

# IT SHOULD BE A CRIME

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## CHAPTER ONE

A foul odor and complete darkness were clear signs the door Morgan had walked through didn't lead to the patio. She was in the alley, and she didn't think the night could get any worse. She was wrong. As she tugged on the handle of the large metal door, she realized it was locked and she was stuck outside.

Morgan looked around, realizing she was completely alone. Empty delivery crates and broken-down cardboard boxes were stacked next to a small Dumpster. The opposite side of the narrow drive was fenced off with a short wire fence designed to discourage, but not prevent, foot traffic. She assessed her choices: walk down the long path and circle back to the front entrance of the bar, or scale the fence and scout out a cab on one of the adjacent streets. The latter option, though messier, was more appealing. Morgan glanced down at her outfit and sighed at the destruction she was about to cause. She'd dressed to impress, for all the good it had done. Her now inappropriate attire couldn't be helped. She had no desire to reenter the bar or risk being seen. She was determined the inevitable confrontation was not going to take place tonight. Not while she was in the weaker position. Absolutely not.

Morgan faced the fence with resolve. With a last look at her new shoes, she wedged her brand-new sling-back, peep-toe sandal into an opening in the wire structure. As she started to pull herself up and over she heard faint strains of disco music growing louder and louder. Glancing back over her shoulder, she saw her sworn enemy—the door—was now an inviting friend, propped wide open, and beckoning her back to the bar. She jumped off her perch and rushed back across the alley.

“Hey! Where did you come from?”

Morgan jumped at the unexpected voice. Warily, she turned toward its source. Less than two feet away, with a surprised expression on her face, was a tall, beautiful woman. Relief at rescue didn’t preclude Morgan from taking a moment to appraise the alabaster skin, messily coiffed jet-black hair, and piercing blue eyes of the handsome woman standing before her. Her savior-slash-inquisitor stood almost six feet tall, her height accentuated by her lithe frame. She sported well-worn Levi’s 501s and a plain black T-shirt, tight on her well-toned chest.

“Did you hear me?”

Morgan realized she was probably staring with her mouth wide open. She chided herself for thinking illicit thoughts about another woman after what she had been through that evening. Finding her voice, she replied, “Yes, I heard you. I’m sorry for staring.” Thinking she shouldn’t have acknowledged that last, she resolved to say only what was necessary. “I was in search of the patio, but apparently walked out the wrong door.”

“Good thing I came out when I did. You ready to go back in?” The beauty took her turn appraising Morgan, and the heat of the woman’s glance seared her. Morgan knew the rakish grin on the stranger’s face meant her own mouth was probably hanging open again. The woman spoke. “You look ready for something, but you don’t look like you’re ready to go.”

“Actually, I’m outside because I needed some air. This may not be the patio, but it provided what I was looking for.” Suddenly Morgan wondered what this woman was doing out here. “And what are you doing out here?”

“I work here,” the woman said simply. Seeing Morgan’s expression, she explained. “I mean I work in the bar. I’m putting out the trash before I leave for the night.”

“Oh.”

“Look, I know you said you want to enjoy the fresh night air and all, but I’m about to go back in and, as I’m sure you know by now, this door is going to lock behind me. Sure you don’t want to go back inside with me?” The woman smiled the invitation.

Morgan stared, lost in thought. She had no desire to reenter this place, not this night. Tina and her “friend” were probably huddled somewhere inside. Though they weren’t likely to notice her, considering

their complete and total rapture with each other, she wasn't going to put herself through the torment.

"Uh, I hate to rush you, but I need to get back in."

Morgan shook herself and focused on finding another way out of this mess. "I don't want to go back inside." She fought to hold back tears of frustration threatening to break through.

The woman walked closer until she was standing mere inches from Morgan. "My name is Parker. What's yours?"

"Morgan," she whispered. Parker's proximity robbed her breath.

"Nice to meet you, Morgan. You look like you're having a bad night." Parker gently slid an arm around Morgan's waist. She purred the next question. "What can I do to make it better?"

Morgan's thoughts raced. *Well, this is rich. Here I am stuck in an alley and a total stranger is flirting with me. Meanwhile, my partner of ten years is doing God knows what with a Barbie wannabe inside.* Morgan wiped her eyes and turned toward Parker, who had moved closer during the silence. She appraised her. *This woman is no Barbie, thank God. She's real-life, drop-dead-gorgeous and knows it.* Feelings replaced rational thought and Morgan settled on a plan of action designed to make the impact of the evening's events fade fast.

"I'd like you to take me somewhere. Anywhere." Morgan stared directly into Parker's eyes, willing her to understand the wide-ranging implication of the control she surrendered with her request.

Parker didn't betray an ounce of surprise. Instead she leaned in and kissed Morgan lightly on the cheek. "Wait for me here. I'll only be a moment." Heading toward the door, she glanced back only once to deliver a reassuring smile.



Parker held a finger across her lips, signaling Morgan to quietly enter the house. The expansive porch was well lit, but the foyer inside was pitch black. Parker stepped carefully, leading Morgan upstairs to her room, careful not to wake any of the other occupants of the house. After crossing the threshold of her room, she flicked a switch to illuminate her destination. She guided Morgan to the love seat near her bed and then she walked to her nightstand and rummaged through the drawer until she found a pack of matches. She lit three candles grouped on

the nightstand and cut the overhead light. The flames from the candles flickered shadows on the walls and, against the dancing images, Parker finally stopped to observe the beautiful woman in front of her.

Now seated, Parker realized Morgan wasn't as tall as she first appeared. Looking down at her feet, she saw delicious painted toes sheathed in spiked sandals. Morgan wore snug dark blue jeans and a cool white draped jersey halter top. Her auburn hair fell in soft waves against the creamy skin of her bare shoulders. Parker wanted nothing more than to run her hands through those tresses. Parker had met a fair share of beautiful women during her tenure at the bar, but Morgan topped the list. As she appraised her, she was tickled by a vague sense of recognition and she wondered why, if she had seen Morgan at the bar before, she hadn't made her acquaintance earlier. Determined to remedy past neglect with present intentions, she strode across the room, knelt, grasped Morgan's hands, and kissed her palms slowly, one at a time. Morgan melted into the light touches. She inched to the edge of her seat, pressing her body into Parker's advances. Encouraged by the response, Parker tucked herself between Morgan's legs and reached up to kiss the warm and welcoming lips hazily smiling down at her.



Morgan fought the urge to bolt. She couldn't remember the last time she had a one-night stand. Over a decade ago, at least. She knew Parker was acting on the undercurrent of her request to take her somewhere besides the bar, but Morgan was still reeling from having witnessed the tragic final act of her ten-year farce of a relationship. She should leave now before she further complicated the evening with her own antics.

As if she could sense Morgan's instinct to flee, Parker held her in place. Morgan slid her hands along Parker's arms, savoring the feel of her muscled limbs. She started to coax the strong arms around her, but stopped short. She didn't want to be held. She didn't want to be taken. She had lost enough control tonight.

Morgan stood and placed her hand on Parker's shoulder, signaling her to stay in place. She kicked off her sandals and balanced herself squarely so Parker's face was centered near her chest. With one arm, she pulled her skimpy top over her head, then deftly unhooked the clasp

of her silk bra. Parker reached up to help her remove the barrier, but Morgan pushed her hands away. She flung the lacy undergarment down and then rubbed her swollen breasts while she watched Parker squirm. Morgan pinched her left nipple and rolled it between her fingers. Parker licked her lips. Morgan wasn't sure if she was making herself wet or if the desire in Parker's eyes was the catalyst of her arousal. Whatever the cause, she was soaking and she wanted to be touched. She motioned for Parker's hand. Parker ran her palm up the bare skin of Morgan's stomach, inching toward her aching breasts. Morgan marveled at the dual effect of her touch, both soothing and stimulating. She swooned, almost forgetting her intentions, but she reclaimed her focus and smacked Parker's hand as it grazed her ready nipple. "No, I want you inside me. Now."

"Let me take you to bed." Parker's voice was low and full of promise. "I want to feel your skin. I want to feel you against me while I make you come."

"I'll come all right, but this way." Morgan surprised herself with the forcefulness of her declaration. She shook off her hesitation and settled into the dominant role, guiding Parker's hand to the zipper of her jeans. "Inside. Now."

Parker complied, but not without testing Morgan's resolve. She took her time unzipping Morgan's jeans and when she finally slid her hand inside, she kept the barrier of Morgan's silk panties between her probing fingers and Morgan's wet center. Morgan ground against Parker's seeking fingers, slowly at first, then thrusting with mounting speed against the increasing pressure of Parker's insistent touch. The soft silken motion was a nice prelude, but she quickly craved the electric charge only skin on skin could provide. No longer able to stand the boundary between her aching clit and the feel of Parker's probing fingers, she reached down and firmly grasped Parker's hand. Force wasn't necessary. Parker's need to be where Morgan wanted her was evident by the urgency with which she slid her hand inside Morgan's panties to find her slick and ready. Morgan groaned as Parker traced a path on either side of her quivering lips. As Parker spread her open, she summoned what was left of her self-control and reached down to grasp Parker's hand once again.

"Not yet." She held Parker's hand still and met her eyes, now black with intensity. "Take off your clothes." Parker hesitated, almost

as if she didn't register what Morgan asked. Morgan lowered her hand to Parker's waist and roughly tugged open a button of her 501s to accent each word. "Take. Off. Your. Clothes." Parker slowly removed her hand from Morgan's jeans and flashed a grin in response to Morgan's low moan. She stood and leaned so close Morgan could feel her breath, warm and sweet. She sucked in her own as she watched Parker raise her arms and peel her shirt away to reveal firm breasts, nipples erect and begging to be touched. Morgan drew a hard nipple into her mouth and rolled her tongue around it with increasing pressure, taking pleasure in the way Parker's strong body sagged against her as if melting at the touch. She nipped hard, then leaned back and gazed into Parker's glassy eyes. "You were talking earlier about wanting to feel some skin?"

Parker took the cue, shoving her jeans down and kicking them away. Morgan smiled at the sight of tight gray boy briefs. "Mmm, these are nice, and you certainly look hot in them." She ran a finger inside the waist band, dipping low to trace the curled hairs beneath. "But they're not skin. Lose 'em."

Parker obeyed, but she took her time, sliding the briefs slowly down and then dangling them in Morgan's face before tossing them over her shoulder. Morgan's breath caught at the sight of Parker's tightly muscled body. She was gorgeous. She stood proud and confident, as if standing around naked in front of other women was something she did every day. *Maybe she does.* For a brief moment, Morgan felt her own confidence ebb, but acted quickly to block its retreat. She slid her arms over Parker's lean hips, pulled her close, and leaned back hard. As they crushed into the cushions of the love seat, Morgan moaned with pleasure at the feel of the welcome weight.

"So, is this what you had in mind?" Parker's smile was irresistible. Morgan answered by kissing the corners of her mouth, then teasing her lips with light strokes of her tongue. Parker matched her movements and their dance quickly dissolved into deep, probing kisses that Morgan felt to her core. "I need to come now." The awareness that drove her to deliver the command faded into the haze of desire. Until she felt the cool air in the room skim the heat between her legs she didn't realize she was fully nude. Within moments, Parker's fingers brought her back to awareness. Morgan matched her touch for touch, unable to resist the excitement of their combined pleasure. As she writhed beneath Parker's

well-toned body, she found her control in the pure physical pleasure she felt as they came together with the unbridled intimacy only strangers who never plan to meet again allow themselves to feel.



Morgan woke to the realization she wasn't alone and she wasn't at home. She sighed as the events of the night before came flooding back and she realized she probably didn't have a home anymore. She rolled out of bed, determined to spend the day figuring out if she had a place to live.

She tiptoed around the room gathering clothes, doing her best to see by the shades of early morning light peaking through the blinds. The desire she still felt for the handsome woman sleeping soundly in bed did not extend to wanting to talk to her this morning, and she shrugged away the stirring sensation urging her to kiss those soft lips once more. *Too many questions*, she thought. *We've probably already exchanged more than we should.* Finally locating her missing articles of clothing, she ducked into the adjoining bathroom to dress. Emerging quietly, she blew a kiss at the sleeping beauty and whispered, "Thanks for showing this girl a good time when she needed it most."

The house was large and contained many rooms. Morgan was surprised to see all the doors were shut, but relieved to know if there were others in the house it was unlikely anyone saw her departure. She quietly slipped out the front door and walked down the street. She looked first at her watch, noting it was seven a.m. Next, she looked around, searching for a reference point since she hadn't paid an iota of attention to their destination the evening before. The nearest intersection was Abrams and Vickery. Morgan laughed. She was mere blocks away from where she had grown up. She rummaged through her bag and found her cell phone. Relieved to note remaining battery life, she dialed information and was connected with Yellow Cab, who promised to have a driver there within ten minutes.

Morgan spent the wait practicing her response to a range of reactions Tina might have to the news she had arrived in Dallas a week early. Pleasure was off the list, but surprise and dismay ranked high among her predictions. Whatever the reaction, Morgan knew she needed

to spend some of the next thirty minutes coming up with a contingency plan, because she wasn't likely to be staying at the posh Preston Hollow address she was headed to now.

The cab driver arrived and, like most cabbies in Dallas, had a poor grasp of map skills for any neighborhood not in his usual path. He was eager to take her anywhere in the surrounding Greenville area, but professed to know nothing about North Dallas. Morgan managed to pull up some long-forgotten map in her head and guided him through the city toward the residence she had planned to call home.

The tall, imposing house swallowed up the lot it was sitting on and seemed to spill out into the street to consume additional terrain. The neighborhood used to be beautiful, Morgan remembered. Ranch-style houses set back from the street, well-manicured lawns and stately trees once made driving through the Preston Hollow neighborhood seem like touring a cluster of country estates. Now many of the ranch homes were teardowns replaced by McMansions, such as the one Tina had commissioned. These fake palaces made the area, in Morgan's opinion, seem cheap. *I suppose it's just as well I won't be staying long*, she thought.

Tina was sitting at the kitchen table nursing a steaming cup of coffee. She looked up at the sound of Morgan's entrance. Morgan read fatigue and the blur of hangover behind the surprise Tina expressed at her arrival.

"Honey! When did you get here? Why didn't you call and let me know you were coming?"

Morgan recalled stowing her luggage in the guest room closet when she arrived yesterday afternoon. She realized Tina didn't have any idea she had been in the house the day before.

"Actually, Tina, I got here yesterday. I wrapped things up quicker than I expected and I thought I'd surprise you by coming out early." Morgan watched the parade of expressions on her lover's face go from confusion to understanding to reflection. Morgan figured Tina was wondering if she'd left anything incriminating lying around.

Tina's expression settled on pleasure. "What a wonderful surprise!" She wrinkled her brow. "But wait a minute. If you got here last night, then where in the world have you been?"

"Gee, Tina, I was wondering when you were going to notice

my absence. I would have explained, but since you were previously occupied I figured it didn't matter what I did with my time."

Tina's puzzled look was almost convincing. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Is that so? Let me help you remember." Morgan was tired of the charade they had played out the last few years of their relationship, and the prospect of this confrontation held equal parts disgust and relief.

"I arrived last night in time to hear one of your new friends leave a message on the machine entreating you to join the 'gang' at Betty's for happy hour. Silly me, I thought joining you would be a great opportunity to not only surprise you, but meet all the friends you've made while you toiled away the summer getting our new home ready. So I called a cab and went out to join you. Imagine my surprise when I discovered you have been very busy this summer. From what I observed, apparently your interests haven't been confined to work and nesting."

Tina mustered a look of righteous indignation. "Morgan, I don't know what you think you saw, but—"

"Darling, don't even say it. I am clear about what I saw. You and I haven't exchanged as much physical passion in the last five years as you exchanged with the hottie on the dance floor last night. I didn't know you still had it in you."

Tina sat in silence. Morgan observed her and read her with the familiarity ten years of living together brings. Tina wasn't going to deny her actions any longer, and it didn't appear she was going to apologize for them either unless pushed to do so. Morgan no longer had the energy to push her into apologies she clearly didn't mean. Regrettably, it had taken a move clear across the country to prove what they had known all along. Their relationship was beyond repair. Neither cared enough to heal the hurt between them, and Morgan knew it was time for her to move on, and the sooner she did so, the better off she would be.

"I'm going to go check into the Palomar until I find a place. The movers should be here tomorrow. I doubt I'll be ready to have them divert what I need, so we'll have to work out arrangements. I trust you'll help make this go as smoothly as possible?" Morgan knew Tina was clear about what "this" was. The two had grown emotionally distant over the last few years, but they still had the capacity to read one another's thoughts and feelings.

“So, this is it for us? We move all the way across the fucking country and after one day you’re leaving me?” The anger in her voice was clear as Tina pushed her to announce her desire.

“Yes, Tina, I’m leaving. We’ve both moved on. I’m sorry I ever agreed to come out here with you. I was stupid enough to think we could make a fresh start, but last night proved nothing has changed between us and it never will. We loved each other once, but we don’t anymore. It’s as simple as that.”

“Fucking lawyers. Everything is black or white, right or wrong. Maybe I got so sick of your logical approach to everything I decided to take a walk on the wild side. Can you blame me?”

“I guess not.” Morgan’s tone was flat. Continuing the argument with Tina would convey she cared and would only prolong her departure. She didn’t care anymore and she wanted out, now. Focusing on her goals, she strode to the guest room and retrieved her luggage. Without another word, she left the house and got into the still waiting cab. An extra twenty allowed the cabbie to overcome his frustration at being asked to head back uptown.