



You can't tell what Spring Meadow is from the road. The sign, nestled beneath a large oak tree, could be for a retirement village. It could be a bed-and-breakfast. It could be a corporate office or a small women's college.

The road to the main building is confusing because you think you've entered a campus of some kind, but then you drive along a row of small houses, none of which seem to hold actual families.

At the end of the road, you're faced with a low, modern building that looks like a school or an office complex. There's still no indication of the purpose of the place. There's no medical equipment, no wheelchairs, no people with clipboards. There are no guards or attendants, no one who seems equipped to handle a crisis situation.

If you arrive on a rainy night, in wet clothes, with bits of vomit still in your hair, nobody comes running to your car to help you inside. Nobody offers to clean you up. You can clean yourself up later if you want. As with many things at Spring Meadow, it's up to you.

There's a chemical smell to the main building. It's a smell you'll get used to. If your parents brought you, they will talk to Ms. Rinaldi, who takes your patient information and fills out the insurance forms. These have to be completed before they put you in a room. And if you're sixteen, of course, there are issues of guardianship and consent.

If you're shaking slightly or having trouble focusing due to extreme levels of alcohol and/or drugs in your bloodstream, well, that's your problem. It's not like the movies. Nobody gives you a shot of sedatives to calm your nerves. Nobody lays a blanket over your shoulders. Nobody puts an arm around you and tells you everything will be fine.

You stay in the main building that first night. You lie down in a cell-like room, on a too-hard mattress with a too-flat pillow, and stare at the bare yellow wall in front of you. If you've, say, stolen a car that day and driven it into a ditch, you might still be feeling the impact in your wrists and chest, you might have cuts, scrapes, and bruises from the air bag. You might see things coming at you at high speed when you close your eyes. That's not fun. But that's nobody's problem but your own.

In a couple days you will be cleaned up, clothed, your stomach settled, your vision cleared. You will walk around the main building in your bathrobe and your slippers, with your herbal tea and your daily schedule in your pocket. Your daily schedule: drug and alcohol classes, drug and alcohol counseling, drug and alcohol group therapy sessions. There's not a lot of variety of subject matter.

But that's what it is. Spring Meadow. Rehab. That's your first twenty-eight days.

In some ways, those are the easiest.