

## —CAMPBELL'S POND

by Brian Knight

Lester was a fat, pale, pimply boy. Sixteen years old, and he had made only a few friends in his life.

Girlfriends? None.

As bad as things were for him at his old home in Missoula, city living had its advantages. He could always trade the hostile faces at his school or neighborhood for the merely indifferent ones a few blocks away where no one knew him.

Then came Uncle Frank.

Uncle, right.

Uncle Frank was an Indian of no tribe in particular, at least none he'd admit to, and fancied himself a Medicine Man. His medicine was meth, and after Lester's mom was thoroughly hooked on the shit Frank cooked, their house had become his house.

The arrangement had started with Frank crashing and eating there and Lester's Mom would get free product. But it wasn't long before Frank was living there full time, cooking his product and treating Lester's mom like a fuck doll.

Then came the bust, which was good because it meant no more Uncle Frank, but bad because it meant no more Mom.

Now Lester lived with his real uncle in Pierce, and his already troubled social life had taken a definite turn from bad to worse.

Pierce was a speck of a town in the mountains of northern Idaho, and had nothing to interest him. No arcades, no music stores, no bookstores. . . even the closest Wal-Mart was almost a hundred miles away.

What Pierce *did* have was a small grocery store, a bar, a single convenience store/gas station, another bar, a lodge with two dozen new cabins built in anticipation of Lewis & Clark Centennial tourists who never came, a sports shop (for hunting and fishing supplies) next to a third bar, and a small, rickety hotel, with a bar in the lobby.

Pierce also had approximately five-hundred residents, almost half of them unemployed since the local plywood mill closed down, all of whom spent the bulk of their time drinking and getting into each other's business.

His real uncle, not a Frank but a Larry, didn't have cable TV, so Lester spent most of his time in his room reading and re-reading the same dog-eared books he'd brought with him.

## BRIAN KNIGHT

Lester had no friends in Pierce, which was nothing new, but in a small town there was no place to hide from the local kids, who had taken an instant dislike to him. Their favorite new sport was pounding Lester whenever they caught him outside, so he only went out at night if he could help it. His uncle was usually gone at night, his preferred haunt was the The Flame Bar and Grill, and he slept through most of the day, so Lester didn't have to spend much time with him.

Sunday nights were the exception. By state law the bars stayed closed on Sunday, so after waking some time in the early afternoon, Lester's uncle spent the rest of the day sulking around the small house, yelling at anyone who called on the telephone, yelling at the evening news, and yelling at Lester to walk to the Mini-Mart and pick him up his beer.

Uncle Larry had a special relationship with the woman at the Mini-Mart, one that prohibited him from going within a hundred yards of her. She was happy to break the 'no beer to minors' rule to keep Uncle Larry safely away from the Mini-Mart.

These trips usually happened at twilight, so Lester would take a long route through cluttered, dusty alleys to avoid the town boys, and once at the little store he hurried to get out before one of them happened to stop by. This approach had been largely successful, much to his relief. He didn't want to know how Uncle Larry would react if someone stole his beer on the return trip.

It was on one of these Sunday trips that Lester got the surprise of his life from a girlfriend of one of his most enthusiastic tormentors.

\* \* \*

"Having a party?" She stepped from behind the chip rack as Lester heaved a case of Keystone from the cooler.

Lester closed his eyes and prepared for the worst. He knew that voice, everyone knew it. Every penis-equipped person in Pierce wondered what it would be like to hear it moan into their ear or shout his name in the height of ecstasy. It belonged to the hottest girl in town. The girl, Samantha Zenner, belonged to Rick Durham, the person Lester least liked to hear saying his name.

*Might as well get it over with*, Lester thought, and turned.

Rick was not there. Samantha was alone.

Lester blinked, scanned the aisles on either side of her, but Rick's grinning face was nowhere in sight. Finally remembering to breathe, Lester hitched in a deep one.

She stood in front of him, arms crossed under her plump and perky breasts, her bright blue eyes moving from his face to the case hanging from his hand, then back again.

"Is it a private party or do I get an invite?" Her impatient foot tapping caused her already short denim skirt to ride up a few inches.

"It's for my uncle." He searched the mostly empty store again. "Where's Rick?"

Her narrow smile vanished. She raised an eyebrow. "You that anxious to run into him?"

"No," he said quickly. Too quickly. He felt his cheeks glowing with embarrassment. "I just thought. . ."

She stepped closer to him, and words failed. He couldn't honestly verbalize