

Bonus Book 3: The Billionaire Lion's Prey

Description

A BBW running away from her family PLUS a hot mysterious billionaire PLUS an attack by a lion!

On the run, alone and living in an abandoned office building, Kristin Brown isn't in a great place. But it's better than where she came from. Kristen is running from her dangerous family and doing her best to stay off the grid. Out of money and with no one to turn to, Kristen has ended up in the small town of Williamstown, Maine.

She's managed to find a job at the local bookstore, when handsome Billionaire, Anton Lev, arrives one day. Kristen can't help but be enticed by him. But her secret is too great and her life is too dangerous for her to even think about dating, no matter how handsome Anton is.

Soon, Kristen learns that Williamstown is no ordinary town. For one hundred years the townspeople have been haunted by sightings of lions prowling the town.

It isn't long before Kristin finds herself being hunted by a ferocious predator. Will she survive? Will her family find her? Can she trust this reclusive billionaire? Will she survive the lion?

Chapter One

The tea was wonderful. I cupped the warm mug between my hands, letting the hot liquid warm my insides. Through the window, I could see a light snow falling. It wasn't heavy enough to stick, yet. This was just the precursor. The real heavy snow wouldn't arrive for a few days. They were predicting a doozy, two feet of snow, maybe more.

It was cold, freezing cold actually. The thermometer, nailed against the bookstore's door, was sitting at fifteen degrees. It hadn't moved in days. People hurried past the picture window. Men and women were bundled up in hats, gloves and scarves with their heads down as they charged against the wind.

I felt safe and warm inside the bookstore. Most people hated their jobs, but not me. I loved my job. I couldn't wait to come to work. The bookstore was warmer than where I was staying and I could drink all the free tea I wanted. Coffee would've been better, since it would also give me the caffeine kick to start off the day, but I stopped drinking it just over a month ago, when my pregnancy test came back positive.

The work was easy. I rung up customers, unpacked books, and dusted. An elderly couple named Harold and Sarah owned the Last Word Bookstore. They were both in their seventies and had run the place for forty years.

When I first arrived in Williamstown I spent most of my days in the bookstore. I would spend hours scanning the shelves, looking at all of the titles. It was the cheapest anti-stress therapy I knew, and heaven knows how desperately I needed some.

During one of those visits, I got to talking with Sarah and told her I was looking for work in town. She told me that winters were tough on her and Harold, the cold froze their joints and she worried about slipping on the ice. They were looking for someone to man the shop, but they couldn't pay much. She offered me ten dollars an hour, under the table and I jumped at the opportunity. I needed a steady source of income more than ever before... plus, this was the kind of work I could keep doing without too many problems well into my pregnancy.

I didn't tell them I was expecting, though. Sarah and Harold were sweet people, but I was too afraid they'd take back their offer if they knew.

And, besides, I wasn't even sure I'd stay that long anyway.

That morning, tea in hand, I worked my way through the bookstore. It was housed in an old Victorian-style house. There was a small kitchen in the back which they used for the office, but the rest of the rooms were filled with books.

Books stacked on top of tables and in every corner. There were shelves lining every wall filled with books. One room, that had been a bedroom in another life was filled with fiction books, another was devoted to history. Books everywhere, books as far as I could see. Books that I was allowed to read for free.

I had completed my work for the day. I dusted and wiped down the bookshelves in the history section and set up a big display in the center of the store for the newest Stephen King book. Now the rest of the day was mine. Sitting with my tea and a thick blanket wrapped around my shoulders I reached for the used, paperback copy of Donna Tart's *Goldfinch* and lost myself in the pages.

I had been reading for about a half an hour when the bells on the door tinkled. A draft of cold air wafted over to me and I shivered and pulled my blanket closer. The man was fighting against the wind to push the door closed. Just as I stood to help him, he managed to close the door and he turned to me with a sheepish smile.

I smiled at him and he gave me a nod and removed his cap and gloves as he began to move through the store. I looked up at him over the pages of my book, surreptitiously checking him out. He was tall and handsome, with a full head of sandy colored hair. He had a thick, light colored beard and dark brown eyes. I could tell that he had money. His long winter coat was perfectly fitting and looked very new. The scarf was probably cashmere, but I would need to touch it to be sure.

"Let me know if you need anything," I called out, my voice slightly higher pitched than it normally would have been.

"I'll be sure to do that," the man said as he headed upstairs. I heard his footsteps above me. He was heading to the history room. His step was heavy and I could hear him above me as he moved about.

"Good afternoon," the man said, as he approached the table with a pile of books and a small notepad in one hand.

"Afternoon," I replied. His hands were clean and he kept his nails neatly trimmed. I could smell an enticing cologne as he stared down at me in a kind way.

I rang up his books quickly. *Ancient Myths of the Greeks*, *Aristophanes*, *Sophocles*, *The Life of Hadrian*, each book was thicker and denser looking than the last.

“Fifty-four, thirty-two,” I said. He handed me a black card and my stomach lurched. This was a limitless card, he could spend millions with this thing.

Don't steal, I said to myself. I knew how to do it. I could copy the information on the card and go nuts with it. No more being cold, no more showering at the YMCA, no scouring *Goodwill* for baby clothes. I could get a room at the fanciest hotel in town, order room service, raid the mini-bar. I could take a hot shower and wrap myself in a warm, fluffy towel. I could afford the best childcare money could buy.

My heart sunk when I handed the card back to him. I always thought doing good deeds would make me feel better, but as I handed the card back to the rich man I only felt sad. The card was slipped back into his wallet like it was nothing. That card could have changed my life, but to him, it was something that he put away and forgot.

“I’ll also need to order a few books.” He slid a piece of paper over to me. Titles were listed neatly, one on each line. He wrote in all caps in neat, tight handwriting. His phone number was at the bottom next to a small note that said, “in case of any problems.”

“Sure, we can get these no problem,” I said. I looked up at him and was surprised to see him staring intently in my face.

I tried not to fidget under his gaze. My hair was a greasy mess piled on top of my head. I had been showering at the local YMCA. Washing and drying my hair was just too much work in this cold weather, so normally I pulled it up off my neck and showered without getting my hair wet. I would wash it on Monday, my day off.

My clothes had been pulled out of a charity bin a few towns over. I was wearing an oversized tourist shirt from the Grand Canyon and a baggy pair of men’s jeans paired with a scuffed pair of black boots. It wasn’t my usual style, but I had left every part of my old life behind, clothes, makeup and jewelry included.

“I hope Sarah and Harold are feeling well, Kristen,” he said glancing down at my nametag.

“Very well,” I replied. “They just enjoy staying in on these cold days.”

“That’s good to hear. I don’t want Harold to suffer another fall. When did they hire you?”

I swallowed, panic swirling in my stomach. Why was he asking this, what did he want from me? Had my father sent him? “Just a few weeks ago,” I said.

“Are you new in town?”

“Yeah,” I said with a nod. “I have a cousin who lived here. I used to visit a lot growing up.”

This was my standard story and most people took it at face value.

“Who’s your cousin?” The man asked.

Why do you want to know? I thought. “The Cleves,” I answered. I had found the name in the phone book. There were several people with the last name Cleve in town, including some that had recently moved away.

“Mary Cleves, who lives up near The Hammer and The Stone?” he asked.

Who was this man? Why did he care? Why was he trying to figure me out?

“Never mind,” he said, shaking his head. “I didn’t mean to pry.”

I let out a sigh I didn’t remember holding in.

“It’s just rare to see a new face in town. I can’t help but be curious,” he continued.

I smiled as I put his books in a bag, “It’s a lovely town, but I’m probably just staying for a few weeks.”

“That’s a shame,” he said and then he didn’t say anything else. What did he mean by that? My hands shook a little as I handed his bag back to him.

“Stay warm out there,” I said, wishing I could think of something more clever to say.

“You too,” was his reply. “I’ll see you in a few days. For the books,” I nodded and followed him with my eyes as he left. He put on his hat and scarf and pushed out into the cold air. Anton Lev had been the name on the card.

Chapter Two

I trudged up the hill, wincing into the wind. The snow was blowing right into my face, my nose was running and my eyes were watering. I was wearing a pair of sweatpants underneath my jeans, three sweaters under my jacket, and two pairs of socks. The first thing I had learned since running away was the benefits of layers. Clothes piled on clothes was the only way to stay warm.

Night had fallen, but I didn't feel scared. I could handle myself, plus this small Maine town was devoid of any sort of crime.

As I walked down the street I saw houses lit from within, soft yellow light bleeding out into the cold night air. Sometimes I could catch a glimpse of the people in the houses. Families sitting down to dinner, or gathered in front of the television looking warm and happy.

I turned off Main Street and down a small side street. If the quaint little town had a "bad" section, this would be it. But it was limited to this one small street. There were a crappy dive bar and a Chinese take-out joint and a few houses split into apartments.

I walked past the bar and the takeout joint and kept walking towards the empty building at the end of the alley. I had once been an office building, but it had been abandoned a long time ago.

Glancing behind me to make sure the way was clear I hopped over the fence and landed on the hard bare earth on the other side of the building. There was an old sign over the door, the decayed words reading, McPoyle, Reynolds, LLC. It had been a law firm, but the owners had skipped town a few years ago, leaving the building to ruin.

There was a loose window in the back and using my hands, I jimmied the window open and climbed through. I had discovered this place my first week in town. The window opened to a small office suite. There was a small room that had once been a reception area, a private bathroom and an office. The good news was this little suite was separate from the rest of the building, so I felt safe and secure once I locked the window behind me. I left the door to the rest of the building locked with a chair jammed underneath the doorknob as an extra precaution measure.

I had turned the office suite into a kind of home. Opening the door from reception I moved into the office, which was now my bedroom. There were candles everywhere. I lit one and then moved through and lit the rest illuminating the room in a soft yellow light.

There was a nest of blankets in the corner. These too I had pulled from a charity bin. I had a lot of them and they were actually quite comfortable. I had piled them on top of each other and into a makeshift bed.

The cold was the worst part. There was no electricity in the office, no heat, no power, no running water. I had worked out a sort of system. I had dragged a metal trash bin in from outside so I could use it to make a small fire. I put the fire near the window so when the window was cracked open most of the smoke was pulled outside.

I had grabbed some free newspapers on the way home and I crumpled them up and threw them in with the kindling, lighting a quick fire. I cracked open the window next to it as the flames consumed the kindling.

I couldn't leave the fire going at night. I worried about breathing in too much smoke and dying on my pile of blankets. I would let the fire burn as long as it could to remove some of the cold from the office. When it was done there would be some burning embers, but mostly the blankets would keep me warm.

The fire caught quickly, a smoky smell filled the room. I walked to the bathroom where I kept a bucket of water. The electricity was off, but as long as I kept the tank full, I could use the toilet.

This was my life now. It wasn't where I planned to be. I had gone to college at NYU and graduated with a 3.8 GPA. I wanted to be an elementary school teacher. I completed all the training and got the necessary certificates. Then my life fell apart. I had to run. I spent days on buses traveling across the country. I ran out of money in Williamstown, Maine.

I couldn't get a job because to do that, I would have to give my social security number, date of birth and all of the other identifying information. I would be in the system. He would be able to find me. I couldn't let that happen. I had to hide until I could figure something out.

This was what hiding looked like. Alone and cold, squatting in an abandoned office. The nights were the worst. During the day, I could walk through town or read in the bookstore, but at night, I had nowhere to be. I read until the fire was nothing more than a few hot coals at the bottom of the barrel. Once the smoke stopped, I closed the window and nestled into my blankets, praying I wouldn't freeze to death during the night.

As I walked to work the next morning I saw the name Lev everywhere. I hadn't noticed it before. The small park on the river was Lev park, given as a gift to the town by Nadezhda Lev in 1909. The library was a gift from Mikhail Lev in 1923.

The piece of paper with Anton Lev's number was still sitting on the counter. I had placed the order for the books, but they wouldn't arrive for another few days. The look he had given me the other day had me worried. Could he tell that something was off about me? Could he guess how I was living just from looking?

I was worried about constantly smelling like a fire so I made sure to shower at the YMCA every morning. I kept my clothes hanging from the shower curtain in my bathroom so they wouldn't smell either. There was a Laundromat in town and I managed to get there once a week. I might currently be a squatter, but I had no intention of smelling like one.

It was twelve thirty when he came in. I was slowly sipping the last of my ramen, enjoying every last atom of it. He looked the same. Tall and handsome with his thick, but well-trimmed beard. He was wearing the same stylish overcoat, but a different scarf. I wondered how many scarves he had.

"Your books aren't in yet," I stammered as he approached the counter.

"I know," he said. "I'm just browsing."

"Let me know if you need anything," I said again, aware that I said that to him the last time he had come in.

He nodded, but instead of heading up to the history section he lingered among the best sellers. He picked up the Stephen King and flipped through it absentmindedly before putting it back.

"How are you today, Kristen?" he called over. There was no one else in the store, just the two of us. I was surprised he had remembered my name.

"Fine, thank you," I answered. He moved over to me, easily maneuvering past the piles of books. He leaned against my counter and looked at me. I tossed my empty ramen cup in the trash, praying I had nothing stuck in my teeth.

"Are you enjoying your stay in Williamstown?" He asked. His voice was smooth and even. And every time he opened his mouth he had my full attention.

"Yes," I answered. Which was half-true. Other than the fact that I was living in squalor, I did quite like Williamstown. If I lived in an apartment somewhere I'm sure I would never want to leave.

He opened his mouth to speak again, but I wasn't sure if I could take any more of his questions, so I cut him off.

"Are you related to the Lev family who donated the park and the library? I've been seeing that name everywhere since I met you.'

"Yes," he answered with a nod. "The Lev family moved to this town in the early 1900s. We've been here ever since."

"It's a lovely town," I said. He smelled fantastic and looked even better. I guessed he was in his late twenties, the beard made him look a little older. I wondered where he lived. Was it nice? Was it warm? Did it require a trash can fire?

"Maybe sometime I could show you around," he said.

I sat back in my chair, stunned at the request.

"Ummm... that's very nice of you. But I can't do anything like that right now. I have a lot of...stuff going on." What was I going to do, go straight from the shower at the Y to a date with this rich man? How would I explain to him that I was technically homeless and living in an abandoned office building? What would I say when it was time for me to run again?

His expression remained the same, he didn't look hurt at my rejection. He just looked at me like he was trying to figure me out.

"Another time, then," he said.