

Never Ending Spring

Prologue

May 17, 1949

Pulling the patrol car off Mill Creek Road into the weed-infested driveway, Sheriff Bob Curry said a silent prayer. "Lord, they don't need this right now. You know the Browns have enough trouble." He sighed and switched off the engine.

Someone was watching; the curtains moved in the front window. Normally such an action would make him wary, but not today. The Browns were harmless. He hated death notices, especially this one. He felt like it was his fault their son Dennis was dead. He was the one who had suggested old man Miller press charges.

"You know, Sheriff, that fence ain't worth much. A little paint might do it some good." Miller said.

"Well, with the words the young scalawag put on there, it's gonna have to be painted." Curry said, wagging his head. "Tell you what. I know the Browns can't afford the paint so I'll see if the county can spring for it and we'll let Dennis cool his heels in jail for a couple of days while he paints your fence."

So the deal had been struck and now Dennis was dead.

The front door opened and Katy Brown stepped out on the rickety porch. She clutched her threadbare robe to herself with one hand and held onto the peeling railing with the other. Her mothers eyes searched the interior of the car. Opening the door, Bob walked across the unmowed lawn.

"Morning, Mrs. Brown." he said, squinting up at the gray haired woman.

"Where's Denny? I thought you said he finished the fence yesterday."

"Well, yes ma'am, he did."

"Then why ain't he with ye, you said you'd bring him by in time for school and its nigh onto 10 o'clock."

"I'm sorry Mrs. Brown. I've got some bad news for you. Can I come and talk to you and Don?"

"Now, Sheriff you know wells I do that fight weren't Denny's fault. Them big boys at the jail goaded him into takin' the first swing. You ain't gonna hold him because of that, are ye?" She stood to the side to let him enter. Taking off his hat, Bob ducked his head and stepped into the shabby living room. Don Brown set on the couch, his face lined with pain.

"How's the back this morning, Don?" Bob asked.

"Not good, I didn't get much sleep last night with it a painin me."

Taking a deep breath, Curry said "Well folks, there's no easy way to say it, Dennis hung himself last night. The night man found him about five o'clock this morning. We tried to bring him back, but it was too late."

"You're a funnen us." Don said, tears misting his eyes.

"You're wrong, it's gotta be some other boy. Denny wouldn't do that. Not over some rickety old fence." Katy Brown said.

"I'm sorry. There's no mistake. It's Dennis alright." Bob said, turning his hat by the brim.

"NO, NO, NO!" Katie screamed. "Not my baby! No!" She collapsed on the couch with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Don raised his cane and pointed it shakily at the sheriff. "You mark my words, somebody killed my boy. If'n I was half the man I used to be, I'd be down at that jail and I'd find out who they is."

They laid Denny out in the living room in a pine box made by his Uncle Jimmy. Uncomfortable going to the home again, Bob waited on the road while they loaded the casket into an old station wagon. When they pulled out of the yard, he turned on the bubble and led the small procession down the mile and a half to the small cemetery where Denny's granddaddy and grandma lay.

After they put Denny in the ground, Jimmy came to him. They had known each other for a long time, Curry on one side of the law and Jimmy on the other. As much as he tried, Jimmy could not overcome the alcohol.

"What are you doing here, Sheriff?" Jimmy said, bringing his face inches from Bob's. The smell of cheap beer was overpowering.

"I came to pay my respects."

"If'n you had respect, Denny wouldn't be in that box." Jimmy took a step closer, his nose almost touching the sheriff's face.

"Go home, Jimmy. I don't want to have to arrest you today." Turning away, Bob opened the door to his patrol car.

"This ain't over sheriff. No sir, this ain't over by a long shot."

Jimmy stared at the patrol car until it disappeared over the hill.