
SEPTEMBER FALL

Campus Life - Book 9

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Chapter 1

Sadie felt a brief moment of instability and knew she was going to fall. Her arms flailed, reaching out to the empty air in an attempt to prevent her downward momentum. A scream erupted from her throat as her body cascaded towards the earth far below.

"Aaah!"

Jerking awake, Sadie's eyes darted around the dimly lit bedroom. Slowly she relaxed and lay back on her pillow, breathing hard. Her brow was sweaty, her muscles felt shaky, and her entire left foot *ached*.

Her bladder insisted that she get up and use the bathroom before trying to fall back to sleep, but a quick trip to the toilet was no longer a possibility. She glared at the cast that encased her left foot and lower calf. The sensation of falling rippled across her brain again, and a shiver ran down her spine.

Tossing the covers off her good foot, she pushed herself up to a sitting position. Sighing deeply, she grabbed the crutches that were balanced between her bed and the nightstand. She stood on her right foot, put the crutches under her armpits, and started the slow trek out to the hall and then down to the bathroom.

Before she even made it to the bathroom, the door to her parents' bedroom opened, and her mother, Victoria, stuck her head out. "You okay?" she whispered.

Sadie's whole body tensed, and it was all she could do not to scream that she was fine. Instead, she gritted her teeth and muttered, "Yes, Mom, I'm fine. You don't have to check on me every time I have to pee." Living with her parents again after two years of living on campus in the dorms was proving to be challenging.

Instead of leaving her alone, Victoria stepped out and shut the door behind her. She walked over to Sadie and rubbed her shoulder.

"How's the pain, sweetheart?"

Sadie almost laughed. Almost. Her old friend pain held an entirely new meaning for her. How was the pain? Well, it was completely tolerable now that her broken ribs were on the mend and the multitude of minor scrapes and bruises that had covered her body were healed. But it wasn't enjoyable. Certainly nothing like the satisfying pain of a good workout or the potentially blissful pain of a whipping from her lover. This pain was just an annoyance and a constant reminder that her life was ruined.

"It's fine."

Her mother scrutinized her and said, "Take some Advil anyway." Sadie opened her mouth to protest, but then her mom added softly, "Do it for me?"

Deflated, Sadie nodded. "Yeah, okay."

"Thank you, sweetheart."

Victoria pressed her lips to her daughter's forehead once before going back to her own room and shutting the door.

Ten minutes later, Sadie was back in her bed with an empty bladder and medication in her system. The clock blinked five-o-eight, as if mocking her, daring her to go to asleep again so she could relive the fall one more time before morning.

"Screw that," she mumbled and grabbed her phone. She

knew better than to check social media. She had turned off all of her notifications. If she had to see one more post from her friends about how great their summer was going, she'd chuck her phone across the room. But just seeing the date of September first made her want to cry. Summer was almost over, and she'd spent the entirety of those precious three months recuperating. She opened an app and started playing a mind-numbing game to help push her emotions aside. Hopefully it would eventually put her into a dreamless sleep for the next couple of hours.

Adam lay on his side and stared at his alarm clock, wishing he had the ability to freeze time. If it stayed six-ten forever, he wouldn't have to face the day.

Today was going to suck ass. It would be another day in a long line of days that had all sucked ass. But today would be especially shitty, because he would be attending his first anger management class. It hadn't been court appointed yet, but his lawyer had advised him to sign up before his court date on the sixteenth, in the hopes that the judge would go easier on him if he was trying to correct his own mistakes before being forced.

He heard movement downstairs and knew that his father, Brian, was awake. Getting up early was now out of the question. He could *not* deal with another lecture about how he'd fucked up his life before breakfast.

He grabbed his laptop and opened Pornhub. Watching porn was his favorite pastime now that his life was ruined and women were scarce. It was still shocking to him how one moment in time, one split second decision, could have altered his life so drastically. He'd been on the road to success, and now he was lost on the side of the road in a ditch. Porn was the only thing that kept him sane.

As the woman on the screen started to undress, he reached a hand down into his boxers.

"You're going to be late," Victoria said as she parked the car.

Sadie rolled her eyes before opening her door and awkwardly maneuvering the crutches out to the curb. "No, I'm not. But who cares if I am. I shouldn't even have to go. That nurse is a bitch for making me come to this."

Victoria shook her head and sighed. "Maybe you need an anger management class more than you think you do."

Sadie pressed her lips together, to keep her response to herself, and worked on situating herself so that her good foot was on the curb along with her crutches.

While she was doing that, her mother walked around to the passenger side and helped her daughter balance as Sadie pushed herself up out of the car.

Once she was up, with her crutches in place, Victoria let go and started walking to the driver's side. "I'll park, and then walk you in."

"I don't need you to walk me in, Mom. Just go. Pick me up in an hour." Refusing to look back at her mother, Sadie started moving towards the glass doors in front of her. She knew she was being mean, but she couldn't take another second of her mother's hovering. As she pushed the handicapped button for the automatic doors, she heard her mother's car drive away behind her. Good.

In the lobby, she looked at the little placard that listed the names and corresponding offices of the people who worked there, along with a map of the building. She found the conference room on the map and started down the hall. The door was propped open, and a woman stood at the front of the room behind a small podium, a television sat beside her on a stand

with the word 'welcome' on the screen, and at least fifteen people were scattered in chairs around the room.

Her eyes stopped on a young man near the back of the room staring at his phone. Adam Griffith was here? A small moment of panic went through her, but she mentally forced the words *I don't care* into her brain. So what, if the last time he'd seen her, she'd had long brown wavy hair that went down to the middle of her back, and now it was short cropped and lay limp against her head? So what, if she'd been wearing the perfect amount of makeup and her nails had been professionally manicured, and now she had no makeup and her nails were bitten down to nothing? So what, if she'd been wearing either her cheerleading uniform or, at the very least, a stylish summer dress, and her outfit today was a tee-shirt and a pair of sweats with the left leg cut in half for the cast to fit though? At least her athletic build and tiny waist weren't gone yet.

"Here for anger management class?" the woman at the podium asked.

"Yeah."

"You're in the right place. Go ahead and have a seat."

Fuck it, she thought and made her way to the back of the room to sit directly next to Adam. He looked as attractive as ever, with his wavy blond hair, sky blue eyes, and broad shoulders.

After situating her crutches on the floor next to her chair, she plastered a smile on her face and said, "Hi."

He looked up from his phone for a few seconds to make eye contact and then directed his eyes back to his device. "Hey."

She stared at him for several seconds as realization set in. *He doesn't even recognize me.*

He glanced at her and narrowed his eyes. "What?"

"What?" she repeated back to him and realized she'd been staring. She quickly turned to face the front. "Nothing. Sorry. I didn't mean to stare." Maybe he just needed a moment to remember, a second glance to jog his memory.

He grunted and turned back to his phone.

She kept her eyes forward without really focusing on anything and wondered if this was a new low point. She'd thought rock bottom had come a couple of weeks ago when the doctor told her that all her aspirations to become a professional cheerleader were gone forever, but apparently there was always room to fall further. She and Adam weren't close friends, but they *had* slept together once. Sure, it was two years ago during a party, and their quick, drunken fuck had been admittedly bad, but he should at *least* remember her face. He had a reputation for sleeping around, but that wasn't really an excuse not to know her at all, because she'd cheered for every one of the football games he'd played in over the past two years at Northern Oregon University. She'd yelled 'Go Otters!' a million times while he'd been on the field.

Before she had the chance to tell him who she was, the woman at the front of the room started to speak.

"Hello, and thank you all for coming today. I'm Dr. Megan Stryker, and I'll be your teacher for the next four weeks, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Each class is an hour and a half, for a total of twelve hours of class time. You have to attend all the classes to receive a certificate of completion. There will be one, and only one, make-up class, on the Saturday following the end of the last class. If you miss two classes, you'll have to take the whole course again. For those of you who are here as part of the court system, bring your papers up at the end of each class so I can sign off. For those of you who are here on your own accord, you will get your certificate of completion at the end of the final class."

Dr. Stryker focused on the laptop in front of her on the podium, tapped on it, and a second later, the television beside her had a class outline on the screen. After talking about expectations and what they would be learning over the course, Dr. Stryker put up a new page with the agenda for today's class.

Sadie let out a little groan when she read the second item on the list: Introduce yourself.

Adam glanced over at her, but she kept her eyes forward, and he went back to looking at the teacher.

The first item on the list was the class syllabus, and after Dr. Stryker had gone over that, she walked around to the front of the podium to address the class.

"We're going to go around the room, and everyone needs to give the reason you're here. If you want to share that it's court ordered, feel free to do so, but that's not required. I do, however, want to know the events that led you here. I know it may seem difficult, even impossible to some of you, but the more honest you are today, the more you're going to get out of this class by the end of it. Everyone in this room, myself included, has done things they're not proud of, and I'm not here to judge your past actions. I'm here to help you find new ways to cope with the anger you feel during certain situations. Roughly eighty percent of the people who take this course are here because they've assaulted someone, so don't worry too much about judgments from your fellow classmates, either."

She gestured to the left side of the front row, to a middle-aged man in a suit. "We're going to start with you. Please tell us all why you're here."

"I got in a fight with a valet at a restaurant. He brought my car back with a big scratch on the driver's door, and then when I yelled at him, he told me it was there before he parked it."

Dr. Stryker nodded. "That's an understandable reason to be angry with someone. Not only did he damage your property, but then he also lied about it."

"Exactly."

"What did you do when he lied?" she asked.

"I demanded to see the manager, and when the asshole said he was the manager, I shoved him. He stumbled back, tripped on

the curb, and fell on the cement. There were bystanders. They called the cops."

"Okay, thank you for sharing." Dr. Stryker gestured to the next person in the row and asked for her story.

At first, while Sadie was listening, she was worried that her story would make everyone hate her. But by the time Dr. Stryker got to the back of the room, she was no longer ashamed of her story in this group of people. After the child abusers in rows three and seven told their stories, nothing she did could compare. And the spousal abusers in rows two, five, and seven weren't much better.

But it was still a little nerve wracking when Dr. Stryker gave her an encouraging smile and said, "Please tell us why you're here."

"A few weeks ago, after reconstructive surgery on my foot, my doctor said that there's no chance I'll ever play competitive sports again. I was upset. A little later that same day, one of the nurses said I should look on the positive side—the doctor was able to save my foot, and I'm still going to be able to walk and function normally. I slapped her. She said she wouldn't press charges if I took this class."

Dr. Stryker nodded. "Those were pretty extreme circumstances and not something that is likely to happen again. I assume you were taking pain medication at the time?"

"I was."

"Thank you for sharing." She turned to Adam. "Last one. Please tell us why you're here."

Adam scowled and said defensively, "I found out that someone matching my neighbor's description was not only suspected of raping women, but suspected of doing it at Sigma Alpha Kappa, the frat house I'm p... the frat house I *was* president of. So I invited him over, and when he started acting dodgy, I beat a confession out of him. I got arrested for assault. My

lawyer said taking this class would help the judge go easier on me when I have my court date."

Sadie couldn't believe she hadn't heard about this yet. That's what she got for avoiding all social media and all of her friends for the past couple of weeks.

"Did the rapist get arrested too?" Sadie asked.

Adam nodded. "He did. And a few days later, his request for bail was denied at his arraignment. I've already been subpoenaed to be a witness for the prosecution."

Dr. Stryker nodded. "I can understand why you'd be upset after hearing that your neighbor was suspected of rape. Everyone in this room can agree that rape is vile. The question for you is going to be why did you invite your neighbor over, instead of calling the police?" She moved back behind the podium and addressed the class as a whole. "And that leads us straight into our first lesson, identifying your true feelings."

While she was bringing up the next image on the television, Sadie leaned closer to Adam and whispered, "I personally think beating up a rapist is heroic."

Adam's eyebrows went up in surprise. "Yeah?"

She smirked at him. "Oh, yeah."

His lips turned up before she focused back on the teacher.

Forty-five minutes in, at the halfway point of the class, Dr. Stryker announced a ten-minute break and told people that the bathrooms and water fountains were down the hall.

Sadie noticed Adam getting out his phone and said, "Will you tell me about it?"

"About what?"

"The whole story of your neighbor, the rapes at SAK, and your arrest."

"Sure." He set his phone down and turned slightly to face her. "It was two weeks ago today, on August eighteenth. The cops came by early that morning to tell me... Well, I guess I have to start a little earlier. The week before that, the cops came by and told me that they'd had reports of women getting raped at SAK during our parties. I hadn't heard anything about it until that point, and we canceled the party for that weekend. Then on the eighteenth, they came by early in the morning to tell me that they had a basic description of the guy. They said he was Hispanic, with a crooked nose and a lazy eye. My neighbor, Rubin, matched that description, and I'd given him a standing invitation to come to all of our parties."

Adam shook his head, and his hands balled into fists. "He'd been doing all the yardwork for SAK for a while, and he just seemed like a really nice guy. Everyone liked him, and I felt bad about his lazy eye. I figured that would make it hard for him to meet a girl, and I wanted to help him out." He looked at her with pleading eyes. "He didn't give off any kind of creepy vibes. He seemed like a normal guy."

A rush of sympathy washed over her, and she put a hand on his knee. "You couldn't have known."

He took a deep breath and nodded. "Thanks. So anyway, when the cops gave me that description, I just... didn't want to believe it, you know? I'd known this guy all summer. We'd shared a few beers, we'd talked about sports, we'd laughed at the same jokes, and I'd even seen him break up an argument between two of the other guys. So I didn't want to implicate him if he was innocent."

"That's understandable," she said.

He glared off into the distance, as if reliving it while he told the story. "I called and asked him to come do some yard work for us. When he got there, later that day, I handed him a beer like usual, and we chatted in the kitchen about the work I wanted him to do. Then I mentioned that the cops had been there that morning and that they were looking for a rapist. Rubin got really

still, like a deer caught in headlights. Then when I said the cops would be back anytime with a police sketch of the rapist, Rubin dropped the beer I'd given him and ran towards the front door."

Adam looked into her eyes, and she could see the fury. "I wanted to kill him in that moment."

A shiver of fear ran down her spine, but she nodded. She understood the difference between the desire to do something violent and actually carrying out that violence.

He looked down at his lap to confess the rest. "Rubin's not a big guy. I caught him before he made it to the door. Shoved him down, sat on top of him, and punched him in the stomach until some of my brothers pulled me off him. Rubin stayed down. I demanded a confession and told him I'd have another go at him if he didn't give me one. He immediately wheezed out that he'd roofied and raped eleven women." Adam looked up at her, and his eyes were narrowed into dangerous little slits. "Eleven."

She moved her hand from his knee and covered his tightly clenched fist with both of her hands. "That's awful."

Her touch seemed to calm him down a little. He took a deep breath, nodded, and then opened his hand to hold hers. "The guys had to hold me back, but I got in another solid kick before they pulled me away. I yelled a lot of threats and called him every name I could think of. The cops arrived not long after that. They cuffed me and read me my rights, and one of them checked Rubin over. My lawyer said I was stupid for not keeping my mouth shut, but I told the cops exactly what had happened." He shrugged. "Then I was hauled into the station and booked. That's when I called my dad, and he sent over a lawyer. I spent the night in jail, but I was released on bail the next day, at my arraignment."

"Sounds to me like you caught a criminal and saved a bunch of women," Sadie said gently, squeezing his hand. She could see his tense shoulders relax marginally and his angry scowl smooth out just slightly.

"Thanks," he said softly.

After an awkwardly long pause, he said, "What happened to your foot?"

She glared down at her foot and then looked back at him with a defeated expression. "My two best friends and I went on a hike at Multnomah Falls, the day after our last final. There was a sign up that said the trail to the top was closed due to recent landslides, but we decided to try getting to the top anyway. We didn't think it would be all that bad, and if the trail was blocked at some point, we figured we'd turn around."

Shaking her head, she focused on her cast and muttered, "It was stupid of us. Part of the trail had been wiped away, and the part that was left was about five inches wide and six feet long. We tried to lean against the rock wall and make our way to the other side. Part of the ledge broke off when I was on it, and I fell. It was a steep section. I only fell about six feet initially, but I didn't really land after that six feet; it was more like I bounced off the side of a boulder. I just kept rolling and falling for another twenty feet, hitting rocks, dirt, boulders, and broken tree limbs. My fall caused several of the rocks to start falling with me, like a small landslide, and once I finally stopped moving, a huge rock landed on my foot and smashed it."

He squeezed her hand that was still in his. "I'm sorry."

"It took three hours to get me off the side of the hill. My friends immediately called 911 for help. But the medical team had to get several men to carefully climb down without causing more of a landslide so they could pull the rock off my foot. They said I'm lucky I was wearing hiking boots. I probably would have lost the foot if I hadn't had a sturdy shoe on. Then they had a helicopter take me to the hospital. I had three broken ribs, a bunch of scrapes and bruises, and half the bones in my foot were broken."

"Wait a minute," he said, leaning back to get a full view of her. "I saw that on the news." He scrutinized her face for a few

seconds, and then suddenly his eyebrows went up and he let go of her hand. "Sadie? Sadie Patterson?"

She couldn't decide if she should be offended by his expression of shock or not. She nodded and muttered, "Yeah."

"That means... shit, that means we, uh..." He put a hand on the back of his neck and his face turned pink.

"Yep." She turned to face the front of the class.

After several seconds of excruciating silence, Adam said, "I'm sorry I didn't recognize you. Your hair—"

"Is gross. I know."

Adam leaned towards her again and put a hand on her thigh. "No. Just different, not gross. I prefer long hair, but it doesn't look bad on you."

His touch was now more confident and intimate than it had been seconds ago, and it helped her forgive him. She turned towards him and said, "I hate it, but when you're stuck in a hospital bed and you can't wash your hair for weeks, long hair isn't practical."

"I bet. Are you..." his hand moved back to his own lap, "... still dating Garrett?"

"No. He graduated just before summer, and he knew I had two more years of college left, so we'd already decided to break up before I fell. He was really sweet and tried to visit me in the hospital a few times, but I asked him to stop, because I didn't want him to see me all bruised and doped up on pain medication. He still texts me sometimes. He got picked up by the Arizona Cardinals."

Before Adam could respond, Dr. Stryker announced that break time was over. Sadie turned towards the front, but Adam leaned closer and whispered, "Hey, did you drive yourself here?"

"No." Legally, she could still drive since her right foot was fine, but her mother had gotten pissed when she suggested driving herself to this.

"Did you want a ride home once it's over?"

Grinning, she nodded. "That would be great."

He smiled too, and Sadie got her phone out of her pocket. She sent a quick text to her mother. *Adam from the football team is in class with me. Getting a ride home with him.*

Her mother's reply was almost instant. *That's wonderful. It's about time you started hanging out with your friends again.*

Sadie rolled her eyes but stuck her phone back in her pocket and focused on the teacher's lecture about healthy ways to express feelings.

When the class ended, Adam watched Sadie grab her crutches from the floor and maneuver herself out of her chair. She was still attractive in an 'I'm not trying' kind of way. Her face was symmetrical, she had a small, straight nose, light brown eyes, and full lips that naturally curved up at the corners. He didn't particularly like the short hair, but hair grew. He could barely remember the night they'd fucked. They'd both been wasted, but he *did* remember her boobs. They were quite large for an athletic woman who didn't have much fat anywhere else her body. She was definitely a C cup.

He noticed her movement stop and looked up at her eyes. He saw her smirk and knew he'd been caught staring at her chest. He smiled, because she clearly didn't mind.

"I'm going to go to the bathroom, and then I'll be ready to go," she said.

"Okay." He walked along beside her as they left the room and started down the hall. "It's almost noon. Did you want to get some lunch before I take you home?"

"I'd like to, but I have another doctor's appointment for my foot this afternoon. Maybe on Thursday after class?" she suggested.

"Sure, Thursday works for me. My dad's always at work

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during the day, so we could hit a drive through and eat at my house. I live about ten minutes from here."

She tilted her head to the side and looked at him closely for a few seconds before nodding. "Yeah, okay."

"Great." He watched her go into the bathroom, checking out her ass while devising plans to get her in his bed on Thursday.