

## Part One

### A Hole in the Mountain

Karen Waverly, Janice Scott and Deborah Appleton, led blindfolded Vanessa Taylor up the thickly wooded lower bordering fringe of Still Creek Mountain. Vanessa could not remember being so humiliated in all her fifteen years. This was part of the juvenile ritual of becoming a member of this – stupid – cliquish – club. She was undeniably having second thoughts about this bunch.

Living in this hickish, boring and small town of Gloverton, Colorado, from Vanessa's way of thinking, was the most horrible and evil thing ever to happen to her. Gloverton, Colorado certainly was nothing like Boston, Massachusetts, where Vanessa was born and, up until only six months before, lived.

She started hating Gloverton the moment her mother, Susan Taylor, told Vanessa and her seven year old brother, Robbie, about the job she had taken as the third grade teacher at the Henry William Harris Elementary School. Though Vanessa had never lived anywhere else but Boston she knew deep down inside her soul that she was going to hate the whole thing beyond all reason. She was still mad at her mother, even after six months. She had barely spoken a civil word to her mother since arriving there.

Vanessa was lonely. She did not make friends easily, she was shy and it was this shy demeanor that seemed to totally rule her life. Nevertheless, she understood that if she really wanted to get along in this town the place to start would be to put up with the girls in this cliquishly foolish club.

Vanessa rarely considered herself pretty or even passably good-looking. Most of the time she felt awkward and out of place concerning her looks. Though she did not realize it she always displayed good posture and never outwardly seemed awkward. True, she had sprouted all of a sudden and early and as a result seemed to embarrassingly stand two or three inches, or more, taller than most everyone else in her class. Vanessa was self-conscious of her straight red hair and uncontrollably blossoming figure, which she was told came from her mother's family, people continually commented on her blue eyes, which ran in her father's side, as well as her fair skin that burned rather than tanned after only a short time in the sun without protection, though this was a trait which none of her relatives really wanted to claim as their own. Most of all, she was certain no one else in the entire world entertained such insecure feelings about themselves. To make matters even worse, being only fifteen years old and somewhat of a late bloomer, she often mistook the attention of others in her class. She especially misread any attention from the boy's, thinking there must be something wrong with her, which, of course, was the furthest thing from the truth.

Vanessa did not dress outlandishly. She just did not want to stand out in a crowd or attract attention to herself. She did not wear dresses often and was most comfortable in jeans with simple and plain colored pullovers. She found makeup and frilly underwear uncomfortable and was absolutely convinced she looked ridiculous with any kind of eye shadow or liner. Little did she know that she was on the verge of changing her mind about such things.

The residents of the town of Gloverton had always been proud of the landscape they were lucky enough to live within, but no one ever invaded the mountainside, it just wasn't done. Vanessa, just like all of the Gloverton inhabitants, thought it was just a cold, damp, dark, scary and uninviting location. She did not like it and she certainly did not want to be there. The truth was that no one ever wanted to be on the mountain or traverse too close to it. In reality no one ever thought about the mountain, it was just there and everyone looked beyond it, as if they did not see it. For the most part Still Creek Mountain was ignored.

Yet this ignored mountain, however, was in reality quite beautiful. It seemed to rise out of nothing within a vast plain to a towering height well above anything else; it dwarfed everything in sight. The expansive prairie extended in all directions around the mountain for fifty miles giving way to a banked gently sloping wooded grade that formed the natural foundation and pedestal of the table-topped mesa. Out of the center of this green wooded perimeter rose the grand and majestic rocky landmass everyone completely overlooked and disregarded as if it were unseeable.