

Captured Hearts by Kylie Brant

She went to bed alone – and woke up handcuffed to a sexy stranger!

Chapter 1:

Bailey Reed woke from a dreamless sleep to find herself in the middle of a nightmare.

The impersonal motel room was still dark, but she was no longer alone in it. The man stretched out on top of her was evidence of that.

It was the weight of him, the heat, that had awakened her. For a frozen slice of an instant she stared into the stranger's eyes, immobile. A moment later comprehension flooded through her with a dizzying rush, fueled in equal parts by terror and rage.

She heaved beneath him, her limbs a flurry of defensive moves. He was ready for her. A hand clapped over her mouth even as she filled her lungs, and he easily dodged her sharply raised knee. He wasn't as fortunate at evading her swift right jab. She landed a smart clip to his nose that had him muttering an inventive curse.

"Geez, lady, give it a rest, will you?"

She had no intentions of obeying. Even as he spoke, she was sinking her teeth into the hand covering her mouth and clamping down with vicious satisfaction.

This time his invective was a bit more imaginative and a lot more vehement. He wrested his hand free and used it to yank hers above her head. "Go ahead and scream the place down," he growled, even as she prepared to do just that. "You'll just bring in security, who'll call the police. You want to do things that way, it's okay by me. But the senator wanted to give you a chance to handle this quietly."

Her screams tangled on her tongue, before sliding silently down her throat. She went still. "The senator?"

"Senator Lloyd Parker." She might not be able to see the stranger's features clearly, but there was no missing the mockery in his tone. "You remember him, don't you? Your employer for the past five years?"

Bailey moistened lips that had gone suddenly dry. Her earlier fears that the man was a rapist, or worse, were no less intense than the panic spiking inside her now. "Who are you?"

"The name's Luke Sutton. I'm a private investigator Parker hired to find you and haul you back to D.C."

"Parker hired you?" She whispered the words, wished she didn't believe them. Wished she hadn't suspected all along that the senator had to be behind the chain of events that had sent her fleeing from the city. The last fragile thread of hope she'd been harboring snapped.

"That's right. Lucky for you that he wants to keep this whole mess under wraps. But I suppose you were counting on that, weren't you? Your kind always figures all the odds before going for the big score."

She let the inaccuracy of his statement slide. There was a much more important point to clarify. "I'm not going anywhere with you."

"You know, I thought you might say that. That's why I came prepared." He raised his left wrist in the air, and puppetlike, her right wrist rose, as well. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist that you come back with me."

She stared, dumbfounded. Even in the shadows blanketing the room there was no mistaking the dull gleam of the metal chain, nor the bracelets at either end. In disbelief she tried to tug free, only to find it impossible.

Bailey was handcuffed to the stranger....

Chapter 2:

"Are you deranged?" Bailey demanded.

It was obvious from the lethal quiet of her voice that she'd recovered from her momentary speechlessness at being handcuffed to him. Luke awkwardly twisted his body to reach across the bed with his free hand and switched on the lamp beside the bed. "Nope. Just determined to track down one Bailey Reed and deliver her to Senator Parker." He blinked a little in the sudden glare of the lamp and adjusted it to a softer glow before turning back to her. "Don't know what kind of name Bailey is for a woman. Sounds more like a man's..."

The rest of his sentence formed a hard ball in his throat and lodged. It was not, by any stretch of the imagination, possible to mistake this female for a man. A riot of honey-blond hair tangled around her shoulders. She was glaring at him from narrowed eyes the color of freshly mown grass. Lust punched through his system, startling him with its intensity. It took more effort than it should have to shove it aside.

Her appearance shouldn't be a surprise after all. The senator had given him pictures of her. Luke had noted her attractiveness in the photos, but in a purely detached way. Seeing her in the flesh was something else entirely.

And right now there was an interesting amount of flesh to be seen.

As if noting the direction his gaze had taken, Bailey snatched the sheet to pull it back up to her shoulders, bare but for the thin straps of her nightgown. "You can't just break into people's motel rooms and kidnap them! That's illegal."

The irony of her words was almost amusing. "Yeah, well, so's blackmail, honey. But that didn't stop you from the little scheme you tried to pull on Parker, did it?"

Her jaw dropped. "Blackmail?"

Luke had to give her credit for her acting ability, although Parker had warned him about that. She'd managed to deceive the senator for five years, and a wiler politician couldn't be found in Washington. Word was Parker was next in line for the chair of the powerful Appropriations Committee. Positions like that weren't granted to fools.

"You can drop the innocent act. I know what you did, and so do the police. If it weren't for Parker's long friendship with your family, there would have been an APB out on you the moment you left his office."

"I never tried to blackmail anybody. And my family lives in Des Moines! They've never even met the senator!"

His shrug was as casual as his tone. "You can work out the whole thing with the senator. My job is just to get you back to the capital. It's your call. You can either come with me quietly, or I can turn you over to the cops."

There were too many emotions flitting across Bailey's expressive face for Luke to identify any one of them. But it was certainly no hardship to try. She pushed the heavy fall of hair back from her face, and his gaze tracked the movement, lingered.

"You're bluffing." Her words were flat, delivered like a dare. "Senator Parker couldn't have gone to the police because there was nothing to report."

Luke cocked a brow. "Need proof? I've got it in my bag, so you're going to have to cooperate a bit." He sat up, tugging at the handcuffs to emphasize his meaning. She gathered the sheet around herself in a belated attempt at modesty, before they moved in uncoordinated tandem across the room.

Kneeling in front of his bag, Luke withdrew a manila envelope, and shook out the piece of paper inside. When she gave a single strangled gasp, he gave the paper another glance. The photos of her at the top weren't the most flattering, but that shouldn't have come as any great surprise. Police mug shots rarely were...

Chapter 3:

"I can't believe this." The shock Bailey felt sounded in her voice. "That's not... I've never..."

"Apparently it is, and you have." Luke read the wording beneath the pictures. "Arrested three different times for shoplifting, twice for public intoxication, and, my personal favorite, once for

solicitation." When her body tensed with indignation he raised his free hand warningly. "I wouldn't advise hitting me again. Next time I won't be nearly as forgiving."

Bailey clenched her teeth and uncurled her fist. No, Luke Sutton didn't seem like the forgiving sort. He didn't seem like a man given to any softer feelings. In his faded jeans, scuffed boots, and long-sleeved black shirt, he looked disreputable and more than a little dangerous. His hair was a couple weeks past needing a trim, its rich brown given to a hint of a wave. The hard line of his jaw was stubbled, angling to a stubborn chin. Regrettably, his straight blade of a nose showed no signs of permanent damage from the blow she'd landed earlier.

"You've got to believe me. This —" she reached for the paper and shook it for emphasis "— is fake. I've never done anything criminal. I don't have a record."

His piercing gray eyes were filled with derision. "Parker told me the only reason you haven't ever spent jail time is because he's come to your rescue. But you overstepped this time, sweetheart. Even an indulgent friend of the family isn't going to stand still for a blackmail attempt."

Her mouth went dry. She'd like to believe it was from frustration, but there was panic clawing at her throat. "He must have used some of my ID photos to have this sheet printed. If you'd bothered to double-check, you'd have discovered that it's phony."

"Really? Then I suppose you'll be surprised to hear that I had a friend of mine in the D.C. police department run your name through its database." His smile was completely lacking in humor. "He came up with the exact same information. Am I supposed to believe he's lying, too?"

She sank to the floor in a boneless heap, still clutching the paper.

He squatted beside her. "Give it up, Bailey." He was feeling something uncomfortably close to sympathy. "You screwed up, and you're going to have to go back and face the consequences. Who knows? Maybe you and the senator will reach some sort of compromise."

She shook her head. "Whatever Parker is paying you, I'll double it if you'll let me go. I've got some money with me, and more in savings. What will it take?"

"I figure you've got approximately \$800 left from the grand you withdrew before skipping town." Luke found a flicker of satisfaction at her stupefied expression. "And since that withdrawal depleted your savings, you wouldn't have money to pay me off even if I was interested. Which I'm not."

If anything, her face grew paler. Her hand began to shake. "I should have over \$5,000 left in my account!"

"Yeah, and I should have a million in my piggy bank. Face it. Your game's over."

Her eyes glittered with something he desperately hoped wasn't tears. This wasn't the woman who had fought him so fiercely just minutes ago. Right now she looked...defenseless. Defeated. Not unusual under the circumstances.

What was odd was his reaction. He had to restrain an urge to haul her into his arms and comfort her, and that would be the dumbest move he could make.

Because he had a feeling that if he ever got Bailey in his arms, comfort would be the last thing on his mind....

Chapter 4:

If Bailey had had any doubts about the lengths Parker would go to to find her, they were shattered now. Changing bank records and having a criminal record manufactured for her were the actions of a very determined man. One who would stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

She slanted a glance at Luke. The question remaining was what kind of man had the senator hired?

The private investigator exuded an aura of toughness and latent danger, qualities she'd rather have allied with her than against her. She didn't doubt he would be fully capable of handling the

situation she was immersed in. Unfortunately, he hadn't responded to bribery. A seduction attempt, even if she had the experience to pull it off, would probably fail just as miserably.

The fact that the idea even occurred proved just how thoroughly her life had been upended. Things like this didn't happen to her. She was a secretary, for heaven's sake. And while she'd been enthusiastic about her job, there was very little in her life that anyone else would deem exciting. The events of the past few days seemed more like scenes from a bad action movie than from her placid existence. But they'd taught her one valuable lesson – she could rely on no one but herself.

"All right." Her voice was meek by design. "I'll go back with you, if only to clear my name." She started to rise, hesitated until he moved with her. "But I want a shower first."

For the first time she saw a flicker of uncertainty cross his hard face. "Okay," he replied after a brief hesitation. "It'll be dawn soon. We can leave then." He tugged her in the direction of the bathroom, turned on the light and looked around. Scooping up her overnight bag in his free hand, he tossed it behind him. His callous disregard for her belongings burned, but now was not the time to take him to task for it.

"The key?"

He dug into his jeans pocket, pulled out a handful of change, a small key and – her gaze suddenly fixed – a condom. Bailey could feel the flush crawl up her cheeks, and she hastily looked away. She didn't need mental pictures of this blatantly masculine man using the protection branded on her brain. The images crept in anyway, sly as thieves.

"Reach in there and get it."

Her gaze flashed to his. "Pardon me?"

He shook his hand impatiently. "The key. Pick it out so I can put all this back in my pocket and release you. Unless you've changed your mind about that shower."

Changed her mind? Not likely. She complied, and when he released the handcuff, she barely managed to resist the urge to

rub her wrist.

Waiting for him to leave, she stared, aghast, when he merely lounged against the sink. "What do you think you're doing?"

The glint in his eye belied his matter-of-fact tone. "Waiting while you take your shower. You might be free for the moment, but that doesn't mean I'm going to let you out of my sight."

Chapter 5:

Bailey seemed speechless for an instant as she considered the fact that Luke was going to stay in the bathroom as she showered. Luke had the feeling the experience was an unusual one for her.

"What are you afraid of?" she finally said when she recovered her voice. "That you'll be assaulted with a wet towel, or that I'll escape through the heat duct?"

She had a point, Luke conceded silently. There was no window in the room, nor could he see anything that would serve as a weapon if she got the misguided idea to try overpowering him.

And truth be known, he was rapidly reconsidering his decision. Even with his eyes gentlemanly averted, his other senses would be unnaturally heightened. The whisper of silk as her nightgown slid over her skin would seem abnormally loud. The fragrance of shampoo and woman would be inescapable. He figured he had as much self-control as the next guy, but he'd never claimed to be a saint.

"You're right." He surged to his feet, suddenly anxious to vacate the room.

"Hey!"

Ignoring her indignant protest, he rifled through the bag. He removed her curling iron, but could find no other potential weapons. He headed for the other room. "The door stays open." He was a man who knew when it was wise to be selectively deaf, so he pretended not to hear the words she muttered under her breath.

Once the shower started Luke didn't waste a moment. He strode

to her purse, and began going through it. He wasn't about to go anywhere with the woman without making sure she had no unpleasant surprises for him.

The people he encountered in his line of work hadn't exactly elevated his opinion of human nature. He'd refined his ability to maintain a certain distance in his professional life. And if that detachment had carried over to his personal affairs, too...well, it had successfully kept him free of the stickier emotional entanglements that he was eager to avoid.

While he expertly searched her bags, he considered how different Bailey seemed from the usual deadbeats he was hired to trace. Just because she was more attractively packaged than most of the cons he'd met, however, didn't make her any more trustworthy - only more dangerous.

She couldn't - wouldn't - be allowed to affect his judgment in this case.

By the time Bailey had dried her hair, dressed, and rejoined him, Luke was sitting innocently across the room. He thought she aimed a suspicious look his way when she glanced at her suitcase, but she said nothing. She dragged a hairbrush through her hair, then picked up a can of hairspray. "I'm going to need my curling iron."

"Sorry." His voice sounded anything but. "You'll have to do without the primping today."

"Are you telling me that a big tough guy like you is afraid of a little piece of plastic and metal?"

He knew when he was being baited. "Let's just say, I thought it wise to keep your options to a minimum. Get packed. The cuffs go back on before we leave."

But she seemed in no hurry to comply. Strolling over to the door, she eyed the chain that still secured it. "How did you get in here last night?"

"Taking notes for next time? I bribed a maid to take a look at your picture, then rented the room two doors down. Crawled across the terraces and jimmied your sliding glass door."

Her shoulders tensed. He expected a sarcastic remark. Maybe even to have the brush come flying across the room. What he didn't expect was for her to drop the brush, unlatch the door, pull it open, and dart into the hallway.

As fast as she was, he was faster. He had her by the shirt, hauling her back into the room before she'd taken three steps outside it. But he had no time to congratulate himself on his quick reflexes, because she twisted in his arms, took aim, and gave him a faceful of hairspray.

Chapter 6:

Bailey felt a surge of satisfaction when Luke cursed, then ducked.

She sent a sharp elbow into his ribs and swung the can at his head.

As a weapon it wasn't much, but the multiple assault had him loosening his hold. Taking immediate advantage, she tore away, ran through the doorway and down the hall. Her hand was inches from the handle of the exit door when her feet abruptly left the ground.

"Oomph!" Bailey found herself spun around and pinned against the wall, held there by 200 pounds of unyielding muscle.

Luke shoved his face close to hers and snarled, "Keep pushing, sweetheart. You could always make the trip back bound and gagged in the trunk of my car."

His temper torched her own. "Don't threaten me, you cretinous thug! You don't have the faintest idea what's at stake here."

She heard a noise to her side, and from the corner of her eye saw another guest's door open. Ready to seize the opportunity, she opened her mouth, only to have Luke cover it with his own.

Her initial shock was replaced almost immediately by overwhelming sensation. A frisson of guilty pleasure rippled through her.

His lips moved over hers with a practiced skill that was all

heat and banked emotion. Her heart did a slow lazy spin in her chest.

He was awfully good at this, she thought dimly, reaching for scattered thoughts. Knowing his motive for the kiss didn't stop her nerve endings from sparking and sizzling.

Reason had never been more difficult to summon. Beneath the pleasure that was spreading flames of wildfire through her veins, was a flicker of sanity. Any moment the person who'd come out of the room would be gone. She'd lose her chance to slip out during the commotion she'd intended to raise. The realization gave her the strength to drag her mouth from his.

He followed it, claimed her lips again. His teeth scored her bottom lip, and her pulse spiked. His tongue met hers in a slow velvet glide and flicked over the sensitive roof of her mouth, eliciting a shiver.

And when the oxygen had been leached from her lungs, he raised his mouth a fraction. "Don't go, baby. She didn't mean anything to me." The words were spoken between quick stinging kisses he strewn along her jawline, across her lips. "You're the only one I want."

Dazed, Bailey opened her eyes. The sight of Luke so close, his face stamped with arousal, was as difficult to comprehend as his words. Then the ground dropped from beneath her feet as he scooped her up in his arms, his mouth sealing hers again as he strode across the hallway.

Reality doused her in an icy splash. Her chance of escape was rapidly disappearing. She began to struggle, desperation flaring when he closed the door behind them. Desperation was followed closely by fury. She sank her teeth into his bottom lip.

"Ow! Damn!" Luke dropped her to her feet and glared at her.

She scrubbed the back of her hand across her mouth, wishing it were as easy to erase his taste. "Your little scene was all for nothing. That man probably went for Security." She wished she felt even half as confident of her words as she sounded.

His eyes glinted. "I doubt it. Once he got the idea he'd

interrupted a lovers' spat, he couldn't get out of there fast enough."

Muscles bunched in frustration, Bailey longed to throw something at his arrogant head. "Your lip is bleeding," she said, without a hint of regret.

He touched a finger to his mouth, discovered she was correct, and scowled. "Satisfied now?"

Bailey stared at him mutely. Satisfied? Not even close. She wouldn't be satisfied until she paid him back for every excruciating moment of humiliation he'd put her through a few minutes ago.

The most mortifying of which were the seconds when she'd forgotten he'd been pretending and kissed him back.

Chapter 7:

The handcuffs connecting her to Luke gave Bailey little choice but to follow him across the room, where he picked up the phone. "What are you doing?" she demanded, still angry at herself for responding to his kiss.

"What I should have done an hour ago. Call Parker and let him know that I've found you."

She didn't think, just reacted. Diving forward, she found the cord at the end of the phone and pulled. Divining her intention, Luke dropped the receiver and made a grab for her, but not before she'd disconnected the phone from its jack.

The look he turned on her then would have cowed a lesser person. She swallowed hard, recognizing her position. "I'll tell you the whole story about the senator and me. Just give me five minutes. You owe me that much at least."

"Yeah, I owe you all right." The grim inflection he gave the words left no doubt to his meaning.

"What can it hurt?" Words, she was discovering, came easily

when pleading for your life. "Afterward, if you still want to make that call..." her eyes fixed on his, she forced the lie out "...then I won't try to stop you."

"That's big of you."

His tone was no less sarcastic, but he wasn't trying to reconnect the phone. Encouraged, she said, "You already know I worked as Senator Parker's secretary for the past five years."

"Yeah." Luke leaned against the dresser with a long-suffering air.

"I ran his office, scheduled his appointments, vetted his visitors, and did whatever else he asked of me. One of those things was taking care of the videotapes." She saw the interest flicker across his face and knew she'd caught his attention.

"What videotapes?"

"He had a security camera set to scan his inner office. He always said that someone in his position couldn't be too careful. One of my jobs was to start the camera whenever he came in for the day, and switch it off before I left that evening. The next morning I'd put in a fresh tape, write the date on the one from the previous day, and leave it on his desk."

"What happened to the used tapes?"

"Every month or so he'd leave a pile on my desk to be reused." She watched him for a reaction, but his expression was inscrutable.

"Go on."

"For the last few weeks I'd been doing some extra work for his reelection campaign. I'd view old footage and make notes of spots I thought would be appropriate for use in a campaign ad. The man at work, that sort of thing. So I'd been taking stacks of tapes home with me at night, and bringing them back during the day.

"That's when I discovered that I must have made a mistake the week before. A current tape had somehow gotten in the stack I was taking home and I labeled the wrong one to put back on Parker's

desk. The one I'd taken by mistake had some footage that...ah...I don't think was meant to be filmed."

Luke's gaze narrowed. "Like what?"

Bailey released a breath. "Like an interlude between Parker and a woman who was definitely not his wife."

Chapter 8:

Luke gazed steadily at Bailey. "You're saying you saw a tape of Senator Parker committing adultery?"

She nodded miserably.

"Senator Parker," he repeated. "The leading conservative of the Senate, who bases his campaigns on family values."

"Believe me, I was just as shocked as you are. I'm supposed to turn the camera off before I leave, but I'd been super busy that day setting up a visit with some foreign diplomats. I must have forgotten to switch it off."

Luke considered the information. He didn't know why he was surprised. Parker wouldn't be the first politician to be proven a hypocrite. And the story fit just a little too neatly with what the senator had left unsaid at their initial interview. "So that's when you decided to blackmail him."

Her eyes heated. "No! I never tried to blackmail him. I told you that."

"Then why did you run?"

She jammed her free hand through her hair, the action fraught with frustration. "Because it wasn't safe for me to stay in D.C. Several days earlier someone had broken into my apartment and trashed the place. The next day my car was broken into. I'd thought I was having a run of bad luck until I saw that tape.

"Then I began to wonder if the events were related. I'd finally decided to slip it back in the senator's pile and not say anything. But when I got to my apartment three nights ago..." She paused, the memory still powerful enough to chill her blood.

"Someone was already there."

"Parker?"

Bailey shook her head. "No, it was a stranger. The door was locked so he must have come in one of the windows. He grabbed me as soon as I was inside the door and put a gun to my head."

Luke went completely still, a muscle jumping in his jaw. "Someone broke into your place and threatened you?"

"He wanted the tape. I said I'd get it for him, and...and then I swung my purse at his head."

"Those three rolls of quarters you had in the bottom of it must have done some damage."

She started to nod, then stopped to glare at him. "You searched my purse?"

"So sue me. I don't like surprises. Go on. You knocked the guy out with your bag...."

"No," she corrected. "I stunned him with my bag. He didn't lose consciousness until I hit him with a lamp."

His mouth quirked. "Considering the possibilities, I guess I should count myself lucky that I only got a little hairspray in the face."

She ignored his comment. "I didn't know what to do with the tape, so I had it in my purse. I couldn't think of anyone who'd be after it except for Parker. Since I couldn't predict what he'd do next, I stashed the tape and ran." Looking at Luke anxiously, Bailey asked, "You believe me, don't you?"

Chapter 9:

Luke supposed Bailey's story was plausible if he was willing to put her word above that of a United States senator. He wasn't naive. He was well aware that politics could be a sleazy business.

"Well?" She shook the links connecting their wrists

impatiently. "Do you believe me?"

"Partly," he responded, and watched, with a flicker of male appreciation when her eyes gleamed with anger.

"Partly? What does that mean?"

"It means there were holes in Parker's story, and maybe you filled in some of them. He'd said you'd made up some wild tales that you threatened to take public. When he tried to get you some help, you took off." He held up a hand to stem her protest. "I'm willing to believe that you didn't have to make anything up. The tape would make handy blackmail material."

"Didn't you hear a word I said?" Her voice was edged with frustration.

His temples were beginning to throb. "I heard everything. The fact remains that you ran, apparently without returning the tape. Flight implies guilt. I'm still going to take you back to D.C."

"Even if doing so may get me killed?"

"I'm not going to let anything happen to you." With a sinking feeling, he realized he spoke the truth. "I won't leave you until this whole thing is cleared up." He could tell by the slump of her shoulders that he'd failed to convince her.

"Your gullibility will be of great comfort to me when I'm six feet under."

Calling on a patience he hadn't dreamed he possessed, Luke said only, "You can listen in on my call to the senator, if it'll make you feel better."

She positioned herself between Luke and the phone. "If anything sounds off, anything at all, you have to promise to let me go."

He considered her soberly. "It'd take about five minutes to find you again. You left a trail that any fool could follow."

Insulted, she tossed her head. "I was careful!"

"Careful people don't use credit cards. The receipts led me

right to you."

Her lips pressed together. "Well, excuse me if I missed the course in Fugitive 101. I never realized I'd need those particular skills."

He was finding he preferred her sarcasm over the desperation that had occasionally leaked into her voice while she told her story. He was uneasily aware that the distance he was careful to maintain in his assignments had been spanned.

"Letting you go is out of the question. But I'm also not going to turn you over to Parker until I'm satisfied that I know the whole story. You'll have to settle for that."

He reached for the cord, and with some difficulty, managed to reconnect it to the phone jack. He risked a glance at Bailey's face as he picked up the receiver and hesitated. Her look of utter desolation tugged at a sympathy he'd be better off denying. "It's going to be all right. Trust me."

Her gaze lifted to his, as bitter as her voice. "I trusted Senator Parker. Look where that got me."

Chapter 10:

There didn't seem to be an answer Luke could give that would pacify Bailey, so he didn't try. But he was uncomfortably aware that this job had moved out of the assignment category and into something unfamiliar.

He'd never been a man to appreciate the unfamiliar.

Snatching the phone off the cradle, he dialed the number the senator had given him. The phone was answered on the second ring. Luke kept his eyes on Bailey as he spoke. "Yeah, it's Sutton. I've found her."

"You have?" The voice at the other end of the line was jovial. "That's excellent. You've certainly lived up to your reputation. Where are you?"

Luke skirted the question. "Senator, after speaking to Bailey

Reed, I have a few concerns about this case."

He heard the other man sigh. "I'm sure she's given you an earful. I warned you that she was pathological. I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have, but right now I'm in the middle of something pressing."

Was it Luke's imagination that the man's laugh was a little too hearty?

"If you can just sit tight for a couple hours and then call me back, I should be free. Then we can clear up any questions you might have."

Replacing the receiver a moment later, Luke caught Bailey's accusing gaze. "Don't even start. That doesn't prove anything other than the fact that the senator has more to worry about than you."

"It's proof enough for me. How do we know the senator didn't have that call traced? There could be someone heading here as we speak."

Paranoia must be catching, because the thought had already occurred to Luke. He felt foolish, but there was also a knot low in his belly that warned him there was something afoot here that he hadn't reckoned on. He'd learned long ago not to ignore the feeling. "We'll wait in my room until it's time to call again."

When he said nothing else, she demanded, "That's it? That's your plan? What makes you think they won't find your room as easily as you found mine?"

"Please." He gave her a superior look. "Credit me with a little intelligence."

Before she could find the insult in his words, he pulled her in the direction of their bags. As they worked together to zip them he said, "You realize that if you alert one of the other guests on the way to my room, the cops will be summoned. I can't imagine they would be nearly as careful as I'm being to check out all the angles before delivering you to Parker." Luke made the mistake of looking at her then, caught the slight tremble of her lips before she carefully firmed them.

There was a pang of something in his chest that felt suspiciously like guilt. The unusual sensation disturbed him. His much vaulted objectivity was beginning to slip. Bailey was a job, nothing more.

He'd be wise to remember that.

The fact that he needed such a reminder was the most disturbing thing of all.

Chapter 11:

"What time is it?"

Luke didn't bother opening his eyes. "About five minutes after the last time you asked."

Bailey blew out a breath. "Are you going to spend the next couple hours sleeping?"

"Apparently not." Lying on a bed next to Bailey was most assuredly not a way guaranteed to summon slumber. For one thing, there was the very real likelihood that if he fell asleep she'd try to smother him with a pillow. And secondly, well...he was lying on the bed next to Bailey.

He knew what her body would feel like stretched out beneath his own, could summon the memory of it at will. Her scent was already familiar, although she wasn't wearing perfume. She smelled of soap, shampoo, and female. The simple combination shouldn't have been so alluring.

Pulling a deep breath into tortured lungs, he reminded himself that she was most probably a felon. A thief. A liar. And if her rap sheet was to be believed, even something a bit more risqué. Problem was, he was starting to question that rap sheet. He was starting to question his client.

And when the questions became more troublesome than the answers, he knew he was in serious trouble.

Digging in his pocket, he found the key and unhooked the cuff encompassing his wrist. Ignoring the hopeful expression on

Bailey's face, he placed the manacle around a rung in the headboard and snapped it shut.

"What are you doing?"

"All your wild talk has gotten me jittery." He was annoyed with himself, but incapable of shaking the nerves. He crossed swiftly to his bag and pulled out the Beretta that he always carried on assignment.

He headed to the door, and her panicked voice followed him.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

He turned back to look at her. "I'm going back to wait in your room. It's probably a waste of time, but you've got me paranoid."

As he reached for the doorknob he heard the handcuffs rattle. "You're not going to leave me here like this. Do you hear me, Sutton? Sutton!"

He didn't make the mistake of looking at her again before he left the room. He was only a man, after all. And the sight of Bailey lying on the bed handcuffed to the headboard made him all too aware of it....

Chapter 12:

There was something about being handcuffed to a bed that gave a woman entirely too much time to think. Bailey's thoughts didn't make particularly comfortable companions.

In her family she'd always been known as the fearless one. The one who decided what she wanted and went after it. That trait had given her the strength to leave Iowa for Washington, D.C. Had helped her acquire a job in a junior representative's office, and then later one with Senator Parker.

But she'd spent the last few days in an unfamiliar state of indecision, layered with shock. Her quiet orderly life had been irrevocably shattered when a stranger had broken into her apartment and held a gun to her head.

She couldn't help the hurt disillusionment that accompanied the

realization that the man she'd dedicated herself to for the past five years was dirty. There was anger, yes, at the senator, but at herself, too, for being duped by the senator's cultivated persona. Her experience with Parker should come as a valuable lesson to not put her faith in someone too easily, or too blindly.

Which didn't explain at all the desire she had to trust the man who'd left her locked to the headboard.

* * *

Luke sat in Bailey's room, feeling like a fool. She'd suckered him, he thought in disgust. Her wild tales and dramatic predictions had sideswiped his normally pragmatic logic.

He'd never been a guy to let his hormones do his thinking, but he had to admit they'd certainly hazed his judgment in this case. He could think of no other reason for him to have spent the past hour and a half sitting in an empty room, all the while trying to wipe that last sight of Bailey from his mind.

It burned to admit how close he'd come to believing her. He should have known better. An objective mind and a healthy skepticism had served him well in his line of work. The knowledge that she'd circumvented both was a well-placed kick to the ego.

Frustrated, he surged to his feet. He'd wasted enough time already. It was time to call Parker back, and past time to see the last of Bailey Reed.

He crossed to the sliding glass door, then froze when a knock sounded. Silently he went to the door and checked the peek hole. He saw no one. Silently he flattened himself against the wall next to the door. He'd no sooner drawn his gun than the knob began to turn.

The armed figure was halfway into the room when Luke kicked the door, slamming it into the man entering. He'd had the element of surprise, but the stranger recovered quickly. He launched himself at Luke, his head catching him low in the belly. They went down, and their guns went flying.

The two of them hit the floor with a crash, and rolled. Luke

took a punch to the jaw that had his head snapping back, before plowing his fist into the man's belly. When the man lunged upward, trying to throttle him, Luke twisted away, placed his knee on the stranger's windpipe.

The other man landed a couple kidney punches before lack of oxygen began to take the fight out of him. Luke ended the battle by slamming the stranger's head against the floor, and the man went abruptly still.

Luke rose, staggered a little. He retrieved his weapon, then crossed back over to the man crumpled on the floor. Holding the gun on him, he went through the stranger's pockets, searching for identification. When he failed to find any, Luke looked for the gun the man had dropped.

He gave a silent whistle as he examined it. A 9 mm Glock, it was big, mean, and deadly.

And the silencer attached to its barrel was a grim testament of its owner's intentions...

Chapter 13:

When Bailey heard Luke at the sliding glass doors, every ounce of impatience and frustration she felt sounded in her voice. "Damn you, Sutton! Do you know how long you've been...." Her voice faltered when she got a look at him. "You're hurt. What happened?"

His hair was disheveled and there was a mark on his jaw that promised to bloom later. "I just tangled with a guy who came to your room for a visit." He moved to her, unlocked the cuffs. "I'd love to discuss it with you, but it's entirely possible he didn't come alone. We're getting out of here."

The thought of him being injured because of her did odd things to her stomach. "I told you that Parker was dangerous." She wished, desperately, that she'd been wrong.

"Save your I told you sos for later," he advised grimly. "Right now we need to concentrate on getting out of here alive."

It wasn't until she was ensconced in Luke's nondescript sedan and they were pulling out of the parking lot that Bailey began to breathe easily. She noted the way his gaze kept going to the rearview mirror, and she turned, scanning the area uneasily.

"Do you think we'll be followed?"

"That depends on whether your visitor brought reinforcements."

His voice was terse, and she regarded him carefully. He hadn't handcuffed her again when they'd snuck out of the hotel or after they'd gotten in the car. That tiny measure of trust would have thrilled her even three hours ago. Now it merely weighted her conscience. His faith hadn't been won without a risk to his life. And as long as they remained together, the danger would only increase.

With that thought in mind she said, "This isn't your mess, Luke. We should split up."

"If you think you can handle this on your own, you're kidding yourself." He drove deftly, cutting in and out of the heavy traffic. "From the looks of things, the senator is getting desperate. Besides..." He spared a look at her. "I tend to take it kind of personally when someone tries to kill me. Whether you like it or not, we just became partners."

If the warm glow spreading inside her was any indication, she liked the idea a little too much. But that only made her more determined. "Once the senator finds out that you're helping me, he'll ruin your life. Believe me, I know..."

His words cut her off as his gaze went to the mirror again. "We don't have time to argue about it right now. We've got a far bigger concern. Like the car that's been following us for the past five minutes...."

Chapter 14:

"Don't turn around," Luke ordered, as Bailey was about to twist in her seat. "I don't want them to know they've been spotted."

"How many of them in the car?" To her credit, her words were steady.

"Two. Wait. Three. I think there's one in the backseat."

"What are we going to do?"

He was surprised she needed to ask. "Lose them, of course. Sit tight."

Before Bailey could respond he punched down the accelerator and barreled through a red light. The blare of horns and screech of brakes told of the chaos they left in their wake. She gulped, and checked the mirror. "They're still behind us."

His silence didn't fool her. "Listen, Sutton. If you're getting some perverted thrill out of playing Mario Andretti, you apparently don't grasp the seriousness of the situation."

Luke couldn't prevent a grin. "Oh, I'm serious, all right. I'm about to get deadly serious. Hang on." He wheeled hard to the right, taking the corner on two wheels, and zipped down a wide boulevard. While Bailey was catching her breath, there was a small ping heard outside their car. And then another.

"Son of a... They're shooting at us. Get down!" Luke reached over, shoved Bailey's head toward the seat.

She struggled away from him. "Where's the gun?"

"What?"

"Your gun!" She popped up again. "I'll shoot while you drive."

The horror her words elicited had to have shown on his face. "Are you crazy? Do you even know how to handle a gun?"

"Can you think of a better time to learn?"

There was another small sound of a bullet hitting metal. An expletive burst from Luke's lips. "Brace yourself."

The exit ramp leading toward the freeway was approaching. Without a backward glance, he sped down it, carefully gauging his

timing. When he hit the interstate he crossed the lanes, bounced over the grassy median that separated the lanes of oncoming traffic and pulled a hard left.

The car fishtailed, and he wrestled for control. A moment later, he was speeding in the opposite direction. It wasn't until he was certain he'd lost the pursuit car completely that reason overcame reaction.

He waited for the hammering of his pulse to slow. He understood adrenaline, instinct, but this surge of protectiveness was new. It was also hazardous.

Bailey wasn't the kind of woman who would be comfortable with the revolving door of his relationships. If there was ever a "strings attached" kind of female, it was her. She almost made him reconsider his aversions to strings.

And therein lay a far greater danger than any he'd ever faced before....

Chapter 15:

"We're going back to D.C.?" Bailey stared at Luke in disbelief. "Are you kidding? We'd be playing right into Parker's hands."

"I don't think so. At any rate, we don't have a lot of choice." He turned off the freeway, onto a county road marked with a sign welcoming them to West Virginia. "We have to retrieve that tape, Bailey. We've got no leverage at all if the senator's men get to it first."

"They won't find it." She pressed a palm to her stomach where nerves seemed to be churning. She wanted to scream her protests, but the simple truth was, she had no other suggestions to make.

As if sensing the nosedive her mood had taken, Luke reached over, took her hand. "Hey, chin up. We'll figure a way out of this. They haven't caught us yet, have they?"

His reassurance soothed her and she curled her fingers in his. It was odd how such a simple gesture from him could give her hope.

They turned off the county blacktop onto a less well-maintained country road. Catching her quizzical look, Luke explained, "If the senator hasn't already released descriptions of our cars to the area State Police, you can bet it's just a matter of time. We need to ditch this one."

"I'm almost afraid to ask, but...how do you expect us to get to D.C.?"

"Simple. We're going to find an isolated home somewhere around here and steal a car."

"Steal a car." She nodded, as if the suggestion was commonplace. "Wonderful. Grand theft auto should really spice up my rap sheet."

A corner of his mouth lifted. "We can refer to it as trading if it'll make you feel better. Mine will have to be left behind. We can't take the chance of getting pulled over."

She considered his words as he drove. She'd been taking chances ever since she'd discovered that tape. But of all the events in the last several days, the riskiest chance she'd taken to date was deciding to trust Luke Sutton.

Chapter 16:

Bailey sat cross-legged on the ground next to the old jeep, eyeing it distrustfully. "We'll be lucky if this thing makes it to the end of the driveway, much less to D.C."

Luke merely grunted at her words and continued fumbling with wires beneath the dash. There were some skills that never left a man, and he was hoping this was one of them. When the engine finally coughed and misfired, he sent her a triumphant grin. "Talents gained in a misspent youth are never wasted, sweetheart. Now admit it. I'm handy to have around."

"I'm not going to praise your unlawful talents, Sutton. Your ego doesn't appear to need stroking, at any rate." The smile she was trying to suppress broke out then, aching lovely.

He stared at her, staggered. He'd seen her angry, defiant, and

scared. But the winsome charm of her smile unlocked something in him, something he would have denied existed. Emotion overcame common sense.

He straightened in one fluid motion and hauled her into his arms. Covering her mouth with his, he dove into sensation. Her flavor was a mixture of sweetness and heat, tantalizing and addictive. That first taste of her at the motel had fired a hunger that had simmered ever since, just below the surface. And when she kissed him back, lips as avid as his, need rose quickly, edgy and fierce.

He wasn't a man given to impulse, and the risks he took were calculated. But there was no way to calculate the gut-wrenching pleasure of holding her, tasting her. His tongue went in search of hers and he heard the small moan that sounded in her throat. It elicited an answering savage emotion.

This demand that fired through his system was too brutal, too overwhelming to deny. He cupped her breast, his thumb finding her nipple, and her body arched into his. Primal desire had his blood pounding. There was nothing he wanted more right now than to lay her back on the grass, cover her body with his, and ride out this pleasure to its peak.

And there was never a less appropriate time to consider doing so.

Logic battled with lust, and regrettably, logic won. Luke buried his face at Bailey's throat, inhaled her scent, his breath sawing in and out of his lungs. He could feel her heart hammering against his chest, the twist of her fingers in his hair. And because the combination tempted him to devour her again, he pulled away.

"Look..." His voice was raw, so he cleared it. "Bad timing for this."

"The worst." Her agreement would have helped his resolve if her voice hadn't sounded so dazed. As it was, it just made his control shakier.

He crooked a finger, tipped her chin up so her gaze met his. "But when this is over, Bailey. When it's over..."

She moistened her lips. "We'll deal with it then."

Satisfied that she understood, he turned his attention to the jalopy and tried to ignore the vicious ache riding low in his belly. "You can count on it."

Chapter 17:

Luke felt a surge of admiration for the woman at his side. He could think of no other women in his acquaintance and damn few men who could have dealt with her situation with half the guts Bailey had shown.

But he was going to have to help her work on her subterfuge.

Standing in the middle of her darkened apartment he muttered, "You couldn't have thought of a less risky place to hide the tape?"

"Don't worry." Her whisper matched his as she moved surely through the darkness. "Parker's men didn't find it either time they were here. I'm sure it's safe."

Luke was less concerned right now about the safety of the tape than he was about the possibility that her apartment was being staked out. After reaching D.C. he'd insisted on waiting until dark before undertaking their mission, but even with that precaution his instincts were screaming that they were in danger.

He followed her to the bathroom, and watched as she hoisted herself up on the washing machine and shimmied into the thin space between it and the wall. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Nope." Her voice was muffled as she bent down. "You can't believe how many times I've dropped clothes down here and had to fish them out. I thought of it right away when I needed a place to leave the tape."

Getting out of the tight area required more dexterity than getting in had. Luke assisted her, and then she jumped down nimbly from the washer, tucking the tape into her purse.

It was almost too easy. They made their way through the near silent apartment house and slipped outside the back door. Across the courtyard, around a corner, and they were on the street. Luke relaxed, just a fraction. Taking Bailey's elbow in his hand, they walked quickly in the direction of the nearest bus stop.

"Luke."

He didn't need Bailey's hissed warning. He'd already seen the two men in dark trench coats appear from the shadows and fall into step behind them. He dropped back a bit, placing himself between the strangers and Bailey.

Reaching into his jacket slowly, he drew the Beretta. Urging Bailey to a faster pace, they turned the corner at a near jog and saw a police cruiser pulling to a stop 20 feet ahead of them.

Bailey's gaze swung from the two men gaining on them to the police car. "Now what do we do?"

"Now we run like hell."

Chapter 18:

"Boy, you P.I.s really know how to impress the ladies." Bailey scanned the motel room with distaste.

Although clean, the room's decor was Early American tacky. The green shag carpeting matched the faded bedspread and drapes. Since it was the sort of place that rented rooms by the hour, Bailey had no doubt that the bed was the kind that took quarters. It was the honeymoon suite, the ferret-faced clerk had informed them. And for a mere \$25 extra, it was the only room that boasted a VCR.

"Consider yourself lucky," Luke informed her. They sat on the edge of the bed while he watched the tape. "It beats a jail cell or the morgue."

Recalling how easily they could have ended up in either one, Bailey felt a bit more grateful. Her heart still hadn't recovered from their wild marathon across yards, alleys, and traffic-filled streets. She wasn't sure when they'd lost the police officers, but the two thugs trailing them had veered away shortly after the cruiser had showed up.

"Parker must still have his men watching my apartment. But how do you explain the police showing up the way they did?"

"One of Parker's men must have paid off one of your neighbors to watch for you." His arm looped around her waist, and with only a little pressure he urged her closer.

Smiling a little, she allowed her head to rest for a moment on his shoulder. It would be tempting – all too tempting – to forget about the seriousness of their situation and greedily hoard stolen moments like these, for the times when memories were all she had left. The thought was more than a little bittersweet.

"Wait a minute. Who are these guys?"

Reluctantly, her gaze followed his to the screen. Then she straightened, leaned forward. "I recognize them. They represent Hansen International."

Luke turned up the volume and they watched in silence while the tape played out. When only static filled the screen, Luke looked at her. "You never saw this part before?"

Stunned, she shook her head. "I figured when I got to the part with the senator and his lady friend, I'd seen enough. I had no idea there was anything else on this tape."

There was an answering amazement in his voice. "The footage of him with another woman would have crippled his career, but this is guaranteed to destroy it. Do you realize we've got proof that the senator is accepting bribes from one of the country's largest military contractors? The Appropriations Committee chairmanship must be considered a sure thing for him to be able to demand this kind of money."

"The question is, what do we do about it? Could we release it to the media?"

He considered her suggestion for a moment before shaking his head regretfully. "Chances are it would never reach the public eye. Parker has destroyed your credibility. No self-respecting newspaper or television station would touch anything you gave them."

There was a boulder-size lump in the back of her throat. "So Parker's won." Even as she spoke the words, a wave of desolation crashed over her, so swift and turbulent that she had to turn away to hide her reaction. "We can't go public, and we can't go to the police. I shouldn't have come back here. And I never should have let you get involved."

His hands went to her shoulders and drew her back against his chest. For a moment, just for a moment, she let herself lean on him, as if she could absorb his strength.

When Luke's mouth went to her ear, a shudder worked down her spine. "I became involved, sweetheart, the minute I laid eyes on you. And the senator hasn't beaten us. Not by a long shot."

It was difficult to concentrate on his words with his breath caressing her throat, the feel of his hard body against hers weakening her knees.

"I don't have a clue what to do now. I'm not cut out for this kind of intrigue."

She heard his smile in his voice. "Fortunately, I am."

Chapter 19:

Dawn's soft pastels painted the sky outside Senator Lloyd Parker's study window. He stood before his desk, impeccably groomed in his discreetly pinstriped suit. "You've caused me a great deal of trouble, Bailey."

The room in his opulent Great Falls home was a shrine to his career. There were pictures of him with former presidents, prime ministers, and movie stars. An ornately worked plaque proclaimed him the hardest-working member of Congress. Once, Bailey had believed the same. That time seemed a million years ago.

"I want my life back. When Luke called, you promised that you'd call off your dogs if I turned over the tape."

"And I'm a man of my word. Where is it?"

"We've got it." Luke stepped between them, his protective stance unmistakable. "But first you're going to call the police department and clear those phony charges you trumped up against her."

The senator inclined his head. "Her record will cease to exist once she gives me the tape."

"I checked the papers. You haven't been appointed chairman yet."

Parker stiffened at Bailey's words. "It's just a matter of time."

"I wonder what the House Ethics Committee would think about you taking bribes from the biggest military contractor in the nation."

"Don't waste my time, Bailey." His tone was impatient. "You and I both know how easily I could discredit your testimony. You had access to all my videotapes and expertise with them. It would have been easy for you to splice some scenes together to come up with something that looked incriminating. If, indeed, the tape ever made it to a hearing."

It was the truth in his words that had brought them to Senator Parker. Reaching into her purse, she withdrew the videotape.

The senator took it from her and crossed to a VCR to verify it. Then he turned back to them. "How do I know you haven't made copies?"

Luke snorted. "You've already shown us what we'd be up against should we ever try to make that tape public. All we want is our lives back. You've got what you want. Now give us what we want."

Parker arched his eyebrows. "Of course. I promised, didn't I?" His gaze rested on Bailey and an unidentifiable expression flickered in his eyes. "You disappointed me, Bailey. I made the mistake of trusting you too much."

"And I made the mistake of trusting you." She returned his gaze steadily. "Tell me, did your price go up because you're the next chair of Appropriations?"

He looked down at her regally. "The representatives from Hansen were quite generous, in return for certain favors."

When she pressed her lips together, looked away, he laughed out loud. "Come, Bailey, surely you're aware of the reality of politics these days. It's not as if my promises to Hansen will affect the national security one way or another. And their donation for my friendship will go a long way toward getting me reelected."

"And pay for this house, no doubt."

His expression grew wintry. "It will pay for a great many things, including witnesses who will swear that the pair of you broke into my home, and threatened me with a gun." His smile was hard. "You really didn't think I was just going to let you walk out of here, did you?"

Bailey regarded him almost sadly, aware that she'd never really known the man at all. "No, as a matter of fact. We didn't."

At that moment three men in dark suits burst through the doorway. Parker's face became guarded. "Sutton, are these thugs yours?"

"In a manner of speaking," Luke murmured.

One man stepped forward, flipped open a small leather case to reveal a shield. "Special Agent Ronald Payton, Justice Department." He signaled to the other men, who came forward to flank the senator as he continued, "I'm placing you under arrest, sir, for bribery and conspiracy."

Parker went apoplectic. "What? You can't just break in here! Do you know who I am?"

"Thanks to Bailey," Luke said, with no small measure of satisfaction, "the entire country is soon going to know exactly what you are, as well."

Chapter 20:

A warm masculine hand smoothed its way over her bare shoulder to cup her breast. Bailey smiled, eyes still closed, and arched into Luke's touch. The hours they'd spent together in the aftermath of Parker's arrest had blurred seamlessly into one erotic dream after another.

Half reluctantly, she opened her eyes. Her heart kicked a faster beat to see Luke, gloriously nude, press his mouth to the pulse at the base of her throat. "Was that the phone I heard a while ago?"

She felt him go still against her, and had the impression that he shifted away, not physically, but emotionally.

"About an hour ago, yeah."

She smiled, slow and languorous and turned in his arms. "I must have fallen asleep for a bit."

"Actually, the call was for you." This time there was no mistaking the distance in his voice. He coupled it in the next moment by rolling away, sitting up in bed. "I gave the number to the agents and they must have passed it on. Guy said he was Don Hegel."

The name was a splash of cold reality. Bailey sat up, as well. "Speaker of the House Hegel? What on earth did he want?"

Luke seemed to find something fascinating on the opposite wall. "Said something about a job with the ambassador to Britain. He wants to talk to you about it."

Bailey received the news silently, wondering at her lack of excitement. A week ago the prospect would have had her over the moon. But now she could summon no enthusiasm for the possibility. And especially not for the idea of traveling overseas.

"Guess that's a big step for you, huh?" At Luke's careless words, she looked at him, her heart sinking a little at his expressionless face. He couldn't have said better with words how little her going would affect him.

A vise squeezed her chest. "It seems odd to be discussing career changes after the last couple days we've been through."

Luke nodded, his gaze still stubbornly avoiding hers. "About that...the danger and all...it can be a powerful aphrodisiac." His fist curled on the blanket between them. "It's been documented, I guess. People can feel things – strong things – that they mistake for something else. Something lasting."

Pain lanced through her as his meaning became clear. "Yes. I guess I've read that." She wondered if it was possible for him to hear her heart shattering.

"The thing is...I've been in treacherous situations before – plenty of times. Can't say that they've ever affected me like this."

Her chin lifted slowly. The light in his eyes when he met her gaze sent a cautious ribbon of hope unfurling inside her.

"There's something between us, Bailey, and I'm not walking away from it. Damned if I can walk away from you." He seemed to note her misty eyes then and his expression eased. "Don't especially like the idea of having to chase you onto another continent, but I think I've proved that you can't run away from me for long."

Her voice was almost steady when she responded. "I'm through running." The kiss they shared then was rife with the promise of new beginnings, with an underlying shimmer of familiar heat. In the next moment she found herself beneath him again, with him grinning down at her.

Bailey slid a lazy hand into his hair. "You seem to spend an awful lot of time in this position, Sutton."

His eyes gleamed as his mouth lowered to hover a fraction above hers. Against her lips he whispered, "Oh, I intend to. I certainly intend to."

The End

<http://www.esnips.com/web/eb00ks>