

*After surviving a brutal beating, Colt frees himself from the prison his father built around him. Summoning the courage to run away, Colt begins a healing journey as he crosses paths with people whose guidance helps transform his life. As he pursues his dream of songwriting, he meets people who show Colt there are no coincidences.*

## **Freeing Colt**

by Christy Lindsay

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CHRISTY LINDSAY

FREEMING COLT



BOOK 1

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-225-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Lindsay, Christy  
Freeing Colt by Christy Lindsay  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020901745

## Chapter One

Sunlight streamed across Colt's face, creating a golden glow behind his eyelids. He shivered and tried to pull his blanket to his neck. His fingers scraped rough wooden planks instead of soft cloth. He blinked, his eyes adjusting to daylight. Widely spaced, coarse slats allowed abundant sunshine and a cold morning breeze to awaken him.

Dad knocked me out and dumped me in the corn crib again—my jail cell, he thought. His head throbbed. His right shoulder and abdomen ached. He felt sticky wetness on his sleeve. Blood, he thought.

Colt touched the goose eggs on the back of his head as fragments of last night's beating flashed through his mind.

He'd come home from his fast food job and seen his dad sloshing whisky into a juice glass at the kitchen table. The dirty white t-shirt. The bloodshot eyes. The bleary sneer. Colt's blood began to boil at the image of his alcoholic father.

"Hard at work tonight?" Colt had asked.

His dad grabbed a chair and swung it at Colt like a baseball bat. It launched him across the room. Colt landed on his shoulder. He remembered his dad kicking him in the stomach and yanking him off the floor by his hair. He'd thumped his head against the fridge. Colt remembered his vision blurring. And then I passed out, he thought.

Colt eased himself up, propping his back against the corn crib's slats. He did one hundred pushups and jogged five miles every day, just in case he ever summoned the nerve to fight back and run away. He leaned his good shoulder into a board. It cracked. Maybe today's the day, he thought. He heaved against the board again and it split in two. His heart hammered.

He rolled onto his left side and pushed himself up. He stood shakily and leaned against a slat to steady himself. It creaked. How long will Dad make me wait before he unlocks the door this time? He

thought. He glanced at the house. No, he thought. I'm not going to be his prisoner anymore.

"I'm...not...calling...him...*Dad*...again," he grunted each time he slammed his shoulder into the slat. It splintered and fell on the grass.

Before the sun rose another fraction in the sky, three fractured boards lay on the ground. Colt climbed out onto the crunchy, cold grass. Crunchy and cold. Fear and anger crashed over him anew. Greg stole my shoes and socks before he locked me in the corn crib, he thought.

Colt gazed at the peeling paint on the white two-story farmhouse behind him. He dug his fingernails into his palms. "You're not coming after me with those fists again, you bastard." The woods beckoned. Sunlight streamed through bare trees. His stomach growled, but he wasn't about to try to get in the house. If he woke Greg, he might not live to see another sunny day.

He nodded, steeling himself. "It's now or never," he whispered. He knew Greg wouldn't wake up for at least two hours. He'd have to sleep off last night's hangover. That gave Colt enough time to get to Tyler's house. It had to. Colt cast one last backward glance, then sprinted into the woods.

Twigs slapped him in the face, some smacking against a tender bruise on his forehead. His chin-length blonde hair flew behind him as he pumped his legs. His feet started to ache. He looked down and saw blood on the decaying leaves. He hadn't felt anything cut him. His stomach clenched. Blood would leave a trail.

He was already drenched with sweat, his heart ready to pound out of his chest, but fear mingled with exhaustion. If Greg saw the blood, he might as well run in front of a car doing eighty. The woods bordered a two-lane road. He heard an engine and squatted, peeking through frost-covered briars to see if he recognized the car. A car would get him away from Greg a whole lot faster.

He spotted Tyler's speeding car through the briars. He darted onto the road. Tires screeched.

Tyler's window slid down. "Colt! What the...?" His hazel eyes widened and his jaw dropped. "Get in."

Colt limped to the door and climbed in, his chest heaving.  
“Thanks, dude.”

“Where should I take you? A hospital?”

“No.”

“What happened? Who did this to you? Look at yourself!” Tyler pulled a visor down.

Colt didn’t recognize the face in the mirror. Blood streaked from his bruised forehead to his cheek. He flipped back the length of his blonde hair and felt goose eggs and crusted blood on the back and sides of his head. It clearly showed through the short, spiky hair on the sides, but his long hair partially covered the back. He adjusted the mirror. His blue work shirt was stained maroon and stuck to his right shoulder. I’ll have to rip the scab open to get the shirt off, he thought.

Colt pushed the visor up. “Greg. He came after me last night drunk as a skunk.”

“I’m taking you to the hospital.” Tyler’s jaw was set. His tires squealed again.

“No. Take me to your house. I’ll shower. Most of the bruises won’t show underneath clothes.”

Tyler shook his head, his light brown hair falling into his eyes. “Your dad will look for you there. We’ve got to take you someplace safe.”

Colt gazed at neat yards flashing past his window as Tyler raced down the road. I wonder what it’s like to wake up in one of those houses, he thought. Cereal in front of the TV. Mom in the kitchen drinking coffee before work. Dad already at work instead of facedown on the table, an empty whisky bottle lying on its side.

Colt glanced at the speedometer. “You’re gonna get a ticket if a cop’s hiding somewhere.”

“So what? Then they’d take you to a hospital and arrest that dirt bag.”

Colt imagined that, saw Greg in handcuffs, a cop shoving him into a police car. He smirked and dropped his gaze. “I’m bleeding all over your floor mats. Sorry, dude.”

“I’ll throw them out. Don’t worry about it.”

Tyler white knuckled the steering wheel and spiked the gas pedal.

“What?”

“I think I see your dad’s truck following us, and I’m almost out of gas.”

Colt jerked his head around. He’d recognize that blue junk heap anywhere. He wasn’t more than a few hundred yards behind them. “Oh, God,” he breathed. Did that count as a prayer? He hoped so; hoped God would hear him.

Tyler’s phone rang. “Get it,” he said.

Tyler had a new smartphone. “What’s your passcode?”

“Nineteen Ninety-Seven.”

Colt tapped in the numbers. “Yeah?”

Tyler’s mom asked, “Who is this? Colt?”

“Yeah. Um...Mrs. Richards?”

Tyler pulled the phone out of Colt’s hand. “Mom, call the cops. Greg beat the sh...crap out of Colt last night. He’s bleeding and a mess. And Greg’s following us in his truck. We’re on Route Eighty-Seven, heading toward town. I’m almost out of gas. What are we gonna do?”

“He’s not after you, you know,” Colt said. He tried to laugh, but it sounded more like a rasp.

Mrs. Richards’s voice was frantic. Colt couldn’t make out the words. Tyler kept nodding. “All right.” He dropped the phone into a cupholder.

“Mom called the cops on our home phone while I waited. She kept both phones to her mouth. A state cop is posted up here where the speed limit drops to thirty-five. I’m gonna do eighty through there. The cop will either know I’m being followed, or he’ll try to stop me for speeding. Either way, you’ll be safer in a few minutes.”

The car skidded forward and Colt’s head almost hit the dash board. Colt looked behind him. Greg’s crazed face leered at him. Even from this distance he could see his yellow teeth and silver beard. He buckled his seatbelt.

Colt couldn’t resist dropping his head below the dashboard and hunching over. He hated the fear that washed over him. A siren wailed. “Yes!” Tyler shouted, pumping a fist. “First time I ever wanted to get pulled over.” He grinned at Colt. Colt sat up and gazed

straight ahead as Tyler pulled over. His dad's tires squealed. He looked out the side view mirror and saw his bumper nearly touching Tyler's bumper.

"He's gonna hit us again!" Colt yelled. Tyler pushed his gas pedal to the floor, but not in time. The car slammed forward and off the road into a towering oak. Colt's neck snapped forward, then back. He heard Greg's engine rev as he raced off. Tyler's head lay on the steering wheel, a trickle of blood snaking its way down his cheek.

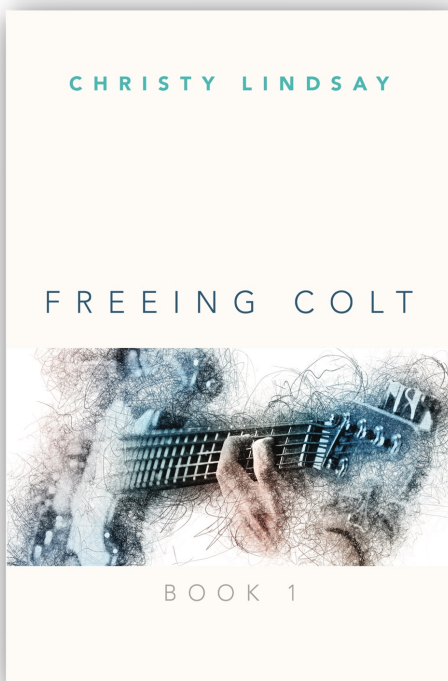
"Tyler? Oh, God!" He reached over and grabbed his wrist, feeling for his pulse. He found it. It was weak, but he could feel it. "Hold on, dude!"

A cop with an athletic build sprinted up to the door. "I already called for an ambulance, and a patroller is waiting in another speed trap a few miles down the road. He should nail the other driver." He looked Colt up and down. His eyes bored into him. "Did you get hurt during or before this accident?"

Colt looked at his toes and the bloody floor mats. The cop followed his eyes. "Get out, kid, and wait in my car. Who did this to you?"

Colt's gaze hardened as he pointed at Greg's taillights. "*He* did."





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