

# Untamed Bonus Chapter

## By Callie Harper

### Heath

Violet sat on the couch reading a magazine. The morning sunlight filtered in through the window, finally giving us what looked to be a warm Vermont day in late March. Personally, I felt the cold winters made the spring and summer heat even more enjoyable. But Violet? She was still getting used to the winters. Good thing she now had me to warm her up. That went a long way. A long, long way if you caught my meaning...

I walked into the room, still chuckling over the phone call I'd just finished.

Violet looked up at the sound of my laughter. "What's up?" She wore a light spring top, the kind of gauzy material she always favored. And I always liked to remove.

"I just got off the phone with Colt." Shaking my head, I sat down next to her on the couch with a thump. I was a big man.

"How's Colt? Busy taking over the world?"

"Naturally." I took her hand in mine. She'd said yes to me over three months ago, but I still marveled over the fact that she'd said it. Who knew I could get so lucky in life? "It seems our favorite CEO has hit a bump in the road," I explained. "But I'm sure he'll figure it out."

"Ooh! A bump? Colt? Tell me everything." She sat up straight, ready for the scoop. My woman might have left reality TV, but Violet still loved a good story.

"Some group is protesting his plans to build on the Oregon coast. He's flying out there to put a stop to it."

"I'd love to see someone try to get in his way." Violet giggled. "He's like a force of nature."

"Always has been," I agreed. Some of my earliest memories of my oldest brother involved him taking charge. I couldn't have been much more than three, but I swore I could remember him putting a pot on my head and telling me that he was my Army Sargent and we needed to head off to war. And I could recall him rounding everyone up at what might have been my fifth birthday party, telling them what games to play.

Later on, he'd been the one to order all of us takeout for dinner when my mother wasn't up to it. That had happened a lot around my parents' separation and divorce. I remembered my mother hadn't wanted a lot of serving staff around witnessing the family's break-up, spreading gossip. We'd had a strange year back when I was around nine, fending for ourselves. Relying on Colt, when I really thought about it.

"What do you think Colt would do if he heard the word no?" Violet asked, snuggling into my chest, right where I liked her. She seemed tickled by the concept.

"He'd turn it into a yes," I replied without a moment's thought. "He's never met a 'no' he couldn't convert."

She nodded in agreement. Over the past year we'd both experienced Colt's M.O. like a full-frontal assault. In action, he was something like a cross between a steamroller and a bulldozer. Thankfully, he was on our side, helping us both with our entrepreneurial endeavors, making introductions, suggesting contacts, giving both of us access to his vast and unparalleled network.

Violet had a great idea on her hands with her TV show *Love Your Local*, but it was Colt who'd helped catapult it into a new hit series. And I now had a thriving art and crafts business, again, in large part due to Colt's contacts. Even better, I was still able to manage everything exactly how I wanted, maintaining complete artistic control, not selling out the way I'd feared the moment I started selling more. Turned out I liked having a wider audience. Customers crossed over into the other local Vermont businesses, which made me happy. Plus it enabled me to hire a cool local kid, only about 19 but so talented and dying to learn more. With him helping in the workshop now, it freed me up to spend more time with Violet.

"Well, I just hope those protestors know what they're in for." Violet shook her head, her fingers laced through mine.

"Oh, I'm sure they don't," I chuckled, bringing her hand to my lips for a kiss. And I wondered...was now the right time? I'd woken up early to make some modifications out on our front porch. She was going to walk out and see it all sooner or later. I'd better get a jump on it or I'd ruin the surprise.

"I've got something to show you—" I began exactly as she started with, "I've got something to talk to you—"

We laughed, then both said "you first," at the same time. That was the thing about couples in love, they got a little nauseating with their cuteness. So in-sync, so solicitous to each other's needs. Good thing it was just the two of us in the cabin. That way we could be as nauseating as we liked. And get naked soon. That I planned on as well.

"You go first," I insisted again, settling back down on the couch. I didn't want her distracted in any way when I showed her what I'd made us. She thought she liked the rocking chairs I designed? Wait until she saw this.

I could still remember the first time I'd seen her in our store. Sitting there, eyes closed, running her hands along the smooth wooden arms, I'd realized I'd made that rocking chair for her before I'd even met her. Life was a strange and wonderful thing. In the past year, I'd learned a lot about not asking too many questions, trying to make rational sense out of situations that didn't seem to add up when you first looked at them. Country boy meets city girl? Who would have guessed we'd click so hard? Some things you simply had to accept. Especially when they felt so good.

"You sure?" she asked, looking nervous. "Because if you were going to show me something quick, we could go do that and then—"

"You're nervous about telling me something," I concluded.

"No! Of course not! I can tell you anything!" Her overly-bright protests only made me more convinced.

"Spit it out." I still smiled, but I meant it. Better get whatever it was out on the table so we could move on. I had something I really wanted to show her.

"Sam wants to plan our wedding for us." She spoke quickly and I wasn't entirely sure that I'd heard her correctly. Because it sounded as if she'd said that

Sam, the man she used to work with, the one who'd thrown both of us under the bus to gain favor at the Fame! Network, wanted to plan our wedding.

"I think you need to repeat that." I stayed quiet, listening, letting her spill it all.

"I know it's crazy," she started again, breathlessly, so I instantly knew I had heard right. She went on to explain a whole lot of things that still didn't exactly fit with the cagy, conniving man I'd met last year in Vermont. Sam had quit the TV business. He felt awful about what he'd done to us. He'd opened up his dream business planning weddings.

"He wants to do this for us totally free of charge, as an apology and as a wedding present."

I looked at her, raising an eyebrow. "This is Sam we're talking about?"

"Honey, I know he wasn't always so cool to us in the past."

Now both of my eyebrows went up.

"OK, he, like, ruined both of our lives for a little while," she admitted. "But then he called you and told you everything, so basically he got us back together. And I really do believe everyone deserves a second chance! And he sounds so happy now, Heath, you wouldn't believe it."

I sighed. I could see where this was going. Violet was far from a bridezilla, but even I knew enough not to stand directly in the way of a bride-to-be and her Vision of her Wedding.

"So you want Sam to plan our wedding?" I asked, a smile tugging at the corner of my lips even though a large part of me still thought it was the worst idea I'd ever heard.

"Only if you think it's OK," she pleaded, her eyes big with an unspoken "pretty please?"

I grumbled and huffed, like the big bear of a man that I was. "You know what he's going to want to do with our wedding." I could picture something like my brother Ash's wedding, 600-plus guests, half of them A-list celebrities. Only Sam would probably want to go even bigger. Why stop at fountains when you could have real mermaids swimming in them?

"I promise, I can keep him under control." Violet read my mind. "We can have it here in Watson, like we planned. And we can keep it small. But Sam will take care of coordinating everything. And he'll make it fun, I know he will."

"Plus will he throw in a surprise back-stabbing event along with the cake-cutting?"

That made her laugh. But then she looked at me seriously. "I'll tell him no if you want, Heath. You know I will. I guess I just feel so happy, so grateful and lucky. I can't seem to say no to anyone lately. And Sam was always fun to work with. He could get bitchy as hell, but I think that was because of where we worked more than him. Fame! could turn anyone into a bitch."

I smiled, remembering my first impression of her. Pulling up in the middle of a snowstorm in a mini red convertible, teetering into the bar on her stacked heels, I'd assumed she was exactly the type of woman I should avoid at all costs. Good thing I'd ignored my own better judgment.

"You're smiling." She grinned up at me, poking me with her elbow. "Does that mean yes?"

"I think you're certifiable," I told her. "But, hell, why not? Stranger things have happened over the past year and a half. Let's get Sam in on the fun."

Violet made a high-pitched sound a lot like "squee!!!" as she threw her arms around my shoulders. I'd become quite the pushover, hadn't I? And I'd never felt happier.

"All right." I wrapped her in my arms. "You got that off your chest. Anything else you want to talk about?"

"Nope." She smiled up at me.

"OK then." I stood and pulled her up. "You might want to get your jacket on. We are going to set foot outside of the house."

She peered out the window suspiciously. "Outside? Are you sure?"

"Come on, city girl." I grabbed her parka off a hook and handed it to her. It was an absurd coat, but we were both attached to it. She'd had it on when we'd first met, after all. Plus we'd put it to good use in other ways on more than one occasion. Padding in a jif.

She buried herself in her parka and stood expectantly at the door. I looked down at her, her pretty face now swallowed in wild fur trim. My Violet, soon to be my wife in six months. I really wanted to drag her back into the bedroom for the rest of the day. But I had something I needed to show her first.

"You ready?" I asked, hand on the door.

"For anything!" she declared, smiling up at me and into our wide-open future.

## **Violet**

Oh my big mountain man. What a guy. I'd been nervous about asking him about Sam for weeks now.

Ever since Heath and I had gotten engaged at his family's holiday party, I'd been back in touch with Sam, mostly texting but sometimes quick chats on the phone. That man made me laugh so hard. And without the angry, competitive work environment pitting us all against each other like cats and dogs, Sam's was a friendship I was really starting to enjoy.

He had all sorts of fabulous ideas for the fall wedding Heath and I had planned. He came up with them all the time, sending me little texts like popcorn exploding into my day. His latest idea was perhaps his best. He wanted to fly every single one of the ladies who worked in my mother's salon up to the wedding in Vermont. The plan would be to ask them if they wouldn't mind doing everyone's hair in the wedding party. Then we'd surprise them by having L.A. stylists ready and waiting there to treat them, doing them up like movie stars.

"I freaking love it!" I'd declared, already picturing the looks on their faces. My mom, especially. She'd gotten a taste of the finer life, dating a silver fox she'd met at Ash's wedding last May. She'd have a ball sharing it with all the women she worked with, her non-blood related family.

And Sam understood that we wanted to keep it intimate, nothing too over-the-top. I had full confidence that he'd do a great job and make the whole thing fun. But that was because I had a long history with him, working with him for years before the whole Vermont fiasco. Heath didn't. Which was why I felt so damn grateful that he trusted me enough to say yes.

"Thank you," I repeated myself, squeezing his hand as we paused at the cabin's front door. "I'm so grateful to you. I can't even really explain why, but I feel like it'll be meaningful to have Sam help plan our wedding. I don't like holding grudges, or..." As I stumbled for words, trying to explain my gut feeling, Heath pulled me to his broad chest.

"Shh." He kissed the top of my head. "You don't have to explain it. Some things don't seem to make sense at first. But I've learned, you just have to go with it."

"Yeah." I nodded up at him, smiling, remembering how I'd tried to talk myself out of falling for him at first. All because I hadn't pictured myself with a big, gruff, pickup-driving mountain man. Shows how stupid I'd been.

"You ready?" He looked down, all excited. I had no idea what he was about to show me. But I had a feeling, with Heath it would be awesome.

"You know how you like the rocking chairs I make?" he asked, hand still on the handle, door still closed.

"Uh-huh." I'd admired them many times, first in his store and now almost every day we spent in our cabin as I cozied up and did a little reading or—believe it or not—knitting. Yes, city girl that I was, I'd taken up needlecraft. Helga had started a knitting circle after her hiphop dance class, adding to the long list of activities held in the multi-purpose storefront downtown. Before I knew it, I was knitting a baby hat for Ash and Ana, due any day now.

"Well, I love seeing you in my chairs. But there's one problem."

"What's that?" I couldn't imagine one. He made the perfect rocking chairs, sturdy and strong. It sounded crazy, but I almost felt like he was holding me when I relaxed in one.

"They aren't big enough for the both of us." Finally, he opened the door and led me outside onto our front porch. Where before we'd simply had a couple of chairs, now I saw a wide, gleaming wooden porch swing hanging from two chains.

With a gasp, I asked, "Did you make this?" But even as I asked, I knew. It had all the signature look of Heath's work, the attention to detail, the mixed materials, with metal and wood blended in ways you'd never expect. He knew exactly how to update the traditional, not losing any of the comfort while adding a whole lot of style.

"What's this, part of a car?" I ran my hand along the back where he'd welded, shaped and smoothed a large metal piece. Somehow he'd taken what looked like a chrome and red fender from a classic car and blended it seamlessly at the top of a sturdy wooden porch swing.

"1956 Ford Thunderbird," Heath informed me, running a reverent hand along the back. "Found it in a junk yard. It deserved a new life."

He'd placed a matching cherry-red seat cushion along the bottom. The swing was tall and wide. It could easily fit three regular-sized people. Which meant it would be perfect for me and Heath.

“Want to take it for a ride?” he asked, a gleam in his eye.

“Absolutely.”

We settled in together, side by side on the swing, and I felt as I had so many times since we’d met. Yet each time I did, it about bowled me over. Heath and I clicked, on a level I didn’t think I’d ever even been aware of before I’d felt it. We clicked when we were joking around. We clicked when we sat together quiet on a porch swing. And holy hell did we click in the bedroom. And on the kitchen counters, the living room couch, the shower stall, or up against the wall whenever we were short on time. We got creative.

Just yesterday he’d surprised me, taking me out for a drive to a neighboring town for dinner and then for a stroll to see their covered bridge. I loved Vermont’s covered bridges and talked big about wanting to see each and every one of them. Each bridge had a story, a history. Many had gotten destroyed at some point or another, a viscous storm tearing the roof clean off or breaking it in two. But resourceful, tough Vermonters always seemed to find a way to resurrect them, pitching in, then telling the story. Covered bridges seemed to get at the heart of Vermont. You might knock one down, but it wouldn’t stay that way for long.

Last night, Heath had given me a whole new reason to love covered bridges. Some of them were completely exposed, the sides almost as wide open as a regular bridge. But some of them provided more seclusion, more privacy. The one he took me to last night was almost like a barn. Magic man that he was, he found a spot tucked into a corner, sheltered from the wind. We knew we might get caught at any moment, so we had to work quickly. But that made it even more exciting, knowing we were breaking the rules, being oh so naughty as he fucked me hard and rough up against the wall, my hands clinging to his broad shoulders.

Eyes wide as he’d slammed into me, I’d bit my lip to stop myself from moaning it felt so good.

“You going to come hard for me, baby?” he’d asked, ramming into me deep. Of course I had, unable to stop myself from crying out into the silent, dark night. Whoops. We’d laughed together about it afterwards.

“I’m liking this idea of yours to tour every covered bridge in the state,” he’d told me, kissing my neck. “Maybe I’ll see if I can make it the ‘orgasm in every covered bridge’ tour?”

“That tour would sell out quick,” I’d laughed.

“It’s not open to the public, I’m afraid. It’s an exclusive, limited, VIP offer.”

“A one-time deal?”

“Only for you. For the rest of your life,” he’d answered.

He sure knew how to take my breath away, even now as we sat together like an old couple, relaxing together on our porch swing.

Funny, at first I’d felt so lost in Vermont. Turned out all I needed to do to find my way was go off the grid. Snuggling into Heath’s large, warm embrace on our porch swing, gazing out into the sunlight dancing among the trees, I knew I’d found my way home.