

The Trade

Piper comes home from work one day to see her home is a mess and her teenage sister is missing. After calling the local police for help—and getting none—she tries calling the American Ambassador in Iran, who tells her that his hands are tied unless Pippa comes to them for help. Piper knows that Yuri will never let Pippa out of his sight, so what is she supposed to do now?

And then a work friend tells her about a man named Lucas Grant, a mercenary that could go in and get her sister out for her...for a price, of course. She knew she didn't have the money to pay anyone to bring Pippa home, but Lucas was her last hope. She'd find some way to pay him even if it cost her everything.

She just didn't know what it was about to cost her.

Genre: Contemporary, Romantic Suspense

Length: 63,935 words

THE TRADE

Gina Duncan



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com

A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

THE TRADE

Copyright © 2017 by Gina Duncan

ISBN: 978-1-64010-104-3

First Publication: March 2017

Cover design by Harris Channing

All art and logo copyright © 2017 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book or print book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **legal@sirenbookstrand.com**

PUBLISHER

Siren Publishing, Inc.

www.SirenPublishing.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gina Duncan lives in a small town in Ohio with the man she's loved for a little over twenty eight years now, her mentally challenged adult son, and her grandson. They share their lives and love with two pets (dogs). A mini Pomeranian and a Boston terrier that are more like children than pets.

She also has two adult daughters, an adult step-son, another grandson, and four step-grandchildren. She enjoys spending time with family when she's able. When she's not writing, she enjoys watching movies, reading, and traveling to see new places. She has already traveled over most of the United States. Besides living in Ohio, she has lived for a couple of years in Kentucky and a short time in Louisiana.

Some of her hobbies include: crocheting, quilting, and sketching.

She has dreamed of being an author for as long as she can remember, but before she was brave enough to send in a manuscript she was a state tested nursing assistant for a few years and a bartender for eight. Through it all, she never gave up on her dream.

Most people ask her the same question: Where do you come up with the book ideas?

She always answers the same way: It was a dream.

For all titles by Gina Duncan, please visit

www.bookstrand.com/gina-duncan

THE TRADE

GINA DUNCAN

Copyright © 2017

Chapter One

Piper didn't know what she expected when she rang the doorbell. A co-worker, named Charlie, had told her to go speak with Lucas Grant, and then gave her the address to his place. From the description of what the man was capable of doing to help her with her problem, she certainly hadn't expected the house to be so nice. She thought Lucas would live in a shack somewhere in a seedy neighborhood.

This house wasn't a shack and this was no seedy neighborhood. It was a big beautiful white farmhouse with blue shutters, set out in the middle of a rolling green meadow. She was directed through large gates and drove down a long paved driveway by a guard. No other homes could be seen anywhere near the large porch. What kind of man would be behind the brightly painted blue door? Most of the house was behind tall privacy fencing.

What opened the door was a giant of a man with bulging muscles, barely concealed beneath his tight black T-shirt. His biceps looked strangled by the sleeves. His body narrowed at the waist. His blue jeans hung low on his hips and he was standing there barefooted. She let her eyes scan back up his body. His hair was short cropped, brown with a tint of blond here and there. His eyes were a beautiful green that stood out from the dark tan of his face. His lips were full and pink, his face clean-shaven. It took her a moment to catch her breath. He definitely wasn't what she imagined him to be, she suddenly wondered why the guard and fortress of a home. He certainly looked as if he could take care of himself.

"Lucas Grant?" she inquired, her voice quivering slightly.

"Yes, and I assume your Piper Sutton."

"Yes." She suddenly felt very jittery. His voice was deep and smooth with a touch of a southern drawl. It was the type of voice that could melt a woman to a puddle, she felt a little uncomfortable as his eyes scanned up and down her body, much like she had done his. She wondered what he thought about her. Was she what he expected? Goose bumps spread over her body, she stiffened to keep from shivering. She never had someone's voice, or the way they looked at her, affect her in the same way Lucas did. She wasn't pretty enough for a man like him. Men like Lucas usually wanted tall, skinny women with big boobs and no brains. Piper never took the time to fix herself up like Pippa did, standing in front of the mirror for hours on end

applying make-up and lipstick. Piper simply brushed her hair and put it in a bun before leaving the house. Today she wished she were more like Pippa.

“Perhaps you should come in and tell me just what it is you believe I can do for you, Miss Sutton.”

“Didn’t John tell you about my problem?” Her brows creased as she shook her head.

“John told me a few things, but I want to hear it from you.” He stepped back opening the door wider.

Piper stepped through the door cautiously and looked around. The house was immaculate. It almost looked like no one lived in the place on the outside. It was an older farmhouse, but someone had totally redone the whole thing. It looked like a brand new home on the inside. The entryway, and what she could see of the other rooms, were large and spacious. She jumped slightly when she heard the click of the door behind her. Lucas held his hand out, indicating that she should precede him toward what she assumed was the living room. She stopped just inside the doorway and Lucas passed her. He sat down on a black leather recliner to the far side of the room facing the couch. The man even made the big easy chair look small.

“Won’t you have a seat, Miss Sutton?” He motioned to the couch. “And tell me what it is you believe I can do for you that no one else can.”

Piper sat on the edge of the large, black leather couch facing Lucas. What he could probably do—that no one else could—was give her an orgasm just by speaking. He rested his elbows on the chair arms, crossing his hands before his face, and his lips resting on his thumbs as he studied her. She felt uncomfortable once again, but tried to remain still. It just wouldn’t do to be squirming in her seat.

“I’m not sure what all John told you, but I need someone to help me get my sister back. I don’t have much money, but I’m willing to make some sort of arrangements to pay you if you will help me. John says you’re very good, and if anyone could find Pippa, it would be you.”

“Did he now...and did John also tell you that I’m not a very nice guy?”

“That’s good, because I don’t need a nice guy for what I’m looking for. If I did, I wouldn’t be here.”

“You wouldn’t be here if the authorities would help you. Do you have any idea of what could happen to you by coming way out here to no man’s land and meeting with a complete stranger? A man, that some other man, told you about.”

“I’ve known John for four years now. I trust that he wouldn’t send me somewhere dangerous. Besides I’m not totally helpless.” She pulled her purse closer. What he didn’t know was that she had pepper spray and a .22 pistol in there, and she was totally capable of using both of them. What she didn’t know was how to find her sister. Once she was close enough to Yuri, she planned to kill him for taking Pippa.

“I was told that you believe your sister was kidnapped and you want me to go find her and bring her back, is that why you’re here?” He was staring at her through hard green eyes. Was this his mercenary look, or was he always a hard man? She rubbed her sweaty palms down the legs of her pants.

“Yes. Pippa has been missing for over two months now. I’ve been everywhere and no one in the government will help me. I’m at my wit’s end. When I broke down at work, John gave me your name and address and told me to come see you.”

“Where do you think your sister is, and how can you be sure she was kidnapped? Maybe she went with this man of her own free will. Why come to me for help, why not your family?”

“Pippa is all the family I have left. Our parents died four years ago in a car wreck. I’ve taken care of my sister ever since. The man she was seeing is from Iran. I believe he kidnapped her and took her back to his homeland with him, and now he’s holding her against her will.”

“How old are you?” Lucas cocked his head to look at her again. He put his hands down and sat forward.

Did it matter how old she was? What did her age have to do with anything? He was just sitting there staring at her, waiting for an answer.

“Twenty-six, my sister is turning eighteen and I know she didn’t go with him on her own. We have no secrets. She broke up with him because he hit her. She was afraid of him.” Piper lowered her head when she felt the tears threaten. She didn’t want to show this man any weakness. She feared he’d take advantage at any weakness he saw in her.

“If I do decide to do this for you, just how did you plan to pay me, Miss Sutton? Do you have any money at all? My expenses are quite high.”

“No, but I was hoping we could make out some sort of a payment plan. I’m willing to pay anything to bring her back safe and sound.”

“So, you want my help, and you can’t pay me. Tell me what makes you think I’ll help you, without being paid? I’m not a generous man either, Miss Sutton. I don’t work for free.”

“I’m sorry I wasted both of our time.” Piper stood and avoided eye contact with him as the tears rolled down her cheeks. What else could she do? All hope was lost. Lucas had been her last hope of finding Pippa and bringing her back home. She hadn’t even heard Lucas move and jumped when he put his hand under her chin and tilted it up, forcing her to look at him.

“You need to stop crying—I don’t do tears. Dry your face and remove your clothes,” he ordered as he moved back to his chair and sat down, just staring at her.

Who the heck did this man think he was ordering her around like that? And why in the world did he want her to remove her clothes for?

“What?” she choked out past a huge lump that had formed in her throat at his suggestion. She crossed her arms over her chest, trying to be defiant. There was no way she’d remove her clothes in front of this stranger.

“Call it a down payment. I want to see what you’re offering before I decide what my payment will be.” He shrugged his big shoulders.

“I didn’t offer you my body. I could pay you back whatever it costs if you’ll let me do it in installments.” She wiped at the tears with one hand the other one was still covering her breasts, what sort of man went around ordering women to remove their clothes? Did he order strange women around like this all the time?

Lucas shook his head. “I don’t want your money, sweetheart. I want your body. Now, do we have an agreement or not?”

Why did he want her body? She wasn’t beautiful enough for a man like Lucas. What did he have planned to do with her?

Piper had never been with a man before. No one had seen her naked since she was a child. She was too much of a prude. She had her doubts that she could do this, but if that was what it took to get him to bring Pippa home, so be it.

Piper swallowed her pride, wondering what he’d want her to do once she was naked. Would he demand that she have sex with him? *Oh Lord, I hope not.* Would once be enough for a man like him? She was sure it would be something she wouldn’t soon forget. The cost of her sister’s safe return—her virginity. Her heart was in her throat, she swallowed hard. She’d do or pay anything he asked, as long as he brought her sister back to her safe and sound.

What else could she do? The only things she had were her virginity and pride. It looked like she was about to say good-bye to both of them to save her sister. Piper began to remove her clothing slowly—very slowly. Her hands shook as she tried to unbutton her blouse. She hadn’t had a chance to date after her parents died. They’d had enough insurance money to bury them and to pay the house off, but she had to go to work after school every evening to pay the bills and buy food for her and her younger sister.

What would this handsome, cold-hearted bastard do when he found out she was still a virgin? Better yet, what would he do when he found out she had no intention of sleeping with him after the job was finished? She just hoped he wouldn’t demand to have sex until then. After Pippa was found, Piper would just do her best to avoid the man.

“Come on, don’t be shy, sweetheart. I’m not going to bite you—at least not yet.”

Piper held her blouse against her chest and stared at him. What the hell did he mean, *not yet*? Did he intend on biting her? She felt her face heat with his laughter. Once again, she wasn’t sure she could do this, but she’d already tried everything and everyone else. No one wanted to help, even though her sister was a U.S. citizen. Everyone was convinced that Pippa had gone with Yuri willingly. The government was afraid it would cause relationship problems within the UN if they intervened.

She wondered what kind of man Lucas was that he would demand her body for payment. She hadn’t intended to pay him with her body, but it seemed she had no choice. It wasn’t as if she was saving her virtue for anyone in particular, and if he could bring her sister home, then she’d gladly let him believe she’d give him what he wanted. She just hoped he wouldn’t demand her body until Pippa was home.

Piper dropped the shirt to the ground, trying to be brave. She finished stripping out of her jeans and underthings while Lucas sat in his chair watching her. Once she was completely unclothed, Piper fought hard to keep her hands at her sides and not cover herself the way she wanted to as she stood there, her eyes closed and head bowed down. She felt defeated once more.

“Hold your head up and open your eyes, sweetheart. I want you looking at me.”

Piper took a deep breath and blew it out before doing as Lucas said. Staring into those green eyes of his was almost hypnotic. She wanted to close her eyes, or look away, but she couldn't. She wanted to reach out and touch him, caress his face, but she didn't. She wanted to feel more human and less like a side of beef. She merely stood there like a statue as he studied her, looking up and down her body. She felt shame that she had to stoop so low as to use her body to bargain for something she needed. If it had been for anything other than Pippa's life, she would have slapped his handsome face and stormed out the door. How could such a handsome man be such an ass?

Lucas motioned with his hand for her to turn. She swallowed past the lump once more and prayed her shaky legs wouldn't give out on her as she made a slow, but complete pivot. Piper wanted to smack the smile from his face once she looked at him again. Her heart jumped, then began to race as she watched Lucas stand. She was sure it would stop when he made his way toward her. Her *fight-or-flight* senses kicked in. She wanted to move away, just run, but she fought hard to remain in place.

He chuckled. "You couldn't even imagine in your wildest dreams the things I'll do to you and your body." He trailed his fingers down her cheek, her neck, and over one of her breasts with a feather light touch.

A shiver went over her body as her nipple hardened instantly at his touch. She wanted desperately to step away from him. His touch sent too many thoughts racing through her mind. Things she had no business thinking at this moment. Things she didn't think she'd feel until she was married. She needed to find her sister, and she needed Lucas' help to do it. She had to keep in mind that he was the only one left who could help her, so she'd do or feel any way he wanted her to for the time being. Once her sister was home, she'd go back to her life and Lucas wouldn't be in it.

"Your body is very responsive, I like that." He smiled, showing perfect white teeth against his tanned face and pink lips.

She knew he was telling the truth about not being a nice guy, but it didn't matter because she needed him. And right now, with the way he was looking at her and touching her, she wanted to be surrounded by him, even knowing she wouldn't. She wanted to breathe him in and never let him go, but she knew he wasn't the relationship type. He was more the love 'em and leave 'em type. If he wanted her body, she could give him that, she just hoped she'd be able to keep her heart out of it. She didn't have room in her life or heart for a man just yet. There were too many things she wanted to do. She wasn't here to find the love of her life. She held her head high and tried her best at flirting. She hadn't had time for such foolish things before, she just hoped Lucas wouldn't be able to tell how naïve she was at it.

"What would you do?" She looked up at him as she bit her bottom lip. The smile on his face was almost evil as he stared at her mouth. She licked her suddenly dry lips. The nerves in her stomach were tied in knots. She feared she'd vomit at any moment. She could promise him anything he wanted right now, but that didn't mean she'd have to follow through with it once

Pippa was home. The only thing she worried about was what she'd have to do to get him to start the job.

"First you tell me why you so easily gave in to my demand of your body for payment. You don't strike me as the type of woman that would be willing to bargain with her body, sweetheart." He looked her up and down hungrily. "Not that I'm complaining. I'm more than willing to take your body as payment. I just want to know why you're so desperate." He moved back across the room to study her once more. His finger worked back and forth over his chin, and his eyes didn't blink once.

"I told you I've tried everything else. You're my last hope, Mr. Grant."

"So, you're willing to bargain with your body?"

She began to shake her head, but the look in his eyes demanded the truth. "Yes. I need your help to find my sister and bring her home. I don't have the means or the money to do it. I can't pay you right now, so I'll give you anything you want, or do anything you want if you'll help me find and bring her back. That is how desperate I really am, and if I had anything else to bargain with besides my body, then I would."

"Anything I want." He rubbed his chin.

Piper took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She didn't know what this man would demand of her. "That's what I said." Her nerves felt as if they were eating a hole in her stomach. She wasn't sure of how much longer she could take it.

He licked his lips and looked her up and down, again.

"Oh, the things I'm going to do to that body of yours when this is over."

Piper bent to retrieve her clothes. She'd had enough of feeling like a piece of prime meat. She hadn't seen or heard Lucas move, and nearly jumped out of her skin when he moved behind her, bringing his arms around her to cup both her breasts in his warm, massive hands. Her breath caught in her throat as chills went through her body. He pulled her back against him, grinding the bulge of his hard cock against the crease of her ass. A shiver ran over her as he whispered close to her ear. His hot breath and indecent words caused gooseflesh to rise. She felt an ache deep in her core, and had no idea of how to ease it.

"I can't wait to finish this mission and earn my payment," he whispered into her ear.

"Remove your hands from my body, Mr. Grant, because you haven't earned it yet." She had no idea where that bravery came from. Maybe it was that fight-or-flight she'd heard about. She had to say something because this stranger's touch was causing too many thoughts running through her brain.

Lucas chuckled deeply, nibbled her ear, and then licked the column of her throat before he slowly released her. "You taste good. I can't wait to taste all of you." He chuckled once more as she shivered again. "I'll bet you're all wet, too." He inhaled deeply. "Yes." He moaned.

When he asked her if she saw the door across the room, Piper nodded her head. She feared trying to speak at the moment, her brain and body wanted his hands back, but she just wanted to get away from him.

“Good. It’s my office. Once you’re dressed come in there. I’ll have a list of things I’m going to need from you to get started. We’ll discuss your payment after I get all the details and information I need.”

Piper held her blouse in front of her, watching as Lucas stepped past her and walked silently across the wooden floor and disappeared through the door. She wondered how such a big man could be so quiet. Had it been part of his special ops training? She hadn’t been able to learn too much about Lucas Grant, except that he’d been a marine. He’d joined when he’d turned eighteen, and he was at least thirty now. She had no idea what he’d done after joining the marines, or really what he did now, and she didn’t care. He was going to help her.

She dressed quickly, then stepped through the door to see Lucas sitting behind a big mahogany desk. He was writing something down, but paused long enough to look up at her.

“Well, come in and have a seat.” He motioned to the empty chair in front of his desk.

She couldn’t believe he could be acting so calm after what just happened. Her body was still tingling where his hands had touched her. Her legs were still weak and wobbly. Her pussy wet and aching, she wasn’t even sure she could make it across the room to sit down in the chair.

Piper felt the heat on her face and knew she was blushing. It was hard to look the man in the eyes after what he’d made her do and feel.

“I’m going to need pictures of your sister and the man that kidnapped her. Any information you can remember about him, his home, his family, friends. Where he said he was from, or anything he used to do there.”

“Ok, is there anything else you need?”

“No, not yet.”

“I don’t remember too much of what Yuri said, but I will write down everything that I do, and I’ll search Pippa’s diary. Maybe there will be something in it.”

“Good. Anything you remember or find will help me to locate your sister and bring her home to you. I will also need something of yours that she will know, so she’ll come with me when I find her.”

“All right, now when do you expect your payment?”

“When you bring me the things I need, I’ll expect your first installment.”

“That soon?” There went those nerves again. She didn’t think she’d have to do anything until he brought Pippa home.

“Yes, normally I get half my money before I go, and the rest upon my return.”

Piper merely nodded her head, as she squirmed in her chair. There went her plan.

“I will also need a doctor’s report clearing you of all diseases. I have a recent report clearing me that you can look over. I know it sounds odd for me to ask for something like that, but you can never be too careful.”

“No, I understand and would appreciate seeing your report, as well.” She wondered if he made all of his women go to the doctor. She was positive that he did just by the way he spoke so casually about it, and if she did have to have sex with him, she’d be happy to know he wouldn’t give her anything, as well.

“Are you on birth control?”

“Birth control?” She was caught off guard by his question. She hadn’t thought about birth control because she didn’t have any men in her life at this point, but she would definitely speak with her doctor about getting on something. She didn’t need any children at this point. Taking care of her sister was more than enough. She watched as he raised his head to look at her.

“Yes, birth control and I’d like to have some proof you’re on it. I don’t want children. And even though you’re on something, I will also use a condom to assure myself.”

“I’m not on anything at this moment, but I will definitely speak to my ob-gyn doctor about it.”

“Good.” He looked back down at the paper on his desk and wrote something down.

Piper felt as if she were on a job interview, only these questions were personal, and she wasn’t sure she wanted this job. Besides, shouldn’t she be the one asking questions, like how was he going to find and return her sister safely? Would he have to kill anyone to bring her back? Would Pippa trust this man and believe that she sent him? She was getting a headache from all the thoughts and questions, not to mention all the things he’d made her feel.

She would speak to her doctor tomorrow about birth control, and get a report clearing her of all diseases. She should have known that a man like him wouldn’t want children.

“I will need everything from you before I go after your sister.”

“I understand.” She nodded her head.

“If there’s anything that I should know about your sister, you should also write that down. If she refuses to come back with me, I refuse to make her. That means you will only owe me for going after her.”

“She will come back, but you need to know that she’s afraid of Yuri, so I don’t know what her state of mind is at this point.”

“Don’t worry, I will assure her if she comes with me that Yuri will not find or hurt her again.”

Piper nodded her head. She prayed that Yuri hadn’t hurt or killed Pippa by now. Pippa had to know that Piper would never give up until she found her.

She feared that Pippa would refuse to go with Lucas, so Piper needed to find a way to go with him to bring her home, or at least send something with him of hers so Pippa will know Piper had sent him.

“I need to go with you so Pippa won’t be afraid.”

“No way, sweetheart.” His reply came quickly.

“What if she doesn’t believe you? I could be there to assure her.”

“No, it’s too dangerous. And that is the end of that discussion.”

It might be the end for him, but she planned to go whether he liked it or not. She knew Pippa would be afraid of Lucas and would probably be afraid to leave, but if she was there Pippa would come with them. She would just have to figure out how to go with him without him knowing it.

“How soon will you be ready to leave?”

“As soon as I get everything from you and get a plan set up.”

“It shouldn’t take me long to get everything you need and get it back to you.”

“Sounds good.” He laid his ink pen on the desk and stood. “I’ll show you to the door.”

He held his hand out when he moved to stand next to her chair. She placed hers in it and he pulled her to stand. He didn't release her hand until they were standing in front of the door. He opened it, then brought her hand to his lips, kissing it gently.

"I hope to see you soon." He arched his brows, a hungry leer on his face.

She was too nervous and breathing too hard to answer him. She merely nodded her head and pulled her hand out of his as she headed out of the door. She was still shaking as she got into her car. He had her so flustered she wasn't sure which way was home.