

LILLIAN
DUNCAN

Broken Trust

SOMEONE'S OUT TO STOP
HER TRANSFORMATION...PERMANENTLY



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Lillian Duncan

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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

Harbourlight Books, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410

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Publishing History

First Harbourlight Edition, 2017

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-968-3

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

This and all I do is for God's glory.

To Ronny, thanks for being you! Without your love and support this book wouldn't exist.

What People are Saying

Game On is a romantic-suspense story layered with intrigue that captivates the reader on the first page and doesn't let go till the last page is turned. Lillian Duncan adds one surprise turn after another to keep readers on the edge of their seat. I enjoyed reading this book and recommend it to all suspense lovers. ~ Jo Huddleston, author

1

"Don't touch me."

The man shoved Chryssie Mason up against the wall. Music blared over the loudspeakers, drowning out her voice. She'd sent the kitchen help home a few minutes earlier. Despite the noise, the night had been slow, so it didn't make sense to keep paying them. *Great move, Chryssie.* She shoved the drunk away, but he only moved closer.

"Come on, let's have a party." His boozy breath sickened her.

She pushed against his chest with all her strength. "If you know what's good for you, you'll take your hands off of me. Right now."

"Come on, baby. We just want to have fun."

"You can have all the fun you want, but not with me. I'm working."

"Nobody's here to have fun with. Except you." He motioned around the empty bar, almost falling down as he did.

She should have stopped serving him, but she'd not noticed his condition due to keeping an eye on the employees and the clock. "Not my problem. I don't plan on getting fired because of you."

"Aren't you a pretty thing?" He reached out for her. "Come on. One little kiss."

She moved toward the bar. The billy club was under the shelf. Just a few more steps and...hands

clamped on her arms. She tried to twist away, but he held on tight.

His buddies sat at a table in the far corner, laughing, fake-jabbing each other, and drinking. She looked over at them. "I suggest you get him out of here. Now."

"We don't tell him what to do." One yelled back, which made all of them laugh.

Another stood up. "Yeah, we're not his boss." He staggered their way.

Good. He'd get his friend under control.

Instead, he grabbed her other arm. The two of them backed her up against the wall.

The first twinges of real fear coursed through her. Chrissy couldn't fight off two guys, let alone four. She'd assumed his friends would rein him in if he got carried away with his antics.

A moment later, another of his friends was on the other side of her, taking hold of her other arm. The first drunk relinquished his hold and moved in front of her.

She pushed away the panic. Since they held her arms so tightly she could barely move, she kicked out at the man in front of her, but he moved out of range and laughed. "Good move."

"I'm giving you one last chance to let go of me." She tried to sound authoritative and tough.

"Oh, wow. One last chance." He grabbed her chin and pulled it toward him. "That is so nice of you. But I think I'll pass."

She brought her foot up and slammed it down on his with all the force she could muster.

Ugly words spewed from his mouth as his fist drew back.

She steeled herself for the punch, squeezing her

eyes shut and ducking her chin. When it didn't happen, she cracked her eyes open.

The fist was stopped mid-air. The guy's eyes were widened. His face flushed red as he turned to see who was behind him.

"I don't give second chances." The new voice was matter-of-fact. And tough.

Zack, thank God. Her startled brain would recognize his tones anywhere.

In the next moment the drunk was on the floor, moaning.

Her arms were instantly freed as the other two stepped back, staring at their buddy. One held up his hands in surrender. "Hey, we don't want any trouble. We were just having a little fun. You know how it is, we didn't mean nothing by it."

"It didn't look as if she was having a bit of fun." Zack's glance gave no quarter. "Pay the lady what you owe her and be sure to include a nice, big tip. Then get out of here before I change my mind." Zack leaned down and pulled their buddy to a standing position. "Got some money for her tip?"

The drunk reached in his pocket and pulled out a five.

"Not enough." Zack told him.

He reached back in and pulled out two twenties. "This should cover it." His words were slurred.

"Don't come back again. If you do, I'll press charges." Chryssie told them.

Zack grabbed hold of the nearest drunk. "You know what? I changed my mind. All of you need to be arrested. Call the cops, Chryssie."

"No. No. Don't do that." The instigator looked at Chryssie. "I'm really sorry. I don't know...I'm not

usually like this. Really. Too much to drink. All my fault. Please.”

Zack winked at Chrissy. Her signal to act tough.

Chrissy glared at the drunk. “Make sure you don’t come back. Ever. And here’s a piece of friendly advice. Stop drinking.” She had no idea why people did it in the first place.

The three drunks and their designated driver left.

“That’s funny advice coming from the bartender of this fine establishment.” Zack grinned.

“I’m really glad to see you, Zack.” Chrissy tried to smile back.

“Are you OK?”

Even as she nodded, her knees started shaking. She swayed.

Zack put an arm around her and helped her to a bar stool. “Maybe I really should call the cops. You don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine.” Much to her horror, tears slipped down her cheeks. Now that it was over, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to throw up or cry. Probably both. “If you hadn’t shown up, I...I don’t know what would have happened.”

“You were doing just fine without me.”

“Yeah, right. Another few minutes and...” She couldn’t finish the thought.

“And nothing, you would have handled them.” Zack sat down on the stool beside her. His muscles bulged beneath his T-shirt, which emphasized the tattoos covering them. His face was grizzled as if he hadn’t shaved for a few days, which he probably hadn’t. “I thought Marv had a policy of no women working alone.”

“He does. I didn’t think it was a big deal so I let

the cook and the waitress go home early. That won't be happening again." She laid her head on the bar, trying to calm down.

His hand rubbed her back.

As she straightened up, his hand fell away. "I'll sure be glad when I can quit this job."

"Not much longer, huh, Glitter?"

Everyone called her Glitter at the bar. A tribute to all the bling she wore, along with too much makeup and her Goth-like black wig. "Not if I can help it."

"I had a good time the other day. On our date." His finger traced a line on her hand, leaving a trail of warmth.

She grabbed it back and jumped up, looking for something to do. He didn't need to get the wrong idea. "It wasn't a date. I told you that. Lunch, not date. Remember?"

He held up his hands in surrender. "Sorry, I forgot. I had a good time on our not-a-date date. How's that?" He winked.

"Zack. I'm serious. It wasn't a date." She walked behind the bar and grabbed a cleaning cloth.

"I know. I know. Stop freaking out. Forget I even said the word. But I still had a good time."

She rubbed at the bar as she talked. "Hopefully, by this time next month, I'll have a new job with better pay...and a lot better working conditions."

"If you quit, does that mean I won't see you anymore?"

She sighed inwardly.

Zack was not the kind of guy she wanted. She hadn't spent five years going to college so she could end up with a biker. Despite his kindness, *bad news* was written across those tattooed muscles. He was a

walking canvas. A snake crawled up his left arm to his neck. An American flag adorned the top of his right arm with a military tattoo of some sort below it. His left forearm had a beautiful rendition of a cross with a fish symbol under it.

Before she could come up with a response, he let her off the hook. "You ready for your exams?"

"Pretty much. I still have tomorrow—well, today— to do some studying. And the final's on Monday."

"And then Glitter becomes a full-fledged nurse."

"Hopefully." She was pensive. "I don't want to blow it."

"Hard work wins any day. You should be very proud of yourself."

Yeah, she should be. "I'll wait to celebrate until after it actually happens."

"Don't be such a pessimist, Glitter."

"Well, if you knew my life you'd understand."

Zack reached out to touch her hand once again, but she was faster. He pretended not to notice. "I'd like to know a little more about that life."

"Yeah, sure." A part of her wanted to believe he was serious, but he wasn't the right guy. No matter how cute he was. Or how attracted she was to him. Or that he'd just rescued her from...the truth was, if he saw the real Chrissy instead of Glitter, he probably wouldn't even give her a second glance. Not that she wanted one. It had been a big mistake to let him take her out to lunch. Mixed messages were not a nice thing, and she sure couldn't afford any more bad boys in her life. She'd been there and done that. She wouldn't do it again.

"Come on, I could show you a good time, Glitter."

He winked as he tugged at his pony tail.

A good time she didn't need. "Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of."

"Afraid? I'm just a harmless teddy bear. You know that. What about coming with me to church? That wouldn't be a date."

She shook her head. "I don't do church." Her grandmother believed in God, but she'd never understood why. All her prayers went unanswered.

He patted her arm. "Used to be the same way until Jesus saved my life."

"Yeah, yeah. I don't mean to be rude, but I've heard all that before. Jesus saves you and then you go to heaven."

"That's true, but that's not what I mean. Jesus literally saved my life."

"Do tell." Her gaze moved to the cross on his arm.

He touched it. "I promise to tell you the whole story if you come to church and have lunch with me after. If not tomorrow, then another Sunday. And it's a really good story."

She put a hand on her hip. "Is that a blackmail attempt, Zack?"

"Me?" He touched his burly chest with his finger. "I would never do such a thing. Besides, blackmail is illegal. I don't do illegal. But I really do want to go out with you again."

"Sorry."

His eyes narrowed. "OK, forget church. Then how about a real date with dinner and a movie?"

"You don't look like the dinner-and-movie type."

"Looks can be deceiving."

He wasn't wrong there. If he saw the real her, he probably wouldn't give her the time of the day. He'd

most likely think she was a little mouse. "I don't think so."

"It's the tattoos, right?"

She laughed. "It's not the tattoos. I'll tell you a secret. I have one."

"Really? Let me see it. Or is it a forbidden area?"

Chryssie shook her head. "It's not in a forbidden area." She lifted up her T-shirt, exposing her lower back.

"What is that? Looks like a worm."

"It's not a worm. It's a caterpillar." She put her shirt down and turned back to him. Then she glared at him playfully. "I can't believe you can't tell the difference between a worm and a caterpillar."

"Looks like a worm."

"It's symbolic." Her hand motioned around the bar. "This is my caterpillar time, but one of these days...very soon, I'll be a butterfly." She interlocked her thumbs and her hands fluttered through the air, the ASL sign for butterfly.

"Very cool. OK. If it's not the tattoos, then what is it? Why won't you go out with me again?"

Even though his words said he was a good boy, his tattoos, his looks, everything about him screamed *bad boy*. And she had too much to lose to get involved with another one of those—ever. "Too much going on in my own life. That's all. No time for dating. Anyone."

"At least you didn't give me the 'it's-not-you-it's-me' speech."

"I really am sorry, Zack. I just don't date anyone."

"I hear you, Glitter. I hear you. No problem, but you be sure to let me know when you change that philosophy. I'll be the first in line." He grinned.

"No thanks. I've never found a man I could trust."

"Oh, ye of little faith." He smiled as he stood up. "I'll try to check back later to see if you have anyone who needs a ride, since it's quite obvious no one does right now. But can't make any promises I'll get back."

Several nights every week, Zack Matthews made the rounds at some of the local bars looking for people who'd had too much to drink. He gave them rides home. Every time she'd ask why, he'd simply shrug and say he was a Good Samaritan.

"I know, Zack. I can't thank you enough for—"

"No thanks necessary. I'm just glad I was here to help."

"Next time you're in, free hamburger on me."

"Now, *that* I will take you up on, Glitter. As long as you eat with me."

After Zack left, a few people wandered in. And then a few more. Before Chrissy knew it, she was busy enough to regret sending the waitress and the cook home. Two hours later, her feet throbbed in time to the music as she limped over to the sound system. She hit a button and the blaring music died instantly.

Moans echoed around the room.

She turned back to the customers with a tired smile. "Last call. Ten minutes and I'm locking y'all up in here. Marv can let you out in the morning."

"Oh, come on. Give us a break, sweetheart. I'll make it worth your while."

"It's Saturday night, Glitter."

She put her hands on her hips and gave them a tough-girl look. "Now it's eight minutes and counting down." Several minutes later, she handed a last beer to a man. "That's it, folks. Bar's closed. You've got five minutes to finish your drinks before I lock you in here for the night."

After Chryssie locked up, she limped out back to the dark alley. Her feet were killing her. She shivered, and not from the cold since it was close to eighty degrees out. Why couldn't Marv let the closers park in the bar's front lot where there were more street lights? But no—the parking lot was for customers, not employees.

Voices drifted on the night air—angry voices.

Her feet slowed then stopped.

"I'm not happy about this meeting."

The tone in the man's voice made her heart beat faster. Angry but calm. Not a good combination. Squinting, she saw two shadowed men at the end of the alley. Chryssie stepped back so a dumpster blocked their view but not hers.

"Yeah, man. I got it. But you want a favor from me so you got to pay me. And pay me what the job is worth. I don't do charity. If you know what I mean." The guy was literally bouncing up and down as he talked. Nervous or high. Probably both.

"I already paid you."

"Yeah, man, but that was before."

"Before what?"

Definitely not a friendly meeting.

They hadn't seen her yet—and she wanted it to stay that way. She pressed against the wall. She'd wait until the men finished their business then be on her way.

"Before I knowed who wanted the favor, man. Found out you can afford to pay me more. I'm not some street punk, you know."

Her pulse raced as she listened to the other man respond with a barrage of cursing. He wasn't calm any longer. Suddenly she was afraid to breathe or move.

Should she go back to the bar? But they might see her. Better to wait it out. She pressed against the old brick wall. Trying not to breathe in the fumes from the nearby dumpster, she hoped this would end soon.

"Knew. Knowed isn't a word, you idiot. You won't get very far in this world if you don't have a basic knowledge of English. And you certainly sound like a street punk to me."

"Whatever. It was just a mistake. I *knew* the right word."

"Well, that makes two mistakes you've made today."

"Two?"

"Yeah, the other mistake was trying to cheat me. We had a deal. I don't like it when people don't keep their deals."

Adrenaline shot through Chrissy. Maybe she should make herself known. If they saw her, it might calm the situation. She took a step away from the wall.

"Hey, man. You don't need the gun. You don't want to pay me no more, fine by me. Not a problem. I'll still do the...job."

Gun. A chill traveled the length of her spine. Every nerve screamed at her to run back to the bar, to safety, but her feet were frozen. She couldn't move. If she ran, it would only draw attention to herself.

"Sorry, I don't believe in second chances."

The exact same words Zack had said earlier in the evening. Could it be him? She hadn't really looked that close at them.

Pop.

And then a moan.

He'd shot the guy. Even though she couldn't see it, she knew it. Would she be next? Be quiet. Let him

leave, and then she'd help the guy. And call 911.

Pop. Pop.

Or not.

Footsteps pounded on the pavement. And they were getting louder. He was coming toward her.

She should have left when she had the chance. Maybe, he wouldn't notice her. Looking above at the light shining down on her, that possibility was slim. She pressed closer to the dumpster, hoping it would hide her.

The footsteps grew louder, and then they stopped. A shadow loomed closer. His eyes grew wide as their gazes locked. His arm moved upwards.

Chrissy stared at the gun.

2

Her mind froze. Chryssie tore her gaze from the weapon and looked up at the man. Not Zack, but he seemed familiar. Maybe from the bar? She wasn't sure—it was hard to think. A thousand thoughts zoomed around in her mind. He was bigger and stronger. But she couldn't die yet.

Gabriella needed her.

"Please." Was that barely audible whisper hers? She cleared her throat. "Please, don't hurt me. I didn't see anything."

"You've seen me and that's all I care about." The man grabbed her arm. His fingers bit into her flesh. Tears sprang to her eyes as she struggled.

He grabbed her hand, forced it toward the gun, and then pressed her fingers into the trigger and handle. "This is good. You'll come in quite handy. I guess it's my lucky day." He dragged her down the alley like she was a sack of potatoes. Fighting against him did no good.

Her stomach heaved as she looked at the man lying on the dirty bricks. So young. A halo of blood surrounded him. He wouldn't be needing her help. Or anyone's.

"OK, let's get this over with." He dropped the gun on the ground, then another gun appeared in his hand as if he were a magician.

Bizarrely, she wondered if she should applaud his