



## Colton's Ranch Refuge (The Coltons of Eden Falls)

By Beth Cornelison

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Ex-soldier Gunnar Colton's only focus is shaking off the horrors of war in his remote cabin—until a murderer abducts another victim from the neighboring Amish community. Now the Colton code of honor kicks in and it's his duty to protect the eyewitness who's the next likely target.

Treating sexy, spitfire actress Violet Chastain as just another assignment is next to impossible, though. There's more to her than Hollywood and the hurt she's hiding. The minute Gunnar lets the starlet and her twin baby boys into his home, the guard around his heart starts to crack. One taste of passion shows him the future he could have with Violet—if the threat closing in doesn't claim them both.

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Award-winning author Beth Cornelison has been writing stories since she was a child. A University of Georgia graduate, Cornelison worked in Public Relations before becoming a full-time writer. She has won many honors for her writing, including the coveted Golden Heart, awarded by the Romance Writers of America. She lives in Louisiana with her husband and son. For more information, visit her website at [www.bethcornelison.com](http://www.bethcornelison.com).

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A chill November breeze buffeted Gunnar Colton's cheeks and sent a shiver rippling through him. Tension strung Gunnar as tight as a trip wire, and he cast a wary gaze around the downtown Eden Falls street. At first glance, nothing about the scene seemed amiss. Merchants decorated their shop windows for the upcoming holidays, and customers milled about casually enjoying the Saturday afternoon and hunting for early season bargains. Eden Falls was small-town Americana at its best, yet Gunnar couldn't relax, couldn't quiet the hum of anxiety buzzing through his veins.

"The cold air is making my nose run," sixteen-year-old Piper complained.

"Guess you better go chase it then," Sawyer teased.

Piper slanted her adopted brother a you're-so-stupid look before turning to Gunnar. "I'm freezing out here."

"So drink your hot chocolate. It'll warm you up." Gunnar curled his hands around his cocoa, soaking up the heat from the ceramic mug, and gave the teenager a patient glance.

She rolled her eyes and flopped back in her chair with a shake of her head.

The weather was too cold for them to be sitting outside, but Sawyer, Piper and Gunnar's eleven-year-old brother, had specifically requested that they drink their hot chocolate at the cafe's sidewalk table. Gunnar hadn't had the heart to tell Sawyer no, despite his own deeply personal reasons for being uneasy with the outdoor table. He felt exposed on the city street—jumpy, emotionally raw.

He turned his attention to the local street vendors selling holiday arts and crafts, and his mind wandered thousands of miles away....

*The marketplace disintegrated into chaos as debris rained down on the street. Shouts and screams pierced the ringing in his ears as the concussion of the explosion echoed through the street.*

"Gunnar? Did you hear me?" Piper asked, giving him a half worried, half exasperated frown. "I'm sorry. What?"

"Can I go to Tres Chic and look at their jeans while you two finish your cocoa?"

He shook his head. "Stay with us. We'll be done in a minute. Then we'll go with you."

Piper and Sawyer sent him matching looks of horror.

"To a girl's store?"

"Gunnar!"

He divided a look between his youngest siblings, knowing he was totally out of his league—what did an ex-soldier know about raising teenagers?—but determined to reconnect with his family after so many years away. Sawyer had been a baby when Gunnar had enlisted in the army and had left for his first tour of duty in Afghanistan. His brother felt like a stranger. And teenage Piper bore little resemblance to the sweet little sister he'd hugged goodbye eleven years ago. "Listen, if you'll—"

The roar of a motorcycle engine yanked Gunnar's attention away midsentence. He jerked his gaze toward the black sport bike speeding toward them, and ice filled his veins.

*The moped sped past them, breaching the security checkpoint and ramming into the crowded marketplace. Sam and Ronnie were on their feet in an instant. "Suicide bomber!"*

Gunnar jolted as the bomb in his memory exploded with a deafening blast.

This motorcycle rider wore a backpack. He drove right up onto the sidewalk.

"Get down!" Gunnar grabbed the front of Sawyer's jacket and yanked him from his chair to the ground. In an instant, he'd shoved Piper to the sidewalk as well and flipped their table on its side to serve as a blast shield—as if the flimsy metal table was any real protection from a half dozen sticks of dynamite or a block of C-4.

With an arm around each of his startled siblings, Gunnar huddled behind the table, bracing for the fireball, the concussion, the chaos. His heart drummed a frantic tattoo against his ribs. Despite the cold, a film of sweat popped out on his forehead. Adrenaline sent a shudder rolling through him.

"Gunnar? Wh-what's wrong? Why are we hiding?" Sawyer asked.

Several seconds had passed with no explosion. Passersby on the sidewalk sent them curious looks and half-hidden grins behind gloved hands. Had the detonator failed? Had the bomber balked?

*In the wake of the blast, he staggered to his feet, tasted blood in his mouth, searched the street for his friends, for the woman and her son...*

Nausea churned in his gut, and he struggled for a breath. It was still so fresh, so real, so terrifying.

Piper wiggled free of his grasp, shooting him an annoyed yet troubled look. "What are you *doing*?"

Gunnar dragged a shaky hand over his face, blinking hard to separate the present from the past. "The motorcycle. He had a backpack. I thought."

"Of course he had a backpack. That's how most people carry their stuff on a motorcycle." Piper dusted her hands and shook her head. "Why'd you freak out over that?"

"I thought.. " Gunnar rubbed the bridge of his nose, his breathing still ragged and his pulse racing.

Piper clambered to her feet and cast her gaze down the street...and gasped. Quickly she dropped back behind the protection of the overturned table, her pale blue eyes wide with horror.

Gunnar's pulse ramped higher. "What?"

"The guy on the motorcycle...it's Heath Hamilton!" She squeezed her eyes shut and groaned. "Oh, God, please, don't let him have seen me. I will *die* if he finds out it was us behind this table! Heath is only the hottest guy at school."

"At least you didn't skin your knee," Sawyer said.

Gunnar shifted his attention to his little brother. "You're hurt?"

"Thanks to you." His brother's soulful brown eyes blazed with accusation. "What did you think? That the motorcycle was going to run over us? That he had a gun?"

He saw Sawyer's ripped jeans and bloody knee, and his chest tightened. "Bomb. I thought he had a bomb."

Sawyer wrinkled his nose. "Dude, this is America, not Afghanistan. That kind of stuff doesn't happen here."

Gunnar lightly ruffled his brother's hair, swallowing the reply that sprang to his tongue. *But it has. The 9/11 terrorists killed our parents.*

"Sorry, buddy. I just..." Gunnar fisted his hands and shoved the last whispers of nightmarish tremors down, locking them in a corner of his brain where he didn't have to face the memories. "Let's get you home so Derek can take a look at that knee, huh?"

As he climbed to his feet, Gunnar cast a sheepish side glance to Piper. Her returned gaze was wary, worried, shaken. "Sorry, Piper. I didn't mean to embarrass you."

She glanced back toward the parked motorcycle as she pushed to her feet. "No harm done. I don't think he saw us." She sighed. "I don't think Heath even knows I exist." She paused and scrunched her nose. "Are you all right? You're sweating and shaking and stuff."

Gunnar wiped his face on his coat sleeve. "I'm fine."

"Did you really think Heath had a bomb?" Piper tucked her Nordic-blond hair behind her ear and gave him a puzzled frown. "Why would Heath Hamilton want to bomb Main Street?"

Gunnar righted the table and picked up the broken pieces of their hot chocolate mugs. "I'm sure he wouldn't. My mistake." Clearing his throat, he divided a look between his disgruntled siblings. "Say, guys, don't mention this to Derek or Emma. Okay?"

Sawyer shrugged. "Whatever."

Piper was less easily convinced, and she narrowed a suspicious gaze on Gunnar as he tossed the shattered ceramic pieces in the nearest trash can. "Why not? Why don't you want them to know?"

He lifted a shoulder, which protested with a sharp ache. Apparently in his dive to the sidewalk he'd jammed the joint. "I just don't want them worrying about me. They've got enough on their minds with this new case regarding the missing Amish girls and Derek hiring new help for his office."

The door to the coffeehouse opened, and the manager stepped out to surveyed the mess Gunnar had created. "Are you folks all right?"

Piper's cheeks, already pink from the cold, reddened further. Sawyer rolled his eyes and started walking toward their Suburban.

Gunnar pulled out his wallet, peeled off a couple one hundred dollar bills and handed them to the manager. "Here. This should cover the damage. We're sorry for the disturbance."

Turning, he hustled to catch up with Sawyer, and while his wallet was out, he handed his little brother a hundred dollar bill as well. "Buy yourself some new jeans. Okay, buddy?"

Sawyer's eyes lit up. "Wow! Thanks, Gunnar."

Piper's jaw dropped, and she grunted. "You're bribing him?"

Gunnar shook his head. "He tore his jeans. He needs new ones."

His sister twisted her mouth speculatively. "I broke a nail. Do I get money for a manicure?"

Gunnar doled her a hundred dollars, as well. "Cunning."

"So are you really a billionaire, Gunnar?" Sawyer asked as they reached the family's SUV. "I heard Tate saying you, like, made some kind of killer investments that went crazy while you were deployed, and now you've got something like nine bazillion dollars."

Gunnar unlocked the driver's door and flipped the switch to unlock the rest of the SUV doors. "I prefer not to discuss my financial business with an eleven year old."

"Come on, Sawyer," Piper said, settling on the front passenger seat. "If he had billions of dollars, why would he be living in that little cabin at the edge of the ranch property?"

"I don't know, Piper," Sawyer sniped. "Why aren't you living in the Amazon with all the other giant women?"

Piper turned to glare at her brother, and Gunnar gritted his teeth as he pulled into traffic. "Cut it out, Sawyer. It was a legitimate question. And I live in the cabin because I want to." He he...

## **Users Review**

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The guide with title Colton's Ranch Refuge (The Coltons of Eden Falls) possesses a lot of information that you can study it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. This particular book exist new know-how the information that exist in this publication represented the condition of the world now. That is important to yo7u to know how the improvement of the world. This specific book will bring you throughout new era of the syndication. You can read the e-book in your smart phone, so you can read the item anywhere you want.

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