

THE GIRLS

EPISODE 1

[THE GIRLS THEME]

WEST McCRAY:

Welcome to Cold Creek, Colorado. Population: eight hundred.

Do a Google Image search and you'll see its main street, the barely beating heart of that tiny world, and find every other building vacant or boarded up. Cold Creek's luckiest—the gainfully employed—work at the local grocery store, the gas station and a few other staple businesses along the strip. The rest have to look a town or two over for opportunity for themselves and for their children; the closest schools are in Parkdale, forty minutes away. They take in students from three other towns.

Beyond its main street, Cold Creek arteries out into worn and chipped Monopoly houses that no longer have a place upon the board. From there lies a rural sort of wilderness. The

highway out is interrupted by veins of dirt roads leading to nowhere as often as they lead to pockets of dilapidated houses or trailer parks in even worse shape. In the summertime, a food bus comes with free lunches for the kids until the school year resumes, guaranteeing at least two subsidized meals a day.

There's a quiet to it that's startling if you've lived your whole life in the city, like I have. Cold Creek is surrounded by a beautiful, uninterrupted expanse of land and sky that seem to go on forever. Its sunsets are spectacular; electric golds and oranges, pinks and purples, natural beauty unspoiled by the insult of skyscrapers. The sheer amount of space is humbling, almost divine. It's hard to imagine feeling *trapped* here.

But most people here do.

COLD CREEK RESIDENT [FEMALE]:

You live in Cold Creek because you were born here and if you're born here, you're probably never getting out.

WEST McCRAY:

That's not entirely true. There have been some success stories, college graduates who moved on and found well-paying jobs in distant cities, but they tend to be the exception and not the rule. Cold Creek is home to a quality of life we're raised to aspire beyond, if we're born privileged enough to have the choice.

Here, everyone's working so hard to care for their families and keep their heads above water that, if they wasted time on the petty dramas, scandals and personal grudges that seem to define small towns in our nation's imagination, they would not survive. That's not to say there's no drama, scandal, or

grudge—just that those things are usually more than residents of Cold Creek can afford to care about.

Until *it* happened.

The husk of an abandoned, turn-of-the-century one-room schoolhouse sits three miles outside of town, taken by fire. The roof is caved in and what's left of the walls are charred. It sits next to an apple orchard that's slowly being reclaimed by the nature that surrounds it: young overgrowth, new trees, wildflowers.

There's almost something romantic about it, something that feels like respite from the rest of the world. It's the perfect place to be alone with your thoughts. At least it was, before.

May Beth Foster—who you'll come to know as this series goes on—took me there herself. I asked to see it. She's a plump, white, sixty-eight-year-old woman with salt-and-pepper hair. She has a grandmotherly way about her, right down to a voice that's so invitingly familiar it warms you from the inside out. May Beth is manager of Sparkling River Estates trailer park, a lifelong resident of Cold Creek, and when she talks, people listen. More often than not, they accept whatever she says as the truth.

MAY BETH FOSTER:

Just about . . . here.

This is where they found the body.

911 DISPATCH [PHONE]:

911 dispatch. What's your emergency?