INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Community service recognition awards, hunting trophies, and family photos adorn an otherwise plain wall.

An American flag bookends a small shelving unit topped with monitors, fax machine, and columns of neatly stacked papers.

In front behind a small desk sits SHERIFF DENNY, an imposing figure with a troubled look on his face talking heatedly into a landline phone.

SHERIFF DENNY
I don't care what he does with his own time-

A KNOCK.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
Hold on Terry.

DEPUTY COLE, a tumbleweed of a man pokes his torso into the office from a doorway.

DEPUTY COLE
You wanted to-

Denny cuts him off by waving him in.

SHERIFF DENNY
(into phone)
Nobody. Listen you've got twenty minutes to get that boy down to the courthouse or your ass is gonna end up patrolling shopping centers for the next six months.

Denny slams the phone down.

Cole waivers in front of Denny's desk.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
Well don't just stand there like a scarecrow. Have a seat.

Cole jumps into the chair across from Denny.

Denny regards Cole. The once hard lines of his face seem to melt away into a unexpected softness.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
I got your letter.

DEPUTY COLE
Yes, sir, I-

SHERIFF DENNY
-Before you say anything you might regret, let me ask you a question.

DEPUTY COLE
Yes, sir.

SHERIFF DENNY
Is this because of what happened out on Woodard Creek?

Cole's silence says it all.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
I'm not going to bullshit you, Cole and tell you it gets easier. Our duty is to the protection of the citizens of this county and sometimes...well sometimes the intention of an individual is unclear.

DEPUTY COLE
We had him. Right here. Just one day before, he was sitting in this station, just a normal man who was trying to be helpful. I should have seen it, but I didn't...I...

SHERIFF DENNY
You couldn't have known, Cole.

DEPUTY COLE
But if I just could have-

SHERIFF DENNY
-Cole. You couldn't have known.

A long silence.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
I was about your age when I became a Deputy. Growing up watching Gunsmoke with my daddy, all I ever wanted was to be like Marshall Dillon, taking down the bad guys. I was sworn in at a quarter after 11, April 9th 1993.
(MORE)

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
Three hours later I'm standing in a living room across from the body of a teenage boy...dead from a gunshot wound. Bullet was from my gun.

DEPUTY COLE
What happened?

SHERIFF DENNY
We got the call at 2:17. Neighbor said there was screaming. We were three minutes away. We heard the shot before we even got out of the cruiser. Sheriff Horton hit the door first. I was right behind him. I saw a boy standing over a dead man with a revolver in his hands. I yelled for him to drop it. He turned. I fired.

Denny collects himself.

SHERIFF DENNY (CONT'D)
Nobody knew why that boy pulled the trigger and killed Mark Emerson, a middle school guidance counselor. Emerson was well liked by all. Then a week later another kid finally broke to his mother what Emerson had been doing to him and several other boys from the school. No one could have known.

DEPUTY COLE
Jesus.

SHERIFF DENNY
You're trying to quit because you think you should have known. Maybe that little girl would still be alive. I'm telling you...you won't always know. The world isn't made black or white and it takes good men to help make sense of the grey. I hired you because you're a good man. And your reaction to Woodard Creek only reinforces that I made the right choice. Keep the badge. Help me keep making the right choice.

Cole sits with Denny's story as we...

FADE TO BLACK.