a monotone delivery, as if the speaker were reading off a card.

"Speaking."

"Hello, Ms. James!" I could almost see the exclamation point quivering in the air. "How are you today?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

“I’m good, thank you! Tell me, Ms. James, has love found you?”

I pulled the cordless phone back from my ear, looked at it, found no hidden cameras, and pushed it back to my head. “What’s this about?”

“It’s about helping you find love. Are you single or married?”

“Who is this? Are you asking me out?”

I heard a rustling of pages, a quiet second of reading, followed by tinny laughter. “Why no, Ms. James. I’m calling to find out if you’d be interested in joining Love-2-Love, the new online dating service from Robco. We have thousands already entered in the system, and one may be your soul mate!”

Cripes. I needed a soul mate like a monkey needed a bikini wax. “Yeah, no thanks.”

“Registering is free and easy, Ms. James! Save yourself from a lifetime of loneliness. Let me read you a testimonial from some of our newest customers.”

“Do you know it’s 7:30 a.m. in Minnesota?”

“This is from Becky Rafferty, West Virginia: ‘Before Love-2-Love, dating was a tedious process that involved many hours of picking through unsavory men in the hopes of finding a good egg. Now, Love-2-Love chops that time in half!’”

“Nothing personal. I know this is just your job, but I’m really not interested.”

“Check out what *Doctor Alan Rotis* of Pennsylvania had to say. ‘Like you, I was suspicious of online dating. That was before I met my beautiful wife, Lora. Thanks, Love-2-Love!’”

I wondered what hellacious karma debt had placed my name on this phone list. Had I smashed a bunny on my way home from work? Cut off a nun in traffic? Accidentally killed someone? Ooh. Maybe this was payback for not pursuing a relationship with the post-operative transsexual professor I had been set up with in June. Man, somebody somewhere was keeping a close eye on the score. “I have to go to work.”

Another riffling of papers. “I understand, Ms. James. You’re happy without love in your life, with no one to take romantic walks with at night or to smile into your eyes as you wake up. Could I give you our web address in case you change your mind and decide you don’t want to die alone?”

“Sure.”

“Do you have pen and paper?”

I had my car keys in one hand and the doorknob in the other. “Yup.”

“OK, it’s www.love2love.com. The ‘2’ is a written as a numeral.”

“Got it. Bye.”

“Thanks. And rememb-”

I clicked the “end” button, tossed the phone on the couch, let out my calico kitty Tiger Pop and Luna, my German Shepherd-mix foster dog, and was out the door. Nobody likes to be told they’re in for a lifetime of loneliness, but for me, the issue was especially painful. I had formally filed love in the junk drawer of my mind two months ago, right about the time my erstwhile boyfriend, Jeff Wilson, turned up murdered in the Pl-Sca aisle of the Battle Lake Library, a bullet hole drilled through his forehead. There’s nothing quite like finding your man dead at work to turn a gal off dating for a spell.

The downside to this out-of-sight, out-of-mind philosophy of mental health and romance was that when I finally found someone worth opening the junk drawer for, it was going to be messy. In the meanwhile, I really *was* happy with myself, and it didn’t hurt that I had a good, detachable showerhead and reliable water pressure. I also had been attending a Community

Education class early Saturday mornings taught by Johnny Leeson, local horticultural hottie. The next class was called the Second Sowings of Lettuce and Beets, but what was more pressing was Johnny's curling golden hair, strong hands, and the smell of sun-heated black dirt and spicy greens that followed him. Something about his organic quality turned me into an idiot in his presence, so I admired from a distance, keeping my junk drawer tightly closed.

When thoughts of Johnny weren't enough to keep me company, I took emotional isolation to a whole new level with Chief Wenonga. Aah, the Chief. Twenty-three well-sculpted feet of dark alpha male forever guarding the shores of Battle Lake. He was the perfect man if one overlooked the blatant racist stereotyping and the fact that he was a giant fiberglass statue. If he had been in the Love-2-Love system, I might have joined. The Chief visited many a dream of mine, all strong and silent, sporting a full headdress, six-pack abs on a half-naked body, tomahawk in one hand, and the other hand raised in a perennial "How."

The Chief, or at least his statue, had been in Battle Lake for exactly twenty-five years this July. The Battle Lake Chamber of Commerce had originally commissioned the figure as a tribute to the flesh and blood Chief Wenonga, an Ojibwe leader who gave the town its name in 1795 in honor of a fierce battle with the Dakota. The Chief was my favorite part of summering in Battle Lake. Or at least that's what I would call what I was doing if I were rich. Since I wasn't, I called it house sitting for my friend Sunny and holding down one job running the Battle Lake Public Library and another as a reporter. The newspaper I worked for, the *Battle Lake Recall*, came out every Wednesday and sold for fifty cents.

Matter of fact, I had just gotten promoted and now wrote my own column, "Mira's Musings," which was a nice addition to the weekly recipe feature, "Battle Lake Bites," that I also penned. My new column ran on the back page of the *Recall*. There was even a tiny black-and-white photo of me that ran with it. It was so fuzzy that my long brown hair looked dark gray, my freckled skin looked light gray, and my gray eyes looked black. It didn't really matter because as far as I was concerned, no headshot was going to show my best qualities—my brain and my ass.

I was granted "Mira's Musings" because news seemed to find me in Battle Lake, first in the shape of Jeff whose lifeless body I discovered in the library in May, and then again in June when I uncovered the mystery of the disappearing jewels on the shore of Whiskey Lake. Ron Sims, the editor for the *Recall*, hadn't asked for any specific content when he assigned me the weekly column ten days ago, but I assumed he wanted me to write about murder and money when I could find them and gossip and garage sales when I couldn't.

It was because of this position as star reporter that I was on my way to the Chief Wenonga Days final planning meeting. Every July, to celebrate the man who had named the town and the coming of his statue a couple hundred years later, Battle Lake hosted a three-day festival. It was always scheduled the weekend closest to the Fourth of July so the town could double-dip on the tourists. Wenonga Days perennially included Crazy Days and a street dance on Friday, a kiddie carnival with turtle races, a parade, and fireworks on Saturday, and a bike race, pet and owner look-alike contest, 5K run, and all-town garage sale on Sunday. The planned revelry this year would be extraordinary, though, because the Chief statue was twenty-five. The festival happenings weren't in the hands of the citizens of Battle Lake, however.

The Wenonga Days final planning meeting was only a formality designed to make the entire town feel involved without letting them actually have any say. Kennie Rogers, the town mayor and resident busybody, was the mastermind behind the festivities, and she wanted to keep it that way. I knew for a fact that she had organized the entire weekend, including booking a country group for the street dance and getting local high school bands and organizations like the

Girl Scouts signed up for the parade, last summer. Normally, she opened the final planning meeting to the public two weeks before Wenonga Days so that there was a semblance of town involvement without enough time to actually change anything. This year, however, Kennie had been out of town until late yesterday to receive some hush-hush training, and she refused to allow the Wenonga Days pretend planning to begin until she returned. I suppose I could have skipped the meeting, particularly because the paper wouldn't come out until Wednesday, three days after Wenonga Days was over, but I had promised Ron I would cover it.

I sniffed at my armpits as I drove my rusty, light brown 1985 Toyota Corolla to the meeting in town and wondered if the unrefined rock deodorant I had picked up at Meadow Farm Foods outside of Fergus was going to hold back the floodgates. The lush hardwoods lining county road 83 looked tropical, but there were no birds singing. It was too crazy hot. I propped my left foot on the top of my driver's side door and splayed my blue-painted toenails, redirecting the tepid morning breeze that was pawing at my wet, half-combed hair. The other foot was holding the gas pedal at a constant 62 miles per hour as I navigated the snake curves of Whiskey Road with only my right hand on the wheel. This was the coolest I was going to get all day.

I pulled up to the stop sign at the intersection of County Roads 83 and 78. On my right was Larry's grocery store, across the street was Stub's Supper Club, and to the left was the old granary. I turned north on 78, also called Lake Street, and drove the two blocks to the Battle Lake Public Library. The yellow brick building was barely ten years old and an incongruity in a tiny town. William T. Everts, a man who made his fortune in the lumber industry and a beloved mainstay in Battle Lake until his death a decade ago, had bequeathed his entire estate to create it.

The library was located on one corner of Lake and Muskie. First National Bank, Area Lakes Dental, and a temporarily abandoned building that once housed Kathy's Klassy Klothes occupied the other three corners. I had noticed some activity in Kathy's Klassy windows lately, and word on the street was that soon a quilting shop—or maybe a kwilting shop—would occupy the building. Alongside each of these cornerstones were knick-knack and antique stores, a bakery, two hardware stores, a drugstore, a post office, a Lutheran church, and various service offices—chiropractor, accountant, realtor. It was a full-service small town with something for everyone.

I parked my car in the "Librarian's Spot" behind the library and hoofed it the half block to the Chamber of Commerce office for the final planning meeting. The sun beat down on my dark hair like a blow torch, and I wondered if blondes stayed cooler in the summer. By the time I got to the Chamber, sweat droplets were tickling my lower back and gathering in the spot where my cleavage would be if there was any fairness in this world. As it was, the sweat trickled to my belly button, unimpeded by my A-cups.

The gathering was scheduled to last from eight to ten, but I would need to ditch a little early to open the library on time. The Chamber of Commerce shared a squat, one-story brick building with the post office. The main room was designed to hold up to forty people for town meetings, and today, it was full to bursting. I shook my head, amazed that that so many townspeople had a stake in the events of Wenonga Days, 25th anniversary or not. Didn't everyone know the planning wasn't for real? A loud yet calm female voice broke through the din.

"I understand that. I'm just saying that to dedicate a town and a weekend to celebrating the objectification and stereotyping of a whole race of people is a blatant exercise of hegemonic privilege, no matter how much business it brings to Battle Lake."

The people in the crowded room murmured their affront, both at the content and length of her words. I couldn't see the speaker, and I didn't recognize her voice. It had a strange lilt, like she was singing the middle of the sentences. I elbowed closer to get her in view.

"We'all are *honoring* the Chief." Kennie Rogers was not hard to find. She was at the front of the room, one hand on the podium and the other on her hip. Her clothing was muted, for her: platform flip flops, black and white calfskin capris, a white pleather fringed belt that distracted from her overspill of skin in the thigh/genital area, a suede vest over a yellow tank top not up to the challenge, a peacock-feather choker, what appeared to be teepee earrings, and I swear she wore a beaded headband. She had curled her brittle, white-blonde hair around it, sort of like a living stage starring her hairline. Her makeup reinforced the tacky Indian theme started by her clothes—nude lipstick, maroon blush troweled just under her pale cheek apples to imply stark cheekbones, the same color on each side of her nose to make it look fierce, and shades of brown eye shadow caked above her fake eyelashes.

Welcome to Battle Lake. I jostled my elbows some more, still unable to spot the woman who believed it was worth her time to argue about the objectification of American Indians with a 38-year-old Norwegian dressed like Porn Pocahontas.

"I recognize that you feel you are honoring the Ojibwe with your festival," the voice broke in.

I finally caught sight of the speaker, standing two rows from the back. She was wearing a taupe pantsuit, strawberry blonde hair pulled back in a loose ponytail, revealing a strong-featured, make-up free face. She looked about my age, late twenties or early thirties, and gave an overall impression of capability. I could tell by the lines around her generous mouth that her normal facial expression was a smile. This morning, however, she was all grim business. She pushed back her jacket sleeves to continue, and I was surprised by the Celtic tattoos on each of her wrists belying her otherwise conservative appearance.

"However, to promulgate the stereotype of Indians as savages, to celebrate capitalism with your 'Crazy Days' on what used to be consecrated ground, and to disregard the historical significance of the Battle Lake conflict with a kiddie carnival and parade is disrespectful to Native Americans, and to those who respect individual human value." Her words were clipped, and I got the impression she was dumbing down her speech for this audience.

Her points ignited a louder buzz throughout the room, but Kennie drowned it out. "What did you'all say your name was?"

"Dr. Dolores Castle. I am a Professor of Native American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, and I represent the People for the Eradication of American-Indian Stereotypes."

PEAS. I had always wondered if groups came up with the acronym and then a name to fit it, or vice versa. In this case, I assumed they thought up the name first because the green vegetable was not really associated with crusading strength. Asparagus, I could see. Peas, no.

I turned my attention from Dr. Castle to the people watching her. Most wore a mask of Bewildered Anger, the official talisman of rural Minnesotans confronted by liberal progressives. There was no way she understood the depths of institutionalized stereotyping she was up against. Battle Lake even had a tradition of substituting Indian "warriors" (basically Shriners in face paint, fake leather pants, and moccasins) for clowns at the Wenonga Days parade. I knew the town wasn't trying to maliciously malign anyone, but I also knew how the celebration would appear to the rest of the world. It was only five years ago that Battle Lake finally replaced the high school mascot, a stereotypical Indian warrior chief they called The Battler, with a bulldog, and that change had been hotly contested.

Dr. Castle continued. “We don’t want you to stop your festival. We are just asking that you rename it and remove all Indian caricatures from your region, including Chief Wenonga.”

The whispering crowd suddenly went whip-silent.

“Remove...” my voice cracked as I went from observer to participant in light speed. Suddenly, she was hitting a little too close to home with this talk about taking my big man away, and it slapped me right off my judgmental pedestal. I raised my voice to get her attention. “You mean remove Chief Wenonga *actors* from the *parade*, right?”

“I mean remove the statue of Chief Wenonga from the town.”

My stomach plummeted and the room got a little hazy as a net of panic encircled me. Then, for a nanosecond, I saw the beauty in this idea. He could come live with me. We wouldn’t have any misunderstandings about whose job it was to take out the garbage or arguments about my emotional inaccessibility. Oh no. Just clear expectations. He’d be there when I needed him, always. And then my brain fluttered back to reality. The Chief wasn’t mine. If he left Battle Lake, I’d never see him again, and neither would anyone else. Suddenly, the audience of nearly fifty people erupted with wild talk and outraged looks. Dolores Castle held her ground, hands crossed serenely at her waist.

“Silence!” Battle Lake Head of Police Gary Wohnt pounded the podium with a gavel he got from I don’t know where. The crowd didn’t stop talking, but they hushed their voices. Gary had that effect on people. He was big like a bull, with dark eyes and hair, and his itchy silences could elicit confessions from the dead. I didn’t like him, which made sense: he was pompous, he applied Carmex like his life depended on it, and he always caught me at my worst, usually around dead or seemingly dead bodies. What I didn’t understand was why he didn’t like me.

“Are there any other general objections for the Wenonga Days Festival before we continue with the planning?”

I think Wohnt meant this as a segue and not a serious inquiry, but to his chagrin, Les Pastner stood up. Les was a card-carrying local militia guy, and he had run against Kennie in the last mayoral election on the platform of “Les is More.” He had lost.

Les owned the Meat and RV Store right off of 210 where he sold used Winnebagos and wild game that he smoked in-house. When business was slow in the winter, he worked odd carpentry jobs around town, bitched about the government, and spread rumors that the police left him alone because they knew he was sneaky and fast. Except for running for mayor last summer, he mostly blended in. Apparently, though, Les’ activism was cyclical, and we were witnessing his annual blossoming. He stood in the center of the Chamber, atremble in his fatigues, all five foot two inches of him tensed. His close-set features, which had always made me feel like I was talking to the three finger holes of a bowling ball, seemed darker than usual.

“I been quiet for too long, and I ain’t gonna be quiet no more!”

I could see Les’s eyes get disorganized, and I wondered if he had missed a dose of some medication. He puffed himself up, which only served to make his face redder and his features deeper-set.

“We don’t honor the white man! When do we have White Man Days? Nuthin’ against the Indians, but it’s about time the white man gets some. That’s all I’m saying. You don’t see no statue of any big white man in Battle Lake. We need to get rid of Wenonga, get us a big white man, and have White Man Days in July!” And just like that, Les deflated and fell back into his seat.

The room underwent a collective headshake. Who would have thought anyone had the time to object to a once-a-year festival in a tiny town, and here we had two serious protestors,

one who was even articulate? This was the last thing I had expected from the meeting. The ironic part was that Dr. Castle and Les kind of wanted to get the same thing out of this meeting—no more Wenonga. I considered, as a concession, informing Les that every day was White Man Days in Otter Tail County, but I didn't want to lose my hair in the angry mob scene *that* would create.

I scanned the front of the room. Gary Wohnt appeared to be on an inner mental voyage, and Kennie's mouth was opening and closing like a wide-mouth bass on land. Somebody needed to pull this meeting back on track, and soon, because I needed to open the library and didn't want to miss the good stuff. I was about to step up when a reedy voice cut through the crowd.

"Bullshit. You two are singing in the key of crap." Mrs. Berns, my favorite octogenarian, was pointing a bony finger each at the doctor and Les. "As long as we have Chief Wenonga, we're having Wenonga Days, and a 20-plus-foot statue ain't going nowhere. So stop with the malarkey and get on with the planning. If I don't get back to the home by 9:30, I don't get my snack."

Mrs. Berns had been a peripheral player in the last two adventures I had been swept up in. She had even turned out to be a pretty good informant considering she lived in the Senior Sunset, the local nursing home and not exactly what you'd think would be a hotbed for clues. Turns out the old-homers were a force to be reckoned with and had the best dirt in town. Sometime last month, Mrs. Berns had also created and then applied for an assistant librarian position at the library, and she was making me proud I had hired her. Despite a randy streak that often found her dancing suggestively and wearing see-through blouses and no bra, she was a good worker and a practical woman, which was my favorite kind.

Mrs. Berns' interjection yanked Kennie out of her reverie and back into her Southern denial mode. "I do declare, it's time to plan a party!" PEAS, Les, and all things unhappy were dismissed. Reality got in line behind Kennie.

That was my cue to leave—the library was waiting. Surprisingly, I enjoyed the job. If you had asked me as a girl what I wanted to be when I grew up, I wouldn't have said "librarian." Actually, I probably would have said "cat," but I've always been a dreamer. Currently, I lacked the degree and the skills to ever be a real librarian, but under the circumstances, the town was happy to have me. And I was happy to be here, mostly. The library perfectly joined my love of organization and books.

I liked the job less on days like today, however. My shift was a whirlwind of clearing out paperwork, answering a mad influx of tourists' questions ("If I like Janet Evanovich, who else would I like?", "Can I check out the magazines?", "Do you give library cards to out-of-towners?", "Where would I find that purple children's book about the bear?") and shelving books, leaving me no time to draft "Mira's Musings" or write my recipe column or even to find out what came of the uproar at the pretend planning meeting. In fact, I was forced to stay late to catch up on my daily paperwork and didn't leave the library until 8:00 pm.

When I stepped outside the air-conditioned door, the hot, muggy air hit me like a blast from a kiln. My hair wilted to my head like a skullcap, and the last bit of energy was broiled out of me. The tar parking lot felt soft and sticky and reeked of cooked gravel and blistering motor oil as I walked to my car. I was smart enough to pull my tank top over my hand before grabbing the metal door handle. Once in, I rolled down all four windows, moved the emergency blanket to cover the volcanic naughahyde that was the front seat, cranked the radio, and headed for home.

When I pulled up to the mailbox at the end of my mile-long driveway seven minutes later, I realized I was too tired to eat, forget about calling around to find out what had come of

the planning meeting today. I parked the car in the shade of the lilac bushes, near where both Luna and Tiger Pop were resting. Luna thumped her tail and Tiger Pop opened one eye when I pet them, but that was about all the welcome home I got.

In hand I had a bill from Lake Region Electric, a flyer for a new store called Elk Meat, Etc. opening in Clitherall, the tiny dot of a town six miles east of Battle Lake, and a birthday-card sized white envelope. My birthday had been in May, and there was only one person I knew who sent cards two months late. My mom. There was no return address, but the post office stamp said “Paynesville.” Yep, it was from my mom. I thought about opening it, but decided I wasn’t up for it tonight. I loved my mom, but our relationship was not comfortable. We’d had a minor breakthrough since I’d moved to Battle Lake, but I was moving gingerly within the relationship. I think I was still mad at her for not divorcing my dad when she had the chance.

Instead, she stayed married to him despite his drunkenness throughout my entire elementary and middle school years, and through my first two high school years, until he was involved in a fatal car accident at the end of my sophomore year. After that, I was known as Manslaughter Mark’s daughter and fled to the Cities as soon as I had high school diploma in hand. That worked out for a while, until I started doing my best imitation of my dad, getting drunk every night and letting my life slide. Moving to Battle Lake had been designed to shake me out of following in his footsteps, and I was proud of how I had been doing since May.

At least I was until I had received the letter from Dr. Lindstrom last month, asking me to return to the Cities to be his research assistant in the U of M’s Linguistics department. When I read that letter, I sort of felt like a failure, spinning my wheels in a small town while life and a real career passed me by. So I didn’t read that letter very often, though in the back of my brain I knew I’d need to make a decision about staying in Battle Lake or moving back to Minneapolis by the end of the month, as he had requested.

I dropped my unopened mail on the table inside the front door, changed Tiger Pop and Luna’s water, dropped some ice cubes into their bowls, refilled their food, coaxed them into the stifling house, and apologized for neglecting them all day. They both plopped down on the cool linoleum near the refrigerator, and I considered joining them. The ant creeping across the floor nixed that idea. I tossed my jean shorts and tank top over the back of the couch and crawled naked onto my bed, a fan pointing at my head. The air it was moving around was so scorching that I would have been better off rigging up a flamethrower.

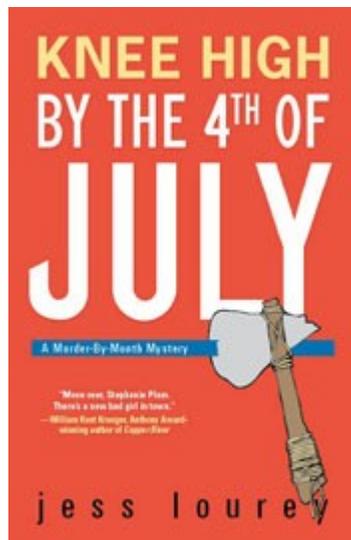
I slept on top of the sheets, except for my feet, which I always covered in bed. Seeing *Roots* as a child had affected me to the point where I couldn’t leave my feet vulnerable for fear of having them chopped off as I slept. I knew the sheets wouldn’t stop an ax, but they made me feel safer, and after two months in Battle Lake, I needed all the reassurance I could get.

I woke up seven hours later with a layer of sweat covering me like a salty wool blanket. An icy shower and a quick breakfast of whole grain Total with organic raisins, and I was on my early way to meet another oppressively hot day. I knew my Wednesday “Mira’s Musings” column was going to be somehow related to the Wenonga Days planning meeting, so I needed to find out how it ended and get a draft of that out before I opened the library. Besides my regular filing, ordering, and organizing duties there, I wanted to take down the Fourth of July holiday decorations—the library would be closed on Saturday and Sunday—and replace them with generic summer ornamentation. Somewhere in there I also needed to find a recipe “representative of Battle Lake” (in Ron Sim’s words) for that column. My to-do list for the day was getting as stifling as the hazy July air.

The fertile smell of the swamp I passed by on the gravel tickled my nose, and I could hear frogs singing in the sloughs. The sun was scratching the horizon when I turned right onto County Road 78, just up the street from the Shoreline Restaurant and Chief Wenonga. I had chosen this route because driving past Chief Wenonga on my way to town seemed like a natural way to get my (mental) juices flowing.

I was just onto the tar when a red tank zoomed over the hill and aggressively hugged my Toyota's bumper. Whoever it was had their brights on, unnecessary in the bright dawn and making it impossible for me to see their face in my rearview mirror. I was pretty sure it was a guy with a small penis, though. My feet twitched to tap my brakes, but it was too early in the morning to trade my safety for my pride. I pulled to the right to let the Humvee pass and glared at the silver-rimmed tires as they raced past me and my puddle jumper. Feeling cranky, I drove the last mile into town, cursing tourists and gas-guzzling army vehicles. I was moving on to getting mad at the color red when I crested the hill right before the Shoreline.

The restaurant's parking lot was peppered with a sprinkling of early morning fishers in town for their excellent eggs Benedict and hash browns. My temper cooled a little as I thought of good food and the fact I was just about to say a great good morning to my big fiberglass man. I leaned forward in my seat so I could spot him a millisecond sooner. Just beyond the brown roof of the Shoreline, I made out Chief Wenonga's cement stand, with four bolts poured into it. I didn't remember seeing the bolts before, and a beat later, I realized why. The bolts held Chief Wenonga up, one each in the front and back of his feet. Now that he was no longer there, the bolts were obvious. Someone had stolen Chief Wenonga.



**KNEE HIGH BY THE 4TH OF JULY,
By Jess Lourey**

BUY THE BOOK

Publisher: Llewellyn Publications

ISBN13: 9780738710358

- [Independent Mystery Booksellers](#)
- [IndieBound](#)
- [Barnes & Noble](#)
- [Borders](#)
- [Amazon](#)
- Also available in e-book format.