

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 20 – No. 1

(SPECIAL EDITION)

January, 2020

Here's a little short story I wrote a few months back. I hope you enjoy it. Consider it my Christmas present to you. The regular Jan.- Feb. edition should be available near the end of January.

MURDER AT RUBY FALLS
By Jerry McKelvy

Note: All characters in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Everybody in Ruby Falls knew about the old house on Section Line Road. Old Man Miller who lived there was a little peculiar, or at least that's what everybody said. His wife had died in the early 1950s and for the last five years, the place had really gone down. The yard was only mowed maybe once or twice each year and the place was beginning to look like one of those old haunted houses you hear about.

The people of Ruby Falls had tried to be neighborly to Mr. Miller when his wife died, taking him food and offering their condolences. He thanked the folks for their concern, but told them he would be OK. He had his dog for company and said he knew enough about how to cook to keep from starving to death. People soon got the idea he wanted to be alone, so they let him be.

Mr. Miller was seen around town occasionally driving his old pickup truck. He was always dressed the same--overalls and an old floppy hat. He never ate at the local restaurant and was always alone.

John Stephens passed by the old place every day on his way to work. Sometimes he saw Mr. Miller out doing some chore in the yard or just walking with his dog. John would wave at him, and usually Mr. Miller returned the wave. During these last five years, the old place was the topic of many conversations among the people of the town. The young kids of Ruby Falls heard their parents talking about how strange it was that Mr. Miller would have nothing to do with anybody. The kids got it in their heads that Mr. Miller was some kind of a nut and since he lived in that old scary two-story house, they all avoided the place. In fact, most of the parents had warned their kids about going anywhere near it.

John and his family lived down the road about a mile from Mr. Miller's place on a dead-end road, so they were the only people who had any reason to go by Mr. Miller's except for the mailman or anyone who happened to be visiting John or his family.

John's son, Tommy, had just turned twelve. All his friends lived closer to town, but they all rode the same school bus. Tommy and his younger sister were the only ones on the bus when they passed Old Man Miller's since they lived at the end of the road.

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The Stephens family had just gotten telephone service a few months earlier and it was a four-party line. Everybody had to know their own ring, because the phone would ring when anyone on the party line got a call. Mr. Miller didn't sign up for a telephone probably because he didn't want to talk to anyone and nobody wanted to talk to him.

One day in early April, while Tommy was out playing with his basketball in the yard, he looked up and saw a strange dog at the edge of the yard. The dog seemed friendly and looked a little hungry, but he wouldn't let Tommy get anywhere near him. Finally, Tommy started back toward the house and noticed the dog following at a distance.

Tommy's father came out about that time and Tommy told him about the new dog. They had a few biscuits left over from breakfast and used them to lure the dog closer so they could get a better look at him. The dog did not have a collar.

John said, "I think that's Mr. Miller's dog. I guess we need to take him home if we can catch him."

The dog seemed to enjoy the food and seemed to take a liking to Tommy. After a few minutes of coaxing, the dog came close enough to let Tommy pet him.

"It's getting late. We'll wait until morning and if he's still here, we'll take him home then," John said. Tommy fed the dog another biscuit and went into the house where supper was waiting.

The next morning, the dog was still there near the back porch as if waiting to be fed. Tommy walked out and the dog came to him and acted friendly. Tommy petted him on the head and went back inside to see what kind of food he could find for him.

"Better not get too friendly with that dog, Tommy. You know we've got to take him home today."

Since it was Saturday and there was no school, Tommy had the morning free. He asked his dad if it would be OK if he walked the dog back to Mr. Miller's.

"Are you sure you want to do that? That Mr. Miller doesn't have much to do with folks around here."

"I don't think he's all that bad," Tommy said. "Maybe he just needs a friend or somebody to talk to."

John didn't much like the idea of Tommy going to Mr. Miller's alone, but as far as he knew, the man was harmless—just a little strange. Finally, he agreed to let Tommy take the dog home if he promised to come right back and not bother Mr. Miller or do anything to upset him.

Tommy started walking down the road toward Mr. Miller's with the dog following closely

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behind him. In the short period of time, he and the dog had become friends. The dog seemed to trust him and the dog was actually pretty cute. He was some sort of mixed breed and was about medium size for a dog. As they walked along, Tommy threw a stick down the road. The dog ran to fetch it and brought it back to him. Tommy patted him on the head and said, "Good boy!"

Soon they were in sight of Mr. Miller's old house. The place looked pretty spooky even in the daylight. As they came to the gate on the path leading to the house, the dog seemed reluctant to go any further. He even started back toward the road like he didn't want to go home.

Tommy made it to the front door. There was no sign of anybody around, so he knocked on the door hard enough that it should be heard anywhere in the house unless someone happened to be on the second floor. He knocked again but there was still no answer.

Mr. Miller seldom went into town except to get groceries. His old truck was in the shed, so surely, he was around somewhere. Tommy went around to the back of the house, but there was no sign of Mr. Miller. All this time, the dog acted like he did not want to be there and was even whining.

Just as he was about to leave, Tommy noticed something out near an outbuilding. He walked closer and then saw that it was Mr. Miller and he appeared to be dead or at least unconscious. Tommy ran to him, calling his name. He then noticed a large gash on the back of Mr. Miller's head as if he had been hit by something. Tommy knew then that he needed to get help. Something was seriously wrong. Mr. Miller appeared to be dead and it didn't look like an accident. Tommy took off running toward his house as fast as he could with Mr. Miller's dog following closely behind him.

He hollered for his dad as soon as he got close enough for him to hear. John came running from the house and Tommy said, "We need to get help. Somebody has killed Mr. Miller. I found him out by the shed on the ground. He has a big gash on the back of his head."

John ran back inside to call the sheriff, but the phone was busy with some of the neighbors gossiping. He broke in and told them it was an emergency and soon he was talking to the sheriff. He told him the situation and the sheriff told him to meet him at the Miller place in about fifteen minutes. John told Tommy to stay at home while he met the sheriff. He said the sheriff might need to talk to him later.

It was only then that Tommy realized what he had witnessed. He had never seen a dead person up close before. He felt weak as he slowly calmed down and wondered what had happened to Mr. Miller. Nothing like this had ever happened in this part of the county. Mr. Miller was a little strange, but as far as he knew, nobody meant to do him any harm.

Mr. Miller's dog came closer and seemed to realize that something had happened to his master. No wonder the dog had acted so strange when they had reached Mr. Miller's

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house. Dogs seemed to sense when something was wrong.

The murder of Mr. Miller would be the talk of the town now. He hoped the sheriff could figure out who did it and arrest whoever was responsible. It looked like Tommy had a new pet, at least for the time being, if his parents would let him keep him.

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It had been two days since Tommy Stephens had discovered the body of Mr. Miller. The word had quickly spread through the little town of Ruby Falls. People were careful about keeping their doors locked and removing the keys from their vehicles.

Tommy's father had met Sheriff Parker at Mr. Miller's home soon after Tommy had told his father about finding Mr. Miller's body out by the shed. There was no question it had to be murder and the sheriff immediately started an official investigation into the crime. The problem was nobody knew much about Mr. Miller. The only family Mr. Miller had ever mentioned was a sister who lived in Little Rock. When the sheriff had finally been able to contact her, she seemed to be somewhat unconcerned, but did say she would come to Ruby Falls and take care of the funeral arrangements. She confirmed that she was the next of kin, but the two had not been very close in recent years.

Evidently, the last person to see Mr. Miller alive was Sam Rhinehart, the local mail carrier. He told the sheriff he saw Mr. Miller out in the yard as he delivered the mail the day before Tommy had discovered the body. He also told the sheriff that Mr. Miller didn't get much mail except for his social security check each month and rarely mailed any letters other than payments for his monthly utility bills.

Mr. Miller had once owned some cows, but at the time of his death, he had no animals except for a few chickens and his dog. The dog had now taken up residence at Tommy's house. Tommy's parents agreed to let him keep the dog under the circumstances. He would have to come up with a name. Nobody even knew what Mr. Miller called it.

The sheriff had searched both inside and outside Mr. Miller's house looking for any clues to the murder. It was probably the first time anyone had been inside the house in the five years since Mrs. Miller's death and even then, it was just some neighbors who came to the front door bearing food for Mr. Miller.

The inside of the house had been ransacked. Drawers were emptied of their contents and the kitchen cabinet doors were open. Evidently, the killer had been looking for something. Perhaps it was just a stranger passing through who thought Mr. Miller might have a little money around the house. The only thing missing for sure was Mr. Miller's gold pocket watch which he always kept in the bib of his overalls. The gold watch chain had always looked out of place on the old overalls Mr. Miller usually wore. He had once told someone the watch was a gift from his wife and he was very proud of it. It even had his name engraved on the back.

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The house looked like a normal home with simple furniture. There were a few pictures hanging on the wall and a refrigerator stocked with the basic necessities. There was no television set. One bedroom had a double bed and a dresser. The other bedrooms were not being used. All the rooms on the second floor appeared to be used mainly as storage space.

When the investigation inside the house was complete, the sheriff emptied the refrigerator of anything perishable and locked up the house using the keys he had found hanging in the kitchen. This looked to be a tough case with no clues whatsoever. There was a killer loose in his county unless he had already left the area. He swore to himself that he would solve this case even if it took months or years, but he didn't have much experience with murder cases. They just didn't happen in Ruby Falls.

John told the sheriff he would keep an eye on the place until it was decided what was to be done with it. Maybe the sister would want to put it up for sale.

The funeral for Mr. Miller was a small affair. Only a few people showed up for the graveside service. Mr. Miller's sister had arranged the whole thing, but it appeared that she had purchased the cheapest funeral available. The Baptist preacher officiated at the funeral, chosen because he was the preacher at the church where Mrs. Miller attended when she was alive. Mr. Miller never went to church with her. He was buried in a plot next to his wife. They already had a double grave marker, but his death date would probably never be engraved on the stone. As soon as the funeral was over, his sister went back to Little Rock without even going out to the house and everybody thought that was a little strange.

Things gradually returned to normal in Ruby Falls. People still were a little more careful than in the past, knowing that a killer was still on the loose. John stopped occasionally at the old Miller place just to check on things. Nobody seemed to be bothering anything and the grass in the yard was growing taller each day.

Tommy and his dog were now the best of friends. He named the dog Miller since it had belonged to Mr. Miller. Miller seemed to enjoy the companionship of the young boy and vice versa.

Three months passed with little progress in the investigation. There was a report of a young man being seen walking on the road near Mr. Miller's place about the time of the murder, but nobody knew who he was. He was the only person of interest in the case so far and the description of the man was just too vague. Sheriff Parker had interviewed everyone who lived on Section Line Road and had talked to all the merchants in town who might have had any dealings with Mr. Miller. None of these interviews produced any new information to help with the investigation.

Finally, a "For Sale" sign from a local realtor was seen in front of Mr. Miller's house. John knew the realtor, so he gave him a call. He was told the sister in Little Rock had contacted him to sell the place and the price was very reasonable. She said she had no interest in

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keeping the place or in any of Mr. Miller's personal possessions. About all he had of any value besides the house was his old Chevrolet pickup truck and it probably wasn't worth more than a few hundred dollars even though it did have a new set of tires on it. She said the truck could go with the house and the new owners could keep it or sell it.

Three weeks later, the house was sold to a family named Martin. They had a couple of young kids and had decided it was the perfect fixer-upper and could be made into a nice place. They had been looking for a place in the country with room for a garden, some fruit trees, and maybe a few animals.

When the Martins moved in, John took his family to meet them and welcome them to the neighborhood. The kids seemed to hit it off at once and the couple was about the same age as John and his wife. They seemed to be nice people and it felt good to have friendly neighbors again.

The Martins mentioned about having a sale to get rid of Mr. Miller's belongings including the truck since they had no use for it. For the time being, they just piled everything in a spare room and planned to have the sale when the weather got a little cooler.

Tommy quickly made friends with Jimmy Martin who was six months older, but they were about the same size. They explored the countryside together with Miller tagging along. They even sometimes spent the night at each other's homes. Tommy had never thought he would be spending the night at the old spooky Miller house, but it didn't seem so spooky now that a nice family lived there and had spruced up the place.

It was Tommy's turn to spend the night at Jimmy's house. They played games and did a little exploring in the woods behind the house after telling Jimmy's mother they would be back in time for supper. She told them to be careful and not wander too far into the woods and stay inside the fence. The boys left following a dim trail that led toward the woods. Miller was running along ahead of them thoroughly enjoying his time with the boys. They soon came to a small clearing about 200 yards from the house. Miller seemed to be interested in something near the center of the clearing. He was pawing at the dirt and sniffing while looking at Tommy. He began to dig in that particular spot like he was after an armadillo or maybe a gopher.

When Tommy and Jimmy got to the spot, they noticed something peculiar that the dog had unearthed. It appeared to be pieces of a burlap sack. They began to dig in that spot and found more pieces of burlap and something solid. It turned out to be an old metal ammunition box. The boys were excited about their find and thought of buried treasure. The box was about a foot long and eight inches wide in size and they could hardly wait to see what was inside. They opened the box and were surprised to find a pouch inside filled with hundred-dollar bills--hundreds of them.

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"Wow, did you ever see so much money?" said Jimmy. "Let's count it and see how much

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is there."

The boys sat down on a nearby log and began counting out the hundred-dollar bills. The total came to 120. That meant there was \$12,000 buried inside the ammunition box.

"What should we do with it?" asked Tommy.

"We've got to go tell my dad", Jimmy answered. "He'll know what to do. This money must be Old Man Miller's".

They put the money back inside the pouch and ran back toward the house, leaving the old ammunition box where they had found it.

Jack Martin was changing oil in his pickup truck when they reached the house. He wondered what the boys were so excited about as they ran toward the house.

"Dad, come look at this", Jimmy said. "We found this money buried in the woods. There's \$12,000 here".

They told Jack about the clearing and about Miller digging there. Jack knew he had to call Sheriff Parker. This must have been Mr. Miller's money and could play a part in the investigation into his death.

Jack called Sheriff Parker and told him he needed to come out to the old Miller place as soon as he could. The sheriff wanted more information, but Jack told him to just come on out and he would explain when he got there.

When the sheriff drove up, Jack and the boys were waiting for him. They showed him the pouch full of money and the boys explained where they found it.

"I never thought Mr. Miller would have that kind of money around", Sheriff Parker said. "He lived like he didn't have a dime to his name. I'll have to hold on to this until we get some answers".

"Who gets the money?" Jimmy asked. "I've always heard 'finder's, keepers'. I think we should get to keep it."

"That's not for me to say, boys. Right now, I've got to find out where this money came from. This may have something to do with the murder".

Tommy wanted to call his dad and tell him what they found, but Mr. Martin reminded him about the party line and that it would be best not to tell anyone about the money. So, Tommy, Jimmy, and Miller decided to walk to Tommy's house and tell his dad in person about their big find.

John Stephens couldn't believe what the boys were telling him at first, but when he

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determined that they were not making up the story, he told them he agreed with Jimmy's dad that they should not tell anyone about the money.

Tommy and Jimmy then returned to Jimmy's house. It was about supper time, but the boys were so excited they knew it would be hard to get any sleep that night. All they could think about was what they could buy with \$12,000.

Sheriff Parker had never given up on finding Mr. Miller's killer, but this was the first real break in the case. The money might not have anything to do with the murder, but if someone had known Mr. Miller had that much money, it could be a motive for murder.

He decided to visit with the president of the Ruby Falls bank to see if Mr. Miller had any kind of bank account there. Mr. Wallace, the bank president, told him that Earl Miller had no account with them. He said he came in once each month to cash his social security check. He said Mr. Miller had told him once that he didn't trust banks. His monthly check was not all that much. The sheriff asked if he had noticed anything unusual about Mr. Miller's visits each month. He said one thing was a bit unusual. Mr. Miller always wanted his money in hundred-dollar bills which he placed in the pocketbook he kept in the bib of his overalls.

Evidently, Mr. Miller had been saving some money each month and was using the old ammunition box as a hiding place. Maybe he saved a hundred dollars each month and used the rest for living expenses. Sheriff Parker did a little arithmetic in his notepad. If Mr. Miller saved a hundred dollars each month and had saved \$12,000, that meant he had been using the ammunition box as his bank for about ten years. He knew that Mr. Miller had bought that farm in 1946.

Sheriff Parker was pretty sure after talking to the bank president that the money belonged to Mr. Miller. The problem now was who was entitled to get the money. Mr. Miller's sister in Little Rock evidently didn't know anything about it, but anyone would take some extra cash if it was offered. Then there was Tommy Stephens and Jimmy Martin. The boys had found the money and the sheriff thought they should at least be entitled to some of it. Somehow, this problem would have to be settled, and right now, he didn't know just how to proceed. At least he had some time to figure out what to do.

His plan now was to find out who might have known that Mr. Miller kept a large amount of money at his home. The people in town knew Mr. Miller came to town to get groceries, but nobody knew anything about his finances. Mr. Miller was not rich and never acted like he had much money. He rarely bought anything new and his only income was his social security check and his farm income before he retired. The clerk at the grocery store said Mr. Miller always paid for everything in cash. Other merchants said the same thing--he always paid with cash. Maybe somebody had seen Mr. Miller flashing a bill roll of bills in public and followed him home. Some people would do anything to get a little money, including knocking somebody in the head.

The sheriff's first thought was what family members might know about the money. Mr.

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and Mrs. Miller had no children and there were no close relatives on Mr. Miller's side of the family. But what about Mrs. Miller's family? He decided to call Mr. Miller's sister in Little Rock and get the names of any other close family members.

The sister asked the sheriff why he needed that information, and he told her he was still investigating the murder and trying to get any information that might help. He needed to talk to anyone who might have been in contact with Mr. Miller in the weeks before he was killed.

She confirmed that Mr. Miller had no immediate family still living other than her. Mrs. Miller had two sisters living in Tennessee. One of these sisters had a son named Mike Stegar who had been in some sort of trouble a few years back. He had served a few years in the penitentiary, but had been released about six months ago. She didn't know why he had been jailed.

Sheriff Parker's ears perked up when he heard that little bit of information. It would be no trouble to check with the Tennessee authorities to get the details on Mrs. Miller's nephew.

He thanked Mr. Miller's sister for her help and promised her he would do his best to bring Mr. Miller's killer to justice.

He immediately got in touch with the Tennessee Department of Corrections and learned that Mike Stegar had been incarcerated at the Tennessee State Penitentiary in Nashville for armed robbery. His sentence was ten years, but he had been released after serving seven years of the sentence. He had been a model prisoner which played a part in his early release. After his release, he moved to a small town near Memphis and found a job working in an auto parts factory. The prison file described him as twenty-four years old, five feet ten inches tall and weighing 170 pounds. Sheriff Parker asked them to send him a copy of his photo.

He then contacted the auto parts factory where Mike Stegar worked. He was told that Mike had quit after working only two months. They didn't know where he was working now or even if he was still living in town.

Sheriff Parker wondered if Mrs. Miller had been in contact with her nephew while he was in prison. If they had corresponded, it could be that she might have mentioned something about them having some money saved. Right now, Mrs. Miller's nephew had become the prime suspect in the murder of Mr. Miller.

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Sheriff Parker contacted Jack Martin and asked if they still had Mr. Miller's personal belongings. Jack said they had put all his stuff in a spare room and planned on having a sale soon.

"Did you come across any personal letters or anything like that in his stuff?" the sheriff

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asked.

"We put everything like that in a cardboard box. There were a few letters, some receipts, and a photo album", said Jack.

"I'd like to take a look at those things. I'll be out that way in about two hours. If you can have them ready, I'll just pick up the box and bring it back here to the office."

"That will be fine, Sheriff. I think I know right where the box is", said Jack.

Later that afternoon when he got some free time, Sheriff Parker started going through the box of papers he had picked up from the Martins. It looked like Mr. Miller had saved just about everything like receipts from stores where he had purchased anything besides groceries. There was a receipt from the appliance store where he had purchased his refrigerator stapled to the instruction booklet and warranty. There was the title for his old pickup truck. The Martins would need that if they planned on selling the truck. He also noticed a receipt for a set of new tires for the truck from Olson's Garage dated a week before the murder.

The photo album contained only a few pictures of some older people--probably Mrs. Miller's parents. One group photo appeared to have been taken at some sort of family reunion. The sheriff recognized Mrs. Miller in the photo. He put this photo aside. He wanted to compare the photo he received of Mike Stegar from Tennessee with this photo.

There was one bundle of personal letters in the box held together by a large rubber band. All were addressed to Mrs. Miller and appeared to be from her family members. He noticed one or two from Mike Stegar which had been mailed from Nashville, Tennessee. That was where Mike had been imprisoned, so here was evidence that Mrs. Miller had communicated with Mike Stegar while he was in prison.

He read the two letters. Mike mentioned that he would like to visit when he was released, that he was doing fine, and planned to get a job and straighten out his life. He was sorry for what he had done and the hurt he had caused the family. From reading the letters, one would say the man had turned over a new leaf. Sheriff Parker wondered about that. He had seen too many cases in which someone released from prison returned to a life of crime when released. He supposed there could be exceptions, of course.

A few days later, the photo of Mike Stegar arrived and Sheriff Parker was able to identify him in the group photo he had found in the photo album. The sheriff had been trying to find out where Mike Stegar went after quitting his job. He had some questions to ask him such as his whereabouts at the time Mr. Miller was killed.

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A few weeks later, Jack Martin stopped by the sheriff's office when he was in town to see what progress was being made in the investigation. He told the sheriff that Jimmy and

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Tommy had been pestering him to find out about the money. Jack had started to think he might be entitled to the money since he purchased the Miller property, so anything found on the property should rightfully be his.

"Give me a few more days," Sheriff Parker said. "I've got a lead I'm working on right now and should know something in a few days.

"By the way, Sheriff. Did you know you have a flat on your car? I noticed it when I was coming in."

That was just what he needed--a flat tire. The sheriff decided he'd best get it fixed in case some emergency happened. Thirty minutes later, he had the spare tire on and placed the flat tire in the trunk. He'd drive up to Olson's garage and get the flat fixed. That was the only place in town to get flats fixed.

Mr. Olson offered him a cup of coffee while he waited for the flat to be fixed. Mr. Olson now had a young guy helping him and he was the one doing the work.

"Ed, I didn't know you had hired a helper", the sheriff said.

"Yea, I needed someone to do some of the work around here. It's getting to be too much for one person. Joe does pretty good work. He's learned a lot since I hired him about four months ago. The trouble is he already wants a raise. He wants to buy a pickup truck and needs some money. I just can't pay him any more right now."

About that time, John Stephens stopped by the garage. Tommy and Miller were riding in the back of his pickup. John wanted Mr. Olson to check out his pickup since it had not been running right lately. John bought Tommy a Coke and candy bar. Miller saw Tommy eating the candy bar and jumped out of the truck, running in his direction but when the dog saw Joe working on the sheriff's flat, he stopped abruptly and began to growl. Miller had always been a friendly dog, but there was something about Joe that he didn't like. Joe kept an eye on the dog as he worked.

The sheriff, Mr. Olson, and Tommy's father all saw how the dog reacted when around Joe. John told Tommy he'd better keep the dog in the truck. Just as Tommy started for the truck, Miller ran toward Joe growling fiercely. Joe was cornered in the shop with no way to escape.

"Keep that dog away from me," he yelled. He had a tire iron in his hand and swung it at Miller but missed. He stumbled about that time and fell down on the concrete floor with Miller barking and showing his teeth. Tommy got there just in time and got hold of the dog which was still growling at Joe and acting like he would tear him up.

"That dog ought to be shot", Joe said.

"I wonder why that dog acted that way," the sheriff said. He's always seemed friendly to

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me." About that time, he noticed that Joe had a gold watch chain attached to his pants. It had been hidden by Joe's shirt until he fell down.

"Mind if I see that watch?" the sheriff asked. Joe reluctantly pulled the watch from the watch pocket of his pants. The sheriff examined the watch, turned it over, and saw Mr. Miller's name engraved on the back.

"Son, I'm afraid you'll have to come with me," said Sheriff Parker. "This watch belonged to Earl Miller."

He placed Joe in his car while Mr. Olson replaced the tire on the sheriff's car. Now they knew why Miller had acted the way he did. The dog knew that Joe had been the one who had killed his master."

After some intense questioning at the sheriff's office, Joe finally admitted he had taken the watch from Mr. Miller. He admitted during questioning that he and Mike Stegar had shared a cell in prison in Tennessee and Mike had told him about his uncle keeping money around the house. They had both been released from prison about the same time but had not seen each other since being released. That was the reason Joe had come to Ruby Falls and got the job at Oleson's Garage. He was waiting for the perfect time to break into Mr. Miller's house and get the money Mike had told him about.

He said he did not mean to kill the old man when he hit him over the head with a short piece of a 2 x 4. Mr. Miller had tried to struggle with him which caused him to hit him. He had been working at the garage when Mr. Miller paid cash for his new set of truck tires. Seeing Mr. Miller counting out those hundred-dollar bills for tires was enough to cause him to put his plan into action. Joe was arrested and placed in the county jail to await his trial for the murder of Earl Miller.

The case had finally been solved thanks to Mr. Miller's dog. Sheriff Parker felt relieved. He had spent many sleepless nights in the last few months trying to find the killer using the latest police techniques. It turned out the case was solved thanks to a loyal mutt who loved his master.

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The only loose end in the Earl Miller case was what to do about the money Jimmy and Tommy had found. Should the boys be allowed to keep it since they had been the ones who found it? Should it go to Jack Martin because he had purchased the land where it had been buried? Should it be given to Mr. Miller's sister in Little Rock since she was his next of kin?

Sheriff Parker didn't feel qualified to make the decision, so he decided to ask Judge Peters. He was the circuit judge in the district which included Ruby Falls.

Judge Peters listened as the sheriff explained the situation. He admitted it was an

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unusual situation. He remembered a case similar to this many years ago in which it was ruled that the person finding some money could keep it if the owner did not claim it within a reasonable time after it had been advertised in a local newspaper for a certain amount of time. Since Mr. Miller was deceased, there was no way it could be claimed by him. Therefore, the judge decided that in this case, the "finders keepers" policy would apply. The money belonged to Jimmy Martin and Tommy Stephens, but since they were minors, their parents would take charge of the money. The judge suggested the money be used for the boy's college education, but he also suggested the parent's give the boys an immediate "reward" for finding the money.

The boys seemed happy with the decision. They were able to purchase several nice things with the money that was given to them. It was like Christmas in August. They didn't forget Miller. They bought him a nice store-bought dog house, a new collar, and made sure he was well fed.

Tommy felt that Mr. Miller would be happy knowing his beloved pet would be well cared for. The boys also made sure their parents put the rest of the money in the Ruby Falls bank. They didn't want anyone getting the idea that their parents kept large sums of money around the house.