

Chapter One

Eli and Spring were eating breakfast when they heard a rider approaching their cabin.

“You stay put, Spring,” Eli ordered as he reached for his rifle and went out the door.

“That's close enough,” Eli warned.

The young man raised his arms when he saw the rifle pointed at him.

“It's okay, old-timer, I'm a deputy from Harmony.” He pointed to his badge.

Eli slowly lowered his rifle but was still suspicious of the man in front of him.

“What can I do for you, deputy?”

“The Sheriff sent me out this way to warn folks of a gang of men raiding farms and ranches.”

“I'm listening,” said Eli.

“Well, they usually come at night and steal whatever they can from horses to money to jewelry. The sheriff wanted everyone alerted to the situation.”

“You live here alone, old man?”

“Yes,” Eli answered.

“Okay, let us know if you see anyone suspicious.”

“No need, if one of them fellas comes up here, he will meet my rifle.”

“Well make sure it's one of them and not someone else like a lone deputy.”

“Be careful” the young man said and he turned to ride away.

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Once or twice a month, Eli would venture to town to sell furs to the general store and rabbits to the restaurants. Sometimes he even sold wood carvings he made to bring in extra money. Eli was never good at having a regular job. Living in nature and surviving on his own as a mountain man gave Eli peace. He had tried to settle down once in his younger days when he had met Cal's mother, but that kind of life made him restless and his wife knew he was not happy on her family's ranch. They agreed that he would go back to the mountains and would come home when he could. Unlike his father, Cal loved the ranch and hoped one day to have his own.

Eli made it a point to come home as often as possible. He loved his wife and son dearly, but was a better man if he could live some time out in nature. Although the arrangement may have seemed strange to others, they were a happy family. Born into a family who had ranched for generations, Cal's mother knew how to run a ranch. She hired experienced men to work for her and Cal learned all he could about ranching from them.

After a long illness, Cal's mother died when he was just eighteen. Sadly, the ranch had to be sold to pay medical bills. Eli had been with her throughout her illness and after the funeral, tried to talk Cal into going with him, but Cal was set on having his own ranch someday. They parted ways, but still remained in touch even though it was hard at times. Five years had passed when a letter made it to Eli. Cal had married, bought a small ranch near the town of Harmony and wanted his pa to come visit. Elated by the news from his son, Eli set out the next day to visit his family. When Eli arrived not only did he meet his new daughter-in-law, but he also found out he would soon be a grandfather. Little did he know how events would unfold and how he would be left to raise his only grandchild.

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“Spring!” Eli called for his granddaughter. “Spring! Where is that dad gum girl... Spring!”

Spring was down at the creek when she heard her grandfather call

“Shoot! I wish Grandpa wouldn't make me go with him. I would rather stay here with you, Lobo.”

The animal cocked his head as if he was listening to the girl. The wolf had been rescued by Spring when he was just a pup. Sick, weak and missing a small part of his ear, the wolf had been abandoned and left to die. Under Spring's tender care, he grew stronger and knowing a wolf is a wild animal, she returned him to the wild when he was older. Happily, however, she would see Lobo at the creek from time to time, and today was one of those times.

“Spring!”

“I got to go, Lobo. I really hate going to town. Hopefully we will be back before too long.”

Taking her time, Spring trudged up the path and found Eli sitting on the wagon waiting for her.

“Spring, didn't you hear me calling? Get yourself up here on the wagon so we can go. I don't want to be in town all day.”

“Grandpa, do I have to go? I hate going into town, the townspeople look down on country folk.”

“And just where did you hear that?”

“From you, of course.”

“Well then never you mind, just put that hair of yours under your hat and remember you are a boy and your name is Jimmy.”

“I remember, Grandpa. But I don't have to be a boy to take care of myself.”

Patting her jacket, Spring checked on her hidden gun. She asked Grandpa if she could bring it for protection but he had told her absolutely not; he had the rifle for protection. When he wasn't watching, Spring had taken the gun and hid it under her jacket before she went to the creek. Grandpa did not know that she had peeked out the window when the deputy came by and heard him warn Eli of the raiders.

“We are almost to town girl, so you remember....”

“Grandpa,” Spring interrupted, “I remember, I'm a boy and my name is Jimmy.”