

TOUCH:  
A ONE-ACT  
PLAY

Briana Morgan

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ISBN: 069269420X  
ISBN-13: 978-0692694206

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Visit the website for news and notices of upcoming releases at  
<http://www.brianamaemorgan.com>

For more information, contact  
[BrianaMorgan@outlook.com](mailto:BrianaMorgan@outlook.com)

Published by Moran Publishing  
11173 African Sunset Street  
Henderson, NV 89052

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## **CHARACTERS**

**THE CURED**—thirties/forties, the Seeker's mother

**THE SEEKER**—teenage girl, the Cured's daughter

**THE ADDICT**—woman of at least forty

**THE DEALER**—late twenties/early thirties

**THE ENFORCER**—mid-forties, the Cured's parole officer

## **PLACE**

A city like any other, bustling and a little dirty.

## **TIME**

The near future—or, perhaps, an alternate reality.



# ACT ONE

## Scene 1

*Open on a woman, the SEEKER, sitting on a bed, looking embarrassed. Another woman, the CURED, her caregiver, reads from a diary. As she speaks, the SEEKER hangs her head in shame.*

CURED. *(Reading aloud.)* “I’ve never been hugged before. I don’t know anyone who has. For as long as I can remember, the world has been full of

people shying away from physical contact. There are no accidental touches without immediate apology, shame, and a little bit of fear. The law is meant to keep us safe. I know that as well as anyone does. Before touch was outlawed, virus and disease ran rampant. I know why the law exists. I know how it helps. Still, I wonder if the history of the human race is nothing but a list of ‘thou shalt not’s scribbled onto massive stone tablets. What was it like to touch someone on purpose? I wish I knew. I’d like to know. It isn’t enough to imagine anymore. I need to go see for myself. (*She slams the diary shut and tosses it onto the bed.*) What do you have to say for yourself?

SEEKER. I didn't mean anything by it.

CURED. Then why did you write it?

SEEKER. I don't know.

CURED. You don't know?

SEEKER. That was private. (*The CURED stares at her sternly without saying another word.*) It's my diary, all right? No one would have read it.

CURED. *I read it.*

SEEKER. You know what I mean.

CURED. After everything I've been through... what were you thinking writing something like that? You know what could happen.

SEEKER. Of course I do. I'm not an idiot.

CURED. You're acting like one.

SEEKER. (*Sighing.*) I had a lot on my mind the other night. I couldn't sleep because my thoughts were driving me

crazy. One of the girls at school said writing in a diary can help—

CURED. What girl at school?

SEEKER. Why does it matter?

CURED. Three of your classmates were arrested last week. How can you be so blind?

SEEKER. I'm not blind, Mother. I just choose not to see.

CURED. I don't see the difference.

SEEKER. The difference is choice. (*Beat.*) Those arrests were awful. They pulled them out of class and handcuffed them in the hallway. Sarah Cole *fainted*.

CURED. Those girls had it coming. They knew the risks.

SEEKER. No one deserves that.

CURED. They met in the woods to kiss. They were right behind the school. It was only a matter of time. I still can't believe they were stupid enough to—

SEEKER. They weren't stupid. They were *curious*. I think what they did was brave.

CURED. It wasn't brave. It was stupid. And you're being stupid now. (*She moves closer to the SEEKER.*) I don't want you to repeat my mistakes.

SEEKER. I'm sorry you think I'm stupid. I'm not stupid. I can't help noticing what's going on around me and I need some way to cope. The diary isn't hurting anyone. I want to keep it.

CURED. You can't keep it.

SEEKER. Why not?

CURED. We've been over this.

SEEKER. I keep it in the house. No one else has ever seen it.

CURED. Doesn't mean they never will. *(She sits down beside the SEEKER.)* It all starts with thinking. Then writing. The next thing you know, you're embracing a hug dealer and trying to explain to the police that you stumbled and he caught you—which, by the way, did not work for me.

SEEKER. Mother, that won't happen.

CURED. You don't know that.

SEEKER. I'm not you. *(She picks up the diary and holds it against her chest.)* I've been thinking and I want to meet my donor.

CURED. You can't.

SEEKER. Doesn't City Hall keep records?

CURED. I don't even know who your donor is. It could be anyone. (*Beat.*) If you're not going to give me the diary, at least stop writing in it. Maybe tear out that last entry. I want you to be safe.

SEEKER. I'm sorry.

CURED. I know. (*The SEEKER gets up from the bed and crosses to the door. The CURED stands.*) Where are you going?

SEEKER. Out. (*Lights fade as the SEEKER exits, leaving the CURED alone.*)

## Scene 2

*Lights up on an alley. A man is perched on top of a dumpster with a hood pulled over his face. He is the DEALER. The SEEKER sits on a bench on the other side of the stage, waiting for the bus and studying a map. She doesn't notice the DEALER. The ENFORCER enters, approaches the dumpster, and taps the side of it with his night stick.*

DEALER. Can I help you, officer?

ENFORCER. Didn't I tell you to leave earlier?

DEALER. (*Ever the charmer*) Oh, I'm terribly sorry. You did indeed. Forgive me for not heeding your instructions. I would've moved on right away, if only it weren't for my leg...

ENFORCER. What's with your leg?

DEALER. War wound, sir. The pain flares up right before a big storm. (*Looking up at the sky.*) Look at that. Dark clouds. Just as I thought.

ENFORCER. Can you put weight on it? The leg, I mean.

DEALER. A little, but it's not good. (*Laying it on thick.*) People ask me if I would've gone to war knowing I'd come out like this. Of course I would have, I tell them. I wanted to serve my country. I

would've taken a bullet through the heart while protecting this nation. I feel blessed to have only been shot in the leg. (*Sighing.*) You a veteran, officer?

ENFORCER. Oh, yes. It's nice to meet a fellow soldier.

DEALER. Likewise. (*He salutes. The ENFORCER salutes back.*)

ENFORCER. (*Smiling.*) Tell you what, pal—why don't we pretend I never told you to leave? There's no point irritating your injury. The streets are empty, so you won't bother anyone. The weather looks rough, though. Try to stay dry. (*He waves and exits.*)

DEALER. Thank you, officer. God bless you. (*After the ENFORCER is offstage, the DEALER hops down from the dumpster, pushing his hood back.*) Sucker. (*The DEALER goes around the side of the dumpster*

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*and pulls out a book. He begins reading. An ADDICT wanders onstage, groping along a wall. She is blind. She runs into the bench where the SEEKER is sitting.)*

SEEKER. *(Startled.)* Oh!

ADDICT. Who's there?

SEEKER. *(Anxious.)* Just someone waiting for the bus.

ADDICT. I'd like to catch the bus as well. *(She feels along the top of the bench then down to the seat, finding it empty.)* Do you mind if I sit?

SEEKER. No. Go ahead. *(The ADDICT sits a little too close to the SEEKER. She scoots over. The ADDICT follows her lead until they're touching. The SEEKER leaps up, horrified.)* What are you doing?

ADDICT. What do you mean?  
*(Insistently.)* Why don't you sit back down?  
*(She stretches her hand toward the SEEKER, who shies away from the contact.)* What's wrong? Is there a policeman around?

SEEKER. That doesn't matter.

ADDICT. Do you see a policeman?

SEEKER. No.

ADDICT. All right then. What's the problem? *(She scoots. The SEEKER eyes her warily before sitting down. The ADDICT sits with her hands in her lap, humming. The SEEKER stares straight ahead, obviously unnerved by their interaction. The bus pulls up, engine humming. The SEEKER stands. The ADDICT scrambles to her feet, loses her balance, and grabs the SEEKER's arm to steady herself. The SEEKER supports her. The two of them freeze.)* Thank you.

SEEKER. Uh-huh. (*She steps away from the ADDICT and watches her get onto the bus. She decides not to get on. The ADDICT gets off the bus.*) What's going on?

ADDICT. I changed my mind. I think I'll walk. Want to walk with me?

SEEKER. (*Beat.*) Maybe for a little while.

ADDICT. Don't let me run into anything.

SEEKER. Okay. I'll try not to. (*The ADDICT takes her arm. She is startled but does not resist.*)

ADDICT. Thank you. See, I was thinking of heading towards East Street because there's that violin player on the corner... (*Her voice trails off as she hears the DEALER, who has begun singing to himself.*) Let's head this way.

SEEKER. Why? What's over there?

ADDICT. There's someone I think you should meet. (*The SEEKER leads the ADDICT to the other side of the stage, catching the DEALER's attention.*)

DEALER. Ladies, welcome. What brings you two to my neck of the woods?

ADDICT. I know that voice.

DEALER. Don't say my name. (*He walks over to the ADDICT, taking her hand off the SEEKER's and putting it on his own. He covers her hand with his, and she leans into him.*) Let me guess. The usual?

ADDICT. Yes.

DEALER. (*Looking at the SEEKER*) And your pretty friend, what's she want from me?

SEEKER. (*Defensive.*) Nothing.

DEALER. (*Laughing.*) We'll see about that. Do you know who I am?

SEEKER. I can guess. You're a dealer.

DEALER. Smart girl. (*He winks and focuses on the ADDICT. She reaches into her pocket, takes out a few bills, and puts them in his hand.*) Perfect. (*He counts the money and puts it away. Satisfied, he takes the ADDICT by the shoulders and pulls her into a hug. The SEEKER gasps, but the pair ignores her. The hug lingers for several moments. The ADDICT reciprocates the embrace, swaying slightly. She touches the DEALER's cheek. He breaks the contact abruptly, taking several steps backward.*) You get what you pay for. No more. You know that.

ADDICT. Please, I need contact. Just touch my face.

DEALER. (*Firmly.*) Can you afford that?

ADDICT. Please. (*She lunges forward and he jumps back. She nearly topples over. The SEEKER rushes over to help her but the DEALER shakes his head.*)

DEALER. That's getting old. You're not that clumsy. (*She sinks to her knees.*) Get up. You're wasting my time. If you don't have any money, you don't get what you want.

ADDICT. One touch. Just one more.

DEALER. Don't make me call the cops.

ADDICT. You wouldn't do that. They'd arrest you.

DEALER. They love me. Granted, they don't know what I do, but they adore me nonetheless. (*To the ADDICT.*) Go on.

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Get out of here. I'm sick of looking at you. (*The ADDICT buries her face in her hands, ashamed. She stands and exits without looking back. The SEEKER is conflicted. She neither advances toward nor retreats from the charismatic DEALER. He, on the other hand, comes closer to her. When he speaks again, his voice is warmer.*) What about you, sweetheart? You want something? First one's free.

SEEKER. I-I don't know. I don't think I should.

DEALER. That's the problem. You're thinking. You don't need to think. Just try it. (*He takes another step forward, holding a hand out to her. She reaches toward him but draws her hand back at the last second.*)

SEEKER. I'm sorry. I can't. I have to go home.

DEALER. Disappointing. (*He takes a step forward, brushing his hand against her cheek. She leans into the contact.*) Rain check?

SEEKER. Sure thing. (*She lets the touch linger for a moment more. Then, she pulls away and exits. The DEALER looks after her. Lights fade.*)