

Ryan's Ruin

T. E. Killian

Chapter One

Candy O'Reilly was tired and not just physically either. She was tired of driving too. After all, they had left Oklahoma City over six hours ago. She was also tired of hearing her kids arguing, complaining, and whining.

She glanced over in the seat next to her at her almost eighteen-year-old son, Connor. He didn't look like her at all. He was six three and very thin with red hair and freckles. That certainly contrasted with her and her daughter's appearance.

She looked quickly into her rearview mirror where her sixteen-year-old daughter, Connie was sulking. She, on the other hand, looked just like her mother but with her blond hair being shoulder length rather than the short pixie cut that Candy preferred. At five eight, Connie was about an inch taller than her mother.

About the only feature Candy could say Conner got from her was his blue eyes. His dad had had brown eyes. Of course neither one of her kids remembered their dad very much. Connor had been eight and Connie only six when Jon had died.

Well, enough of that. She didn't need to be daydreaming now or especially reminiscing, not when they were all embarking on a new life that, at least for her, was long overdue. Of course, both her parents and Jon's parents had thought she was crazy for moving three hundred and fifty miles away to a small town in Missouri. They'd especially been upset that she had bought an equally small café in that small town.

"Mom!"

That was Connie still in her whining mode and Candy didn't want to hear it even one more time.

"Listen, both of you. We are only ten miles away from Clear Creek. I don't want to hear another word from either one of you until we pull up in the driveway of our new house."

Conner snorted. "New? That house must be a hundred years old, Mom."

"Don't you dare start on that too, Jonathan Conner O'Reilly."

At least she could be happy about one thing. He stopped. And not only that but Connie didn't pick up where he left off like they'd been doing the whole trip.

Candy tried to remember the way to their new house. They came in from the west on the state highway, which became Main Street and then they had to turn on, what was the name of that tree street? Oh yes, Dogwood. She knew that if they'd been coming from the other direction, they'd pass the café on their left just before they had to turn. But that didn't help this time.

"Kids, help me watch for Dogwood Street, okay?"

Neither one responded but a quick glance told her that they were indeed watching. Great!

"There it is Mom, the next street," Conner called out.

She turned left onto Dogwood and said, "Now we turn right on Adams."

Connie groaned, "What dorky street names."

Candy saw it first, "That's it." So she turned right, and then left quickly into the driveway of the corner house.

"Hey look Mom, the movers are here already." Connor shouted. "Maybe I can get my room organized today after all."

Connie shouted from the backseat, "Yeah, me too."

As she jumped out onto the driveway, Candy was more than happy to put all the shouting within the close confines of their SUV behind her, hopefully forever. Well, she was entitled to dream a little wasn't she.

Two hours later, Candy was standing on her new rather large front porch watching the moving van pull out and drive away when she saw three women walking down the sidewalk then turn onto the narrow walk leading up to her house. She almost giggled. Two of them were around her age or a little younger and both blond. The other woman was much older with gray hair.

She almost did laugh as she watched them approach. The one in front was very short and so was the one in the rear, but the one in the middle was very tall.

The older lady led the way up to where Candy was standing. "Good morning, we're the welcoming committee from First Baptist Church. I am Sharon Howell, the pastor's wife. And these ladies are, Tiffany Cameron, and Sabrina Elliott both Sunday School teachers."

Candy smiled and said, "Well, I'm glad to meet all of you ladies, my name is Candy O'Reilly and being from Oklahoma, I'm Baptist too and was already planning to check out your church tomorrow."

Sharon nodded her head enthusiastically and said, "Good. We'll be happy to tell you all about our church then."

"Great. I would invite you in but everything is rather upside down inside right now. There isn't even anywhere to sit yet. I'm sure you saw the moving van just leaving when you came up."

Candy motioned to a swing and several other chairs on the porch. "Why don't we sit out here? I'm sure we can get comfortable in these chairs."

Thirty minutes later, Candy said goodbye to the ladies after a delightful visit with them. She had especially liked the two younger women. She felt that they were reaching out to her with more than a welcome to town or even just an invitation to church. They seemed to be offering her friendship as well.

She would definitely seek them out in church tomorrow. She could certainly use some good Christian women for friends in this new town.

She decided to go in search of Conner and Connie especially since she hadn't heard anything from them for over an hour. She assumed they were still trying to arrange their things in their new rooms.

She climbed the stairs only to find the second floor deserted. She went back down and headed for the kitchen knowing that this was the second favorite room for her ever-hungry teenagers. But they weren't in there either.

That was when she heard the sound of Connie's laughter coming from the backyard. She stepped to the screen door and looked out to see both of them leaning on the chain link fence talking to a girl who looked to be about Connie's age.

She pushed through the door and walked out to where the three kids were standing. As she approached, she realized that the three kids made a startling contrast. She was quite used to her two being red headed versus blond but the other girl had long brown hair and brown eyes which added even more to the contrast.

Connie turned as Candy approached and said, "Oh, Mom, you've just got to meet Margie. She lives right behind us and she's a junior this year too. Isn't that just great?"

Candy smiled at the girl and said, "I'm happy to meet you Margie. Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

Margie shook her head. "No, it's just me and my uncle and two aunts living here."

Candy sensed a story behind that simple statement but would wait to find out more later. Meanwhile, she looked the girl over and was pleasantly surprised to see a vibrant girl who at first glance seemed to have a pleasant personality too.

Connie spoke up again. "Mom, you'll never guess, but Margie goes to the Baptist church with her aunts. She's already told me what Sunday School class we'll all be in tomorrow. Isn't that just fabulous?"

"Yes, it is Dear. And I just had a visit from three ladies from the church."

That was when Candy noticed that Conner hadn't said a word, which was not quite normal for him. She looked closely at him and realized that he hadn't taken his eyes off Margie the whole time Candy had been out there. That might just prove to be rather interesting.

"Okay kids, I hate to break this up but I need to go down to the café and start getting things cleaned and organized down there."

When neither one responded, she said, "And I sure could use your help doing it too."

They both turned and reluctantly followed her back up to the house after they all said goodbye to Margie.

As she was entering the kitchen, Candy thought back to the strange look that came over Margie's face when she had mentioned the café. Well, maybe the girl was just thinking about something else right then that had caused the almost painful expression.

* * *

Ryan Maxwell was having a bad day. Too many things had gone wrong. First, his ice machine had gone on the blink and he'd had to call Chet Fontana to come fix it. That had cost him fifty bucks he hadn't planned to spend this month.

But at least it hadn't taken long for Chet to get there since he also owned the hardware store next door.

Then business hadn't been very good even though it was a Saturday. He usually did a fair amount of business on Saturdays since that was the day that many of the farm families came to town to shop. That was just another reason why Ryan was glad that the county was one of the few counties in Missouri that still required all non-emergency businesses to close on Sunday.

On top of all that, his two sisters, Earnestine and Hazel, were giving him all kinds of problems. He might as well mark it on his calendar. Every Saturday he knew that they would nag him all day long to go to church with them the next day. He was getting extremely tired of hearing the same old thing every Saturday.

It wasn't like he'd just stopped going to church in the last few years. No. He hadn't been there for a church service since he was a teenager. And that was too many years ago to consider.

He knew he needed to get into a better mood before he began to chase customers away. So, he did what often boosted his moral. He pulled his stool over to the order window and peered out of the kitchen into the dining area of his café. Well, to be honest his parents had left it to him and his two older sisters.

That often bothered him though. But at least his parents had left him fifty-two percent of the place and only twenty-four percent to each of his loony sisters. His parents had to have known that he was the only one with sense enough to run the place.

He looked out into the empty café. That wasn't good. This wasn't working. His mood was not improving. For it to work there needed to be at least a few customers in the place.

He slid off his stool and went to the refrigerator to grab some ham and cheese to throw together into a sandwich. He stopped halfway when he heard his niece flying in the front door calling for him. Margie never

walked anywhere and she seldom ever did anything quietly. Sometimes, he had to get away from all her racket even though he loved his dead brother's daughter as if she were his own.

When she burst into the kitchen, he said, "Hey youngin' what's got you so all fired excited? If you don't calm down, everybody in town's gonna hear you."

Margie raced up to where he now stood in the kitchen doorway. Her long brown hair was flowing out behind her and when she stopped, it flew over her shoulders and covered her face.

She stopped for a moment to brush her hair back over her shoulders and to catch her breath then she laughed loudly at her uncle. "Aw Uncle Ryan, I wasn't making that much noise."

She put her hands on her hips and said, "I just wanted to tell you that someone just moved into the old Collingsworth house out back of our house. That's all."

Ryan didn't like neighbors, especially new ones and most especially if they expected him to be neighborly. He didn't have time for neighbors.

"Well, maybe they'll finally mow that overgrown yard. It's been the eyesore of the neighborhood ever since Miss Harriet died."

"Oh I know they will. Connor said he'd do it right after school Monday."

Ryan had started back into the kitchen with that ham and cheese sandwich back on his mind when he stopped, turned around, and said, "Who the devil's Connor?"

"Oh he's just the new boy next door. He's almost eighteen and he's going to be a senior this year. And he's cute too."

She got a dreamy expression on her face that Ryan wasn't too sure he liked the looks of.

"Then there's his sister, Connie, she's my age and she's going to be a junior this year too. Isn't it just marvelous that they moved in just two days before school starts and I was able to make friends with them before anyone else at school grabbed them?"

Ryan wondered if she was ever going to wind down. He hadn't seen her this excited in a long while.

She was talking again and he hadn't been paying attention. "What did you say?"

"I was just wondering where Aunt Earnestine and Aunt Hazel are."

Ryan mumbled under his breath before he said, "They're next door listening to that gossipmonger."

"Oh Uncle Ryan, Mrs. Fontana isn't that bad. If anything, the aunts are just as bad as she is."

She giggled and they both looked up when the front door opened and the two women in question walked in.

Ryan always marveled at how his sisters could be so completely different from each other. Both women were about five feet five and they both had short brown hair and brown eyes. But that was where the similarities ended. Earnestine was downright skinny and Hazel was downright plump.

But that wasn't all. Their personalities were opposites too. Earnestine was a straight-laced sourpuss who didn't talk much while Hazel was as smiling and happy go lucky as they get. Of course neither one of them had a lick of sense though.

Hazel rushed ahead of her sedate older sister and said, "Oh Ryan, you're not going to like this one little bit but someone has bought the old café across the street and they're planning to open it sometime next week."

Movement to his left caught Ryan's attention and he looked over at his niece. Margie was cringing. Now what?

"That was the next thing I was going to tell you Uncle Ryan. Connor and Connie's mom bought the café."

She ran to the front window and called out. "There they are now. They're going into the café right now."

Ryan followed his sisters to the front window and they all four stared across the street at the blond woman and the two teenagers who, sure enough, were going into the café over there.

Ryan muttered, “Well, there goes the rest of our business. This street can’t support two cafés across from each other. That’s why that one closed the way it did a couple of years ago.”

They all turned back to give him a questioning look but no one dared to say anything.

Good! He wasn’t in the mood to talk to them anyway. So he headed back toward the kitchen. Nothing was going to keep him away from that ham and cheese sandwich this time.

But Hazel came in rather timidly, at least for her. She usually charged everywhere she went. He suspected that was where Margie got it too.

“Brother, don’t be upset that that nice looking family is going to open up the café across the street.”

He ignored her as he started assembling his sandwich.

“I know that God won’t let us lose this café. It was our parent’s dream when they got married sixty something years ago. You’ll see. God will find a way for both café’s to make it. I just know He will.”

Ryan didn’t dignify that loony statement with a response. He just sat at a small table at the back of the kitchen to eat his sandwich.

After a few minutes of being ignored, his busy body sister went back out front. Good riddance. Peace and quiet.

* * *

Candy was enjoying the short walk from their new house to the café. It was only three blocks and she was thrilled about not having to use the car every day.

When she and the kids turned off Dogwood onto Main Street, she noticed immediately that every person on both sides of the street seemed to stop and stare at them.

“Mom! They’re all staring at us. That’s so gross.”

She wanted to agree with Connie, but just said, “We’re new in town. It’s only natural that they would be curious about us.”

She didn’t say what she was thinking though, ‘Welcome to small town life.’

She was sure that there would be many more things like this that she and the kids were just going to have to get used to. But she at least had been preparing herself for those things. She realized that she was going to have to do a little more work at preparing her kids though.

They walked the half block to the café, meeting several people on the way. Each person would either give them a curt nod or a one-word greeting, nothing more, nothing less.

She unlocked the front door and stepped aside to let the kids in first. When she did step in, she was relieved to be out of the public eye, so to speak. Then she turned around and was shocked.

“Yuck Mom this place is disgusting!”

All Candy could do was to shake her head and mentally agree with Connie’s rather astute observation.

“Well, I guess that means we’ve got a little more to do before we open up than I thought.”

They worked hard for two hours with the kids doing some of the lesser things like picking up trash and taking it out to the dumpster in the alley behind the building. Candy had swept and mopped all the floors. Then she was finally able to begin scraping and otherwise cleaning the rather large range, double oven, and grill combination.

She stopped when she realized she hadn't heard anything from either one of the kids for a while. She stepped into the kitchen doorway and found them sitting at a table by the front window watching people pass by on the street outside.

Connie looked up and said, "Mom this is really funny. Everyone that comes by stops and tries to look in to see what we're doing in here."

Candy simply shook her head and said, "That's small town life for you. We'll all just have to get used to it, that's all."

Just then, the door opened and Candy felt like kicking herself for not latching it when they had come in.

A man came through the door and the first thing Candy noticed about him was his dark blue police uniform. Otherwise, he was average height and build with very short brown hair and she thought he had brown eyes as well.

He looked first at the kids sitting at the table near him, nodded at them then he looked at Candy and kept coming toward her until he was standing a few feet away from her.

"Morning ma'am, I'm Hunter Billingsley and I'm the chief of police here in Clear Creek. You must be the new owner of this place."

She was taken aback by the stern look he was giving her. It was as if he suspected her of some sort of crime. That look was making her extremely uncomfortable. So much so, that she couldn't manage to get a word out for a moment.

Finally, she was able to burst out with, "Yes, I am."

She noticed that he seemed to be waiting for more. Then she realized that she hadn't introduced herself yet.

"Oh, my name is Candy O'Reilly." She stopped again but when he turned his head toward the kids she added, "Uh, and those are my kids, Connor and Connie."

That certainly sounded intelligent. What could she do now? What did he expect her to do now? It was hard even to think the way he was staring at her.

The man finally cracked a very slight smile. If she hadn't been looking directly at him, she surely would have missed it.

Then all he said was, "Don't think Ryan's going to be too happy about all this, no sir."

She had no idea what he was talking about so she just tried to smile back at him.

"Where's your husband?"

She hated it when people naturally assumed that she still had a husband. And there was really no polite way to answer that question.

"He died ten years ago."

He frowned and said, "Sorry ma'am." Then he seemed to add as an afterthought. "My wife ran off fifteen years ago. Good riddance I'd say."

She couldn't help but think, 'Too much information.' When she didn't answer, he looked at her as if he was judging her for something and she was sure she didn't measure up.

After a moment, he turned and started for the door and Candy felt she had to say something else. "Chief you're certainly welcome to come back in any time you want after we're open. Of course our regular coffee will always be no charge to police officers on duty."

He stopped in the middle of the dining room but didn't turn back around. He just grunted something she couldn't make out and then went on out the door leaving Candy still standing where she'd been. Then she realized her knees were wobbly and as they suddenly gave way, she almost fell into a chair nearby.

No one said anything for a moment. Then Connor whistled softly and said, "I sure don't want to get that guy mad at me."

Connie giggled and said, "Yeah. He sure is creepy."

Candy was not about to voice her opinion of the man to her kids. She didn't do this very often, especially since she didn't think it was very Christian of her, but she had developed an immediate dislike for the chief of police in her new town. Oh my. Now what?

Connie stepped out onto the sidewalk in front of the café. She stood there looking down one side of the street and then the other. When she looked across the street at the other café, she let out a shout and opened the door to lean back in.

"Mom, Margie's over there at that other café and she's waving at me." She looked across the street then turned back to Candy. "Can I go over there and talk to her?"

Candy had been planning to go over and talk to the owner of the other café anyway, only later. But she decided that now was as good a time as any.

"Okay, Connie. But wait. Why don't we all go over there and that way, I can introduce myself to the owner of the café?"

With that, Candy locked the door and turned around in time to see Connor and Connie about to cross the street there in the middle of the block.

"Wait kids. Don't cross here. I have a feeling that our friendly chief of police might just give us jaywalking tickets if we did."

She led them down to the intersection and they all crossed in the crosswalk.

Margie met them in front of the café and Candy stepped around the three kids to enter.

She tried her best to put on a happy smile as she walked up to the counter where two ladies in their mid-fifties were standing on the other side and openly staring at her.

"Good afternoon ladies, I'm Candy O'Reilly, and I'm the new owner of the café across the street."

The thin one just frowned at her but the heavier one smiled at her and said, "Well hi there. I'm Hazel Maxwell and this is my sister Earnestine. We own this place . . . along with our little brother Ryan that is."

Well that was the best reception she'd received so far.

"Ryan. Come on out here and meet Mrs. O'Reilly."

A man a few years older than her and only a few inches taller, stepped into the kitchen doorway with a frown on his face to match one of his sisters. Which one was it? Oh Earnestine.

"Good afternoon, Mr.?"

"Maxwell."

That came from the friendly sister.

"Well, good afternoon Mr. Maxwell. I was just telling your sisters that my name is Candy O'Reilly and I'm the new owner of the café across the street."

She didn't know what she'd expected but it wasn't for him to ignore her and go back into the kitchen with only a grunt. Now what did she do?

The friendly sister, Hazel, spoke up then. “Oh don’t pay Ryan no never mind. He gets that way sometimes. It doesn’t mean anything. So, why don’t you sit down here at the counter and have a cup of coffee with us?”

Candy didn’t know if she should or not. What if their rude brother came back out of the kitchen and chased her out of the place?

With plenty of reservations, she slid onto one of the stools at the counter. A cup of coffee was suddenly in front of her.

She had wanted to clear the air with them, all of them, but it looked like she was going to have to settle for just the sisters right now.

They were both standing on the other side of the counter in front of her still staring at her as if expecting her to say something. So she started her explanation.

She looked around the counter area and was pleased to see that it was basically a traditional type of café with nothing but regular coffee machines and such.

“You see ladies, I came over here to explain to you that I’m going to try not to be in total competition with you.”

That seemed to get their attention and out of the corner of her eye, she could see that their ill-mannered brother was standing near the order window with his back to them. But she was sure that he was listening anyway.

She raised her voice just a tad for his benefit. “I’m bringing in some new coffee machines which will make all the latest types of specialty coffees like espresso, latte and all the rest.”

As she watched, both ladies’ eyes seemed to glaze over.

“I want to concentrate my business on specialty coffees, pastries, and light sandwiches. So I won’t be in competition with you for regular breakfast and lunch meals. I’ll only be open until two each day so I won’t be competing with your supper business at all.”

Hazel turned to her sister who was still frowning and said, “Isn’t that just great sister? See, we’ll all be able to get along just nicely after all.”

She turned and raised her voice. “Right Ryan?”

When all Candy heard coming from the kitchen was a loud grunt, she figured that she’d worn out her welcome and left quickly.

* * *

Ryan closed the café at five and headed home. He liked that much about Saturdays. It didn’t do them any good to stay open any longer on Saturday because either most people ate in the middle of the afternoon or they went to one of the regular restaurants in the evening.

For the most part, he didn’t have very much real competition from the other restaurants in town. There was a steakhouse out on the north side, a pizza place on the west side, and a bar and grill on the east side. Otherwise, there were only two fast food hamburger joints, one on each side of town on the state road that passed through town from east to west.

Until now that is. He’d enjoyed having the café across the street closed. But now that was going to end pretty quick. Even though that woman had said she wouldn’t really be in competition with him, he knew she’d still pull some customers away from him. And he certainly couldn’t afford to lose any more business.

When he opened the kitchen door at home, he knew immediately that he was due for a lecture from his sisters. So he opened the fridge, grabbed a beer and sat down at the table where they were sitting there drinking

their infernal tea. Tea! The whole family ran a café and his sisters preferred tea over coffee. At least he'd been able to convince them not to drink the infernal stuff at the café, at least not where paying customers could see them.

As usual, Hazel started in on him.

"Ryan, even though that woman is running a coffee shop, that's no reason for you to have been so rude to her. You are going to have to apologize to her. That's what you need to do."

He snorted and said, "Not gonna happen."

Hazel crossed her arms and tried to glare at him. But she was never able to pull it off as well as Earnestine could.

Hazel came at him from another angle. "Oh yes brother, you were downright mean to that sweet lady and all she wanted to do was to get acquainted with us. And I thought she was rather nice too."

"But the woman's going to ruin our business."

Hazel smiled back at him and said, "Oh fiddly Dee, Brother, at least she'll be nice about it if she does."

Ryan took a swig of his beer, shook his head. He wasn't about to try and follow that line of logic. As he usually did, he ignored his sister's prattle and said, "She's not a customer of mine so I don't have to be nice to her."

Earnestine gave him her sternest big sister look. "That's certainly no way to act brother. You should be nice to everyone. After all, that is what the Bible says that we should do. Jesus said that we should love our neighbors."

He grunted. "Well, she ain't my neighbor."

Margie had come into the room just in time to hear his last comment.

"Oh but Uncle Ryan, she is."

All three adults snapped their gazes onto her.

"That's what I was trying to tell you this morning. She's the one who bought the house behind us."

Ryan dropped his head onto his arms on the table and groaned. "Now what am I going to do. The woman's got me surrounded."

After a moment, he jumped up and said, "Got to go get ready for the game."

An hour later, when Ryan arrived at Hunter's house for their weekly poker game, all the others were already there. So he placed his six-pack in the fridge, tossed a five dollar bill on the table, and sat down.

Everyone always sat in the same spot no matter whose house the game was at. He looked to his left and there was their host for the evening Hunter Billingsley, the chief of police.

Hunter was one of those guys who didn't stick out in a crowd unless he was wearing his uniform. He was average in all ways except maybe for his perpetual frown. Hunter came to Clear Creek twenty years ago and the two men had become good friends over the years. He was five years younger than Ryan but they did a lot of hunting and fishing together when they could both break away from their time consuming jobs.

And of course on Ryan's right was Charlie Randall the county sheriff. He was four years older than Ryan and had the broad shoulders and thick neck of a football player which he'd been in college.

Charlie and Hunter always sat across from each other, since the two cops didn't get along very well either professionally or personally.

That always brought a smile to Ryan's face. He never knew whether it was due to professional jealousy or they were being just plain territorial. But then maybe something had happened between them sometime over the years that Ryan wasn't aware of.

They were always squabbling over whose call it was when something happened on the outskirts of Clear Creek. Charlie always claimed that the whole county was his. And of course, Hunter always claimed that Charlie had no business taking calls inside the city limits of his town.

As Ryan thought about it though, the two cops were always squabbling over something wherever they happened to be.

Well, they usually kept the bad feelings out of their little poker games though. Ryan could be grateful for that much at least.

Then he looked straight across the table where the high school principal, Chase Devereaux sat. Ryan could take or leave Charlie but he genuinely liked Chase. The guy had come up from Louisiana ten years ago and had proven to be the best principal they'd ever had. And since Ryan was Margie's guardian, he'd had plenty of dealings with Chase since she'd been in high school.

Where all three of the others, which included him, had brown hair, eyes, and were rather average in most other ways, Chase was very much a contrast to that.

He was short, at least a couple of inches shorter than Ryan and was thin but his most distinguishing characteristics were his flaming red hair and the only truly green eyes Ryan had ever seen. But he liked Chase, a lot.

Soon the cards were on the table and Hunter, since he was the host, started dealing the first hand.

After about an hour, Hunter slapped his hand on his thigh and said, "I almost forgot. I got a telex today from the state saying they let the Pratt boys out this morning."

After making that announcement, he glared over at Charlie and said, "I guess you didn't see it yet since you probably don't go into your office on Saturdays."

Charlie ignored him, turned to Ryan and said, "Didn't I hear that a widow with two kids moved into the old Collingsworth house back behind yours?"

Ryan nodded. "Yeah, and on top of that she bought the café across the street from mine and had the nerve to come into my place this afternoon and try to tell me she wasn't going to be that much competition to me. Hah!"

Hunter spoke up. "I stopped in to see her this afternoon." He grinned. "That's one mighty fine looking woman, especially to be in her forties like she must be."

Ryan grunted but Hunter had definitely grabbed the other two single men's attention. But that was one thing that Ryan liked about this poker group. None of them was married and it sure did keep most of the complications out of the mix. He knew from experience that women and poker just plain didn't mix.

Chase spoke up for the first time. He turned to Hunter and said, "You think the Pratts might bother this new family? I heard that both of those kids are in high school."

Hunter frowned and shook his head. "I don't rightly know but I'm sure going to keep my eye on those two troublemakers. I don't think they ever found what they were looking for in that house either. And when Harriet's son came to clean out the house before putting it up for sale, he didn't find much of anything worth stealing."

Charlie grunted. "Yeah, but you got to remember those two Pratt boys put together don't have half a brain."

They all laughed at that and the game continued.

