

KEPHART COLLEGE  
BOOK THREE



*The*  
TUTOR

CASSIE MINT

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# The Tutor

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## One

# Freya



I'm ten minutes early. The Humanities library is quiet at this hour, pale morning sunshine spilling through the windows and the distant twittering of birds mingling with the steady rasp of turning pages. Most students on campus are still passed out in bed, and because of that, I've snagged the best table in here, right by the railing of the second floor balcony.

My notebook is ready. I've got a spare pen. I've already rounded up the recommended texts for this module and stacked them in the center of the desk like an obedient puppy.

It's not enough. My insides are still squirming. Lots of people need tutors, there's no shame in it—and I've reminded myself of that fact every few minutes this morning, but I can't help the nerves gnawing at me like acid.

Did I screw up my whole future in the space of a few weeks?

God. I can't have.

But my palms are sweating like I have. I scrub them against my electric blue dress. It doesn't help that I know

who's coming. We emailed back and forth to set up this session, and though he wrote to me like a stranger, I sure recognized *his* name.

Malachi Belman. The grumpy, gorgeous postgrad I get all flustered around. The man I saw doing shirtless pull ups once through the window of his office and nearly swallowed my own tongue.

It's fine. It's *fine*. He must tutor all the time.

This is nothing. No big deal.

“Freya Pippit?”

I hear him coming, of course, but I don't turn around. I knot my fingers together and listen to the steady *tap, tap* of his cane against the floorboards; the rustle of his clothes. And when he says my name in that deep, honeyed voice, I clench my fingers tighter and spin around to face him, pasting on a bright smile.

“Malachi! Hey. Um, I hope this table is okay. I got us coffees, too, but I wasn't sure what you'd like so I got you a filter one. Tell me your order before next time and then I can—”

Malachi settles into the chair opposite me, a slight frown on his face. I cut off abruptly, stunned by the resentment already swimming in those dark brown eyes.

“That won't be necessary.”

I splutter out a nervous laugh. Since when is caffeine not necessary? It's one of my essential food groups. “More of a tea guy?”

The frown deepens. “Less of a time wasting guy.”

*Yikes.*

Well, what’s that saying? No good deed goes unpunished? I reach across the table without a word and drag his cup over to rest next to mine. He can be a rude asshole if he likes. But I’m taking back my coffee, damn it.

Something flickers over his face as he watches me steal the cup back, but he doesn’t say anything. Not about that, anyway.

“You nearly failed your Politics module last semester.”

My throat is tight. “So I did.”

“If you fail this one, your scholarships will be canceled. You won’t graduate.”

“I’m aware.”

Does he think I don’t know that? Does he think I don’t realize my whole entire future hangs on this stupid module?

Crap. Why the hell did I take a Politics minor? It seemed like such a good idea at the time.

“Well.” I spread my palms, aiming for cheery brightness again. I can move past the coffee thing if he can too. “That’s why we’re here, Malachi.”

“That’s why *you’re* here,” he corrects, sliding a pen out of his pocket and spinning my notepad to face him. He clicks the pen, then he’s writing something, tendons flexing in his wrist and forearm.



God, he's pretty. No, not pretty—*handsome*. Dark hair that hangs nearly to his collar, with heavy eyebrows and high cheekbones. A sharp jawline and smooth olive skin. Malachi's dressed in a dove gray button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows, and the toned planes of his chest push against the fabric.

He may be lean, but he's tight with muscle. Sculpted. I saw it all through his office window that one time, and I'm staring at him *now*, gulping down big swallows of the filter coffee I tried to give him.

I place the cup down with a sigh. "You seem less than thrilled to be tutoring me, Malachi."

I can't stop saying his name. Relishing the fact that I'm talking to him at last. But every time I do, his mouth presses into a firmer line.

"I have better things to do," he says shortly.

Well, *that's* bullshit. "Better things than teaching? Aren't you on a track to be a professor?"

He hums, like I've made a fair point but he disagrees. He's still looking down at my notepad, writing a long list. "Better than helping lazy students who are more than capable when they try. Your scores in previous modules were excellent."

I try not to preen at that. It's all for nothing if I don't get my shit together again. "Who says I'm lazy?"

Brown eyes flick up to mine, then down to the notepad. "Your scores last semester. You didn't just tank your Politics

module, you failed two others. You're retaking them over the summer, and there would be no need if you'd done the bare minimum of work."

My grip tightens on his coffee cup, the cardboard creaking. "Well, hey there, Nosy Rosie." Okay, maybe he looked me up on the college system, but he doesn't know the first thing about my life. He doesn't know *why* it all went to shit.

Malachi rolls his eyes and spins the notebook back to me. He's listed around a dozen books, none of which are on the official module reading list.

He's got nice handwriting. A confident, artistic scrawl.

"I want you to read these."

Ha. "And I'd like a giant chocolate fountain in my dorm room. Sometimes the things we want aren't practical, Malachi."

He gusts out a heavy sigh. Like I'm *so* exhausting. "Just the first two by our next session."

I blink at him. "That's in three days."

Malachi meets my gaze. Holds it. Nods.

He wants me to read two thick academic texts in three days—on top of all my other classes and assignments? On top of the three jobs that tanked my grades in the first place? When am I going to freaking *sleep*?

I snatch up his coffee, swigging again, the warm, bitter liquid spreading over my tongue. Turns out I need it more than

he does anyway. And as I drink, the sounds of more students arriving drifts through the library—the creak of footsteps on the floorboards, the thump of books against desks. Snatches of murmured conversation. Our head start is over.

“Alright,” I croak, slamming the cup down. “You win. I’ll read them. Let’s get this show on the road.”

\* \* \*

My tutor is *slightly* less of a jerk when we’re focused on the module. Slightly. He explains things clearly, summing up concepts in his deep, smooth voice. He lists examples for me, and taps my notepad with two fingers when he wants me to note something down.

He’ll be a great professor, I’ll give him that. He’s so smart, it’s like the raw intelligence seeps out of his pores. I’m probably getting smarter just breathing in his air.

Getting smarter, and squirmier. I’m not proud of it, but even after being such an ass, Malachi still makes me all wriggly and restless. My face is hot, and I can’t seem to sit still in my chair. I keep crossing and uncrossing my ankles beneath me; squeezing my thighs and feeling an answering pulse between my legs.

If Malachi notices, he doesn’t say anything. His brown eyes flick to me occasionally, raking over the parts of me visible above the desk, but then they drop back to his notes and it’s like he never looked up.

I suck in a steady breath of library air. It smells like old books and stale coffee and spray cleaner.

And Malachi. When I lean closer across the desk, I get the tiniest hint of *his* scent. It's barely there, a tease, and I'd love to push back my chair and march around the desk and press my face to his throat. Get a proper whiff of him, and see if I'm right that he smells like soap and salty air. Like antique wood and warm paper fresh from the printer.

"You understand all this." Malachi tosses his pen on to the desk after an hour, an accusatory scowl fixed on me. "Why did you score so badly last semester?"

Because I didn't have any freaking time to read it in the first place.

Because I missed half the lectures.

Because life kicked my ass. It's *still* kicking my ass.

I shrug and smile sweetly. "Guess I'm lazy."

Those brown eyes harden, and he pushes to his feet without another word. He snatches up his cane from where it leans against the desk, and then he glares down at me, like he's daring me to comment on it. Gripping the head of that cane until his knuckles practically creak.

No chance. *I'm* not the asshole at this table. I prefer to get to know someone before I judge them.

And I guess I've seen enough of Malachi to make a judgment call by now, but it's nothing to do with that cane and

everything to do with the way he looks at me like a bug he's found on his pillow.

"I'll see you in three days," I tell him.

"Read those books," is all he says.

I watch my tutor leave, staring sadly at those toned shoulders, that trim waist, that freaking perfect ass encased in dark pants—all so wasted on his regrettable personality.

Malachi disappears into the stacks and I blink, coming back to myself.

Better not waste time thinking about *him*. Lord knows I've got enough to do.

## Two

# Malachi



**S**he's early again. Freya Pippit sits at the same table as last time, another stack of books in the center of the desk and her notepad flipped open in front of her. She's hunched over, scribbling furiously, the sound mingling with the gentle rattle of laptop keys from nearby, and my steps slow as I approach her back.

No electric blue dress today. Pity. She's in a black polo shirt and shorts instead, her bare legs crossed at the ankle beneath her chair. With her pale skin and somber outfit, the only color on Freya Pippit this morning is the shock of her platinum blonde hair.

She wears it cut short, a pale pink tint to the blonde. The strands curl against the back of her neck, and I grip my cane tighter as I walk past to keep from reaching out and ruffling them.

I don't think my touch would be welcome, somehow. Freya Pippit may be beautiful with her heart-shaped face and

big, blue eyes, but that didn't stop me from being harsher than usual with her in our last session.

As I fold myself into the empty seat, I'm struggling to remember why. All I know is she pressed all my buttons.

But she *is* beautiful. Sweet, too. She flashes me a genuine smile as I sit, and nods at something by my wrist. Another coffee. Fuck.

"I got you a cappuccino this time. Figured I'd work my way through the menu until I find something you like." She speaks to her notepad, still scribbling her notes, but there's a slight flush on those cheeks.

"That's not necessary."

She purses her lips. They're plump and pink—the kind of lips you want to press your thumb against, to see if they're as soft as they look. "Coffee is *always* necessary, Malachi. But that's okay. You teach me and I'll teach you."

It's not *about* the fucking coffee. It's about the fact that I'm paid to do this, and she doesn't owe me anything except her attention. This is not a favor. I don't want her thinking that we're friends. But if she's going to waste her money anyway...

"Thank you." I pluck up the coffee cup, annoyed at myself. "Don't do it again."

Freya smiles and pointedly does not agree.

"You do realize I'm paid to tutor you." I feel compelled to point it out. Because those secret smiles, that flush on her

cheeks, it all adds up to something this is not. Something I will not be part of. “I’m not doing this out of the goodness of my heart, Freya.”

“Heaven forbid,” she murmurs, but I can tell my words have landed. Her shoulders have curled over, like she’s absorbing a blow, and she won’t look at me even though she’s not writing anymore. Just doodling.

“Don’t waste time,” I snap. Her pen stills. God, I’m an ass to this girl. “Did you read those books?”

Her jaw firms. “I did.”

We launch into an immediate discussion about them, and I probe her mercilessly. Checking she really did read them; that she absorbed the core arguments. That she didn’t just look up a summary online. And not only did Freya read them, but she sits back in her chair and glares at me as I grill her, blue eyes flashing. Daring me to ask her anything, because she’ll know it.

I clear my throat, heat prickling over my skin. She’s cocky. Defiant.

I like it.

“Good.” I spin her notebook around, scanning her notes for this session. Glancing at her half-finished doodle of a palm tree. My mouth twitches. It’s not bad. “Glad to see you’re putting in the effort this semester.”

Freya stiffens but says nothing, and when I steal a glimpse of her face, she’s pale. Her eyes are shadowed, her cheeks



hollow. She looks exhausted.

I slide her notebook back over, throat dry. “Only one book to read for our next session.” That gives her the whole weekend, too. She can rest before she reads. Why the hell is she so tired? “Are you keeping on top of your other classes?”

“Yes.” Freya’s staring past my shoulder out of the window, at the birds hopping in the tree branches. She looks so worn down.

My gut twists, and I lean closer across the table, reaching for her wrist. To tell her what, I don’t know, but as I lean closer, I get a waft of her clothes. And she smells like—like *beer*, and smoke, and cheap spirits.

I straighten, drawing my hand back. So she’s exhausted because she spent the night in a bar. Perfect.

I will *not* feel sorry for this girl.

My heart drums harder in my chest, and I can’t believe I wanted to touch her. Can’t believe I wanted to make a fool of myself like that. My skin is hot and itchy under the fabric of my shirt, and I fight the urge to tug at my collar.

Such a close call.

“Do you know what I dislike most about you, Freya?” I ask instead. Fuck, my chest is tight. I shouldn’t say it, shouldn’t say any of this, but it’s like I’ve lost control of my sharp tongue, and I’m sitting here listening to myself.

Her mouth twitches, but there’s no humor in her smile. She’s still staring out of the library window. “No. What’s that,

Malachi?”

“You’re clearly intelligent. You’re more than capable. But you make stupid decisions and put your whole education at risk. You have no fucking priorities. You’re just—you’re *wasting* it all. Your gifts. Your opportunities. Both of our time.”

She nods, and she’s somehow paler than before. Chalk white. My thumb taps against the desk, drumming out my nervous energy. God, I went way too far. “Listen, Freya—”

“I have a question, actually. About yesterday’s lecture.”

“You weren’t *at* yesterday’s lecture.” Probably already at the bar. Another needle in my gut. But she huffs and finally looks at me, her blue eyes boring into mine.

“I watched the recording. Will you answer my question or not?”

I nod once, the movement curt. “That’s why I’m here.”

It’s the *only* reason I’m here, and I need to remember that, because as we talk through her question, my eyes keep drifting over Freya’s hunched form. Concern gnaws at my insides. Is she eating well, at least? Did I hurt her feelings?

My hand shifts, the edge of my wrist brushing against a cardboard sleeve.

The cappuccino she bought me. Fuck.

A hot flood of shame rushes through me, chased swiftly by irritation. I didn’t *ask* for that coffee. I don’t want her to be

sweet to me, I want her to make the effort in her classes. I want her to deserve all the opportunities she's been given here.

So I don't apologize. I don't say anything else at all, except to finish up the session and wish her a good weekend. Freya stays seated as I grab my cane, striding away across the library, and when I glance back over my shoulder, her elbows are on the desk and her face is buried in her hands.

My heart stutters. My feet slow.

I could go back. I *should* go back. God knows I was way out of line back there, taking out all my worldly frustrations on one girl.

But I turn and walk away, a headache brewing in my skull.

\* \* \*

It comes to me later, while I'm walking through the halls of the Politics department. A huddle of six undergraduate students walk past, one of them in the same black polo shirt as Freya wore this morning, the symbol of a silver giraffe embroidered below the collar.

Recognition slams into me, and my stride hitches. My grip tightens on my cane.

It's a uniform. The bartenders' uniform for a bar in town.

Fuck. She wasn't out drinking, she was working. I replay our conversation from this morning in my head, wincing at every moment I snapped at her. Every unkind comment. And that rant. That fucking rant.

*Do you know what I dislike most about you, Freya?*

I swallow, sweat prickling over the small of my back. I don't dislike her at all, not really. Especially not now. Why the hell did I say that?

I tell myself I don't know why—but a voice in my head whispers that I'm lying.

It says that I want Freya Pippit badly. She's like... like sunshine.

And she'd never spare a thought for a man like me.

## Three

# Freya



**M**alachi beats me to our table. When I arrive—still ten minutes early—with an armful of books, he’s already sitting into the chair opposite mine, his cane leaning against the desk. He’s wearing another button-down shirt, but eggplant colored this time.

His dark eyes watch me approach, an unreadable expression on his face, and when I drop the stack of books onto the table with a thud, I notice why.

There’s a muffin by my spot. A fresh, golden muffin, giving off a warm, buttery scent that makes my stomach growl.

I sit, head fuzzy. Is that for me?

“I didn’t know if you’d have coffee already.”

I make a weird noise. God, someone gives me a single muffin and I lose all social skills. It’s just that—well, *no one* gives me things. In the foster system, you guard your possessions with your life, even the shitty ones, because gifts are rarer than a decent school counselor. And I’m out of the

system now, an independent adult, but apparently I still fall apart at the smallest gift.

“Freya.” Malachi’s frowning at me. He scans everything I’ve brought, then nods once. “You don’t have coffee. I’ll be right back.”

His chair judders over the floorboards. He snatches up his cane, and I watch my grumpy, gorgeous tutor limp into the stacks.

Okay. I peel the muffin wrapper away from the base, eyes still fixed on the spot where Malachi disappeared. This must be an offering. An olive branch. Our last session was kind of brutal, and my tutor did not hold back.

*Do you know what I dislike most about you, Freya?*

Ouch.

Yeah, that still stings.

I bend down and inhale the warm air around my muffin, suddenly desperate for a distraction. Apple and cinnamon. My eyes drift closed, and my heart pounds. If my stomach growls any louder, the librarians will shush me.

This will be the best muffin I’ve ever tasted. I know it already. It could be a stale, overly sugary lump, and it would still be true.

“I didn’t ask for your order.” Malachi’s voice is irritated when he returns, limping past my chair, but for once, he’s not pissed off with *me*. “So I got you a milky coffee and there are packets of sugar in my pocket.”

His cane clatters against the desk, and then he's lowering a cardboard tray with two take-out cups.

He *does* like coffee. I freaking knew it. Before he can stop me, I peel the lids off both cups and check out his order.

A cappuccino. I got it right last time.

"Interesting." I can't help beaming at my tutor as he settles into his chair. "I had you down as one of those '*I drink it dark and bitter—like my life*' kind of guys."

Malachi looks pained. "That is possibly the worst thing anyone has ever said to me."

"Cheers to that." I raise my cup and he follows suit, bumping the cardboard rims together gently. "Too insulting each other for no apparent reason."

Malachi huffs out a breath, but his mouth twitches. "Cheers."

He doesn't apologize for the last session and I don't ask him to. Why insist on the words when his actions speak so much louder? When he speaks warmly with me this time, going over concepts without judgment? When he shakes his head when I offer to share my muffin, but then stares at my mouth whenever my tongue darts out to catch a crumb?

It's delicious, by the way. Not just because it's mine, but because it's warm and soft and buttery sweet. No way did he get this in the shitty campus store. And with every piece of warm apple I find, every gratified moan I make, Malachi sits a little stiffer in his chair, eyes darkening. Until—

“I have a question, Freya.” His voice is rough.

I straighten, swallowing my bite of muffin. “I did the reading.” God, I sound so defensive, but Malachi just nods.

“I know you did. But I’d like to know if your job is why your grades slipped last semester.”

Huh.

Well, I knew he was a smart cookie. And this doesn’t take a genius—it’s pretty freaking obvious that my life blew up if anyone cared enough to look.

Not many people have cared enough to look. Most of the girls in my dorm just think I’m busy a lot. That I have loads of hobbies.

I don’t know why I don’t just *tell* them.

“Jobs,” I correct. Malachi scowls, but I keep talking. “I have three.” That’s not counting the graphic design commissions I take online sometimes, designing company logos and marketing fliers, but I haven’t done those in a while. I haven’t had time.

“And where do you work?”

“The Dizzy Giraffe.” I name a bar in town, counting on my fingers. “In a dentist’s reception near the beach. And I clean offices in town with an agency.”

“Why?” Malachi grits out, and it’s such a ridiculous question that I burst out laughing. The sound bounces around the library, and I clap my hand over my mouth still giggling.



Pages rustle; keyboards rattle. Footsteps echo across the lower floors.

“Why do you think, Mal?” I murmur when I can trust my volume control. “Because it’s sure not because I love serving frat boys and answering phones. I do it for *money*. Just like you’re paid to help me.”

Deep brown eyes glare at the stack of books between us. “I’d help you regardless.”

“No, you wouldn’t.” I tug my notepad closer, face suddenly hot. “You were very clear about that. Anyway, let’s keep working. I have a shift with the dentist after this.” And I’ve finished my coffee and muffin. I need to go lay down somewhere and relive how they both tasted. Really sear it into my memory.

“Your grades were fine before.” God, he’s like a dog with a bone. Malachi’s hand curls into a loose fist, and he presses his knuckles into the table. “Better than fine. Something must have happened to make you work more.”

This is really bothering him. It might be sweet if it were any of his damn business. I frown at the open collar of his shirt, at the hollow of his throat and the ridges of his collar bone. His olive skin looks so smooth. Like velvet. Does he have chest hair under there?

“It’s not like you think.” I speak slowly, watching his throat bob. I don’t know why I’m telling my tutor when I’ve never told anyone else. Maybe it’s because he’s the first person to notice, *really* notice, or maybe because I’m comfortable

with Malachi, despite all the odds. He's ornery but caring in his own way. "It wasn't some tragic event. It was a computer glitch that messed up my tuition payments."

"A glitch," Malachi says flatly. His fist curls tighter.

"Yep." My shrug is all wrong—jerky and weird. I still can't look at his face. "They sorted it out, but it took nearly a month. In the meantime, I had to take out loans."

Because I don't have parents to bail me out, or any kind of safety net. I'm on my own.

There's a long silence.

Then: "You're wrong." I glance up, and Malachi's eyes are blazing. "That *is* tragic, Freya."

My smile feels all wobbly. I start to drink from my cup, then remember it's empty.

"Here." Malachi nudges the last of his cappuccino toward me, and normally I wouldn't take it, but I want my lips to touch the same spots where his mouth did. I spin the cup carefully, lining up my chosen spot, and when I glance up at Malachi, my lungs seize.

He's watching me. He knows what I'm doing.

He looks hungry.

"We've got one section left." My tutor's words may be all business as he flips open another book, but *I* know better. I feel his foot nudge against mine under the desk. I bite my lip hard, nudging him back, but he doesn't draw away. We spend

the rest of the session with the sides of our feet pressed together.

It's silly. There are two shoes between us, and it's the edge of my foot. Not exactly an erogenous zone.

But the longer we sit with that tiny point of contact, the more flushed I get. The more my pulse races, tapping against my throat; the more I squirm in my chair, an ache throbbing deep between my legs.

Because it makes his body more *real* to me, somehow. He's right there. A flesh and blood man, with soft-looking skin and hard muscles and thick eyebrows; with his own scent and taste and body heat. If I tugged on his hair, a growl might rumble in his chest. If he lay down on top of me, he'd squeeze the air from my lungs.

I've never done anything with a man. That would require trust, and trust is in short supply in my life.

But instinctively, I trust Malachi.

Would he...?

Could we...?

As though he can hear my thoughts, Malachi clears his throat and pulls his foot away.

"I'm going to keep scheduling our sessions." He's packing up, sliding his pen back in his pocket and tugging the stack of books across the desk. "But once you think they've stopped being useful, you can cancel them. I'll sign off on it with the department. You clearly have other things to do."

It's not judgmental when he says it this time. It's sympathetic—so no, I'm not canceling these sessions. *Hell* no.

“Maybe I want to keep seeing you.”

Warm brown eyes flit to me, then away. “It's a good way to improve grades.”

“Uh-huh.” I press my lips against a smile. This idiot.

Sunshine bathes my cheeks when I step out of the library ten minutes later, and I close my eyes. Suck in a breath of fresh air, laced with salt and pine. Feet slap against stone paths all around, bodies moving through the warren of Kephart College, and something rustles in the trees nearby.

There's a spring in my step as I head to my dorm, satchel bouncing.

Feels like summer's coming.

## Four

# Malachi



Over the next few weeks, tutoring Freya becomes a special kind of torture. I don't know what's worse—sitting across a desk from her, breathing in her daisy-fresh scent and watching her lick cappuccino foam off her top lip, or lounging in the back of lecture halls and scanning the rows for her short platinum blonde hair.

She's always so far away in those lectures. The ones that she manages to attend between jobs, anyway. There are rows and rows of bodies between us, and I have to crane my neck to see what kind of brightly colored outfit she's draped her perfect, plump body in this time.

Hey. It's not like I need to really listen—I'm here to assist, not learn.

I'm learning some things, though. Like how a lot of guys rush to sit next to Freya. Guess I can't blame them—I'd be the same if I were really in this class and if I could move at a decent goddamn speed.

But they lean over and whisper in her ear. They get close, nudging their elbows against hers. Freya's never rude but she never seems to invite them to lean closer either, and sometimes, I swear she can tell that I'm watching from the back of the room, my fingers frozen on my laptop keyboard.

The tips of her ears turn red.

My breaths come short.

The guy leans away and I can relax again.

One time, an email pops into my inbox after I've just watched a guy pant all over Freya for several minutes while she tapped away at her phone in her lap.

*Subject: Grumpy postgrad.*

*Stand down, Mal, the email says. I can practically hear you growling from here.*

I scrub a hand down my face, hiding a smile. She's got me wrapped around her pinkie finger, and it seems like she knows it. Because another email follows the first, no subject this time, containing only one line: *He's not my type, anyway.*

Her type. Her *type*. What is Freya Pippit's type?

Burly football players? The tanned surfers always jogging along the beach, boards tucked under their arms? An older man with salt and pepper hair? A slick suit from the nearest city offices, with a fast car and a designer watch?

I pinch the bridge of my nose, the professor's steady voice washing over me like the tide. What the fuck is her type?

Oh, good. Another question about Freya Pippit that will haunt me to my grave.

Because one thing's for sure: it won't be a grouchy postgrad with a cane.

\* \* \*

Scratch all that—the worst and sweetest torture is bumping into Freya when I don't expect her. When I'm not mentally prepared, braced for her beauty. Because when her soft, husky voice floats past me in the library, crossing between stacks, I turn to stone with a book tipped halfway off the shelf. My other hand tightens on my cane.

She's *here*. My heart sputters, racing faster, and I take a steadying breath.

Of course she's fucking here. She's a student. This is a college library. I need to get a goddamn grip.

A heavier pair of footsteps follows Freya into the next stack over—no doubt one of the guys from her lecture earlier, shuffling after her and leaving a trail of chemical body spray that makes my nose wrinkle. Another suitor that I have no right to despise.

He asks Freya something, his voice rumbling and indistinct.

She makes a noncommittal noise. Barely bothering to reply. The floorboards creak where she steps, working slowly along the shelves, and I can hear her fingertips brush over the spines.

Fuck this. I stride along my stack, judging roughly where she is, then shove the books apart so there's a gap on the shelf. Freya's big blue eyes widen, staring at me through the gap, then they crinkle with humor. Her cheeks flush.

I grin back, warmth spreading through my chest.

"So do you want to go?" the guys asking. "The party's off campus. Out near the beach."

The grin freezes on my face, but Freya's already shaking her head, eyes on me, expression soft.

"I'm not interested. Sorry."

I shift my weight, leg aching. Does she mean me? Him? Both of us? God knows she's too good for anyone in this whole town, especially *that* idiot. But as the guy curses and stomps away, earning himself a disapproving librarian's hiss, Freya's still gazing up at me through the gap in the shelves like we're the only two people in the world.

She wobbles a book on the shelf. "Are you checking me out, Malachi?"

I stiffen, then grimace as her joke sinks in. "That was awful. Truly."

Freya beams at me, brighter than sunlight. "Thank you."

Fuck. I like her so much.

It's a new sensation for me—wanting someone. Or certainly wanting someone like *this*, like I'm walking around having a



perpetual heart attack; wanting someone so badly I might actually do something about it.

Freya reaches through the gap in the books, and my hand meets hers before I've even thought about it. My body has gone rogue. It's answering to her now, not to me, but I don't even care as my fingers wrap around her wrist. Her pulse taps against the pad of my middle finger.

She's so *delicate*. Plump and soft and pale. There's a freckle on her wrist bone, and the faintest tan line from a watch strap.

"Mal," Freya whispers. Someone turns a page nearby.

I don't say anything. I can't.

But the floorboards creak as I shuffle closer, my cane tapping against the wood, and I carefully draw her arm further through the gap. It's an awkward angle and too high for her, really. Not ideal, but I could no more stop now than I could stop breathing.

I duck my head and meet Freya partway, my lips finally grazing the soft skin of her palm.

"Mal," Freya says again, and her eyes are brighter. Her pupils are blown. Her fingers twitch, curling instinctively at my touch, and they tickle the underside of my jaw. She rubs at my skin like she's petting a cat, and though I shaved this morning, her nails rasp over the growing stubble.

Fuck. I'm in so much trouble here.

I kiss her palm again, thumb tracing circles on her wrist. She smells like sunshine and wildflowers. Like summertime. When I dart my tongue out, tasting the salt on her skin, feeling the grooves on her palm, she makes a low, winded noise. Like someone's kicked her in the gut.

“Mal,” Freya says, and on the third time it finally sinks in. What I'm doing to her. The line I've crossed. I drop her hand so quickly it thumps against the shelf, and then she's drawing her arm back through the gap, eyebrows pinched with concern. “Are you alright? Mal, listen—”

I stumble away from the shelves, my bad leg throbbing with every step. My grip is sweaty on my cane, and my ears are ringing in the quiet of the library as I turn on my heel and limp away.

What the fuck have I done? Why would I do that? Why would I *grab* her like that, and yank her arm through the shelves, and lick her palm like some kind of fucking creep? She must be horrified. Must think I have no idea what I'm doing. She'll cancel our sessions after this, no doubt about it. She'll probably lodge a complaint. She'll never want to see me again.

“Mal,” Freya calls as I leave the stacks. I ignore her, but the wire-haired librarian glares from her desk as I pass, my cane clicking against the floorboards.

I scowl back, heart thumping sickly against my ribs, and lurch away faster.

Freya could chase after me, obviously. It's not like I could outrun her, but she's not like that.

She's a good person. She lets me go.

## Five

# Freya



**M**alachi's in my next lecture. Thank god for that—I thought I'd have to go full creep and follow him home. My thighs burn as I climb the steps to the back of the lecture hall, legs aching from another long shift standing at a bar serving sugary cocktails and wedging limes into bottlenecks.

At least I didn't oversleep and have to run out in my beer-soaked bar uniform this time. No wonder Mal thought I was a waste of space at first.

He's doing his usual thing: frowning at his laptop screen, his cane resting against the empty chair beside him, the blue light washing over the planes of his handsome face. Malachi has cheekbones for days, and the light from his screen deepens the hollows. He's got these plump, kissable lips, too, and that *hair*. He's like a pirate in a navy button-down shirt.

He hasn't booked a tutoring session for me in four days. He hasn't spoken to me at all.

I swallow hard, climbing the last few steps to stand in front of him.

“Is that seat taken?” It takes a minute for him to glance up, but when he does, he turns to stone. I lift his cane carefully, holding it out and trying not to blush. I’ve never touched his cane before. Damn, why does holding this little piece of wood feel so freaking intimate?

Malachi must notice too, because his cheekbones are a shade darker when he takes the cane from me. He rests it on his other side, not meeting my eye.

He hasn’t answered my question, but I slide off my satchel and flop into the seat anyway. The lecture hall’s two-thirds full, the rows dotted with sleepy bodies, rummaging in their bags and murmuring to each other. There are lots of damp heads, fresh from the shower, and coffee cups clutched like lifelines.

An electric light flickers high overhead. At the front of the room, the screen is on standby. We’ve never sat together before.

“You haven’t booked my next session.”

Malachi frowns at his screen, a muscle leaping in his jaw. Then he puffs out a short breath, and spins his laptop toward me. With a few taps, he brings up the booking system calendar.

“Pick a day and time.”

The gray-haired professor elbows through the lecture hall doors, clutching a bigger coffee than anyone else here. She

marches to the front podium and starts loading her slideshow, mouth twisting like she ate something sour.

With every inhale, I can smell Malachi's soap. Is *his* hair damp from the shower? If I slid my fingers up his neck, burrowing into the dark strands, would they be cool to the touch?

"Freya." He's impatient, thumb tapping against the foldout desk. "Do you want a session or not?"

Ass. Frustration and fondness swirl through my insides, and I dig out my phone. Pull up my own calendar on the screen. All of my shifts and lectures are blocked out in different colors, crammed tight together, my whole week like a stressful game of Tetris.

Malachi leans closer, peering over my shoulder. His hair tickles my neck.

"Fuck," he mutters.

Agreed.

"That one?" He points to a free morning, his shirt rustling, but I don't want another 8am session. I want to see Malachi at a time when I don't need to leave right after for something else. I'm scanning my calendar for the impossible dream: uninterrupted time. *Possibilities*.

"How about then?" I chew my bottom lip and point at a 10pm block. I don't have a bar shift that night. I don't have anything.

I'd be all his—if he wanted me.

Malachi is quiet for a long moment, thumb still tapping. Below our chairs, I slide my leg closer until our knees press together.

*Huff.*

Malachi blows out a breath and spins his laptop around, movements jerky, logging our evening session on the system. I bite back a smile and put it in my calendar too.

“What’s this?” He’s tense, jabbing a long finger at a candy pink block on my calendar labeled *sexy pirate time*.

I nudge his knee. “Book club.” Though maybe I’ll label his tutoring sessions that too. “A girl’s gotta have *some* fun, Mal. It can’t all be extra curricular reading and answering phones at the dentist.”

He softens, nudging me back. Was he jealous? Hell yeah.

The professor clears her throat and I settle back in my chair. Better listen. My tutor’s watching, and he’s pretty strict.

\* \* \*

The library’s different in the evening. The electric lights are on, but only in some sections, making the floors a patchwork of yellow light and dark shadows. The desks that line the walls are filled with night owl students, headphones in and fingers rattling over their keyboards, and the stacks are kind of creepy. Like rows of book-filled dark alleys.

Our table isn’t free. I stand nearby, blinking stupidly at the two girls sitting in our seats. *Their* seats. They’ve spread open

textbooks over the desk, and they're huddled together, making notes and popping the cap on and off bright pink highlighters.

"Come on." For once, I didn't hear Mal coming. There's no warning—just the honey rumble of his voice in my ear, and his gentle grip on my elbow. "Leave the nice students alone. There are other tables."

Right. Yeah, I'm being so weird.

"I forgot we don't own the place." Mal huffs a laugh, leading me through the dark stacks. He's still touching my elbow. "Mal, wait a second."

His steps slow. Between the towering bookshelves, we're hidden together in a pocket of darkness. Even the sounds are fainter here—the distant turn of pages and scratch of pens. The creak of shifting weight in chairs.

Mal lets go of my elbow, and I try not to mourn the loss. Already, I feel colder without his hand on me.

"What is it, Freya?" He sounds resigned. Doomed. It's not an ideal reaction from someone I'd like to kiss, but this *is* Malachi. I'm not sure he has any other settings available.

"Um." I spin him to face me, his features extra craggy in the darkness. He is eighty percent eyebrows right now. I nudge my tutor back against the bookshelves, and he goes easily, his back colliding with the stacks with an *oof*.

"Is this okay?" I whisper, crowding in after him.

"That depends," he hisses back. "Are you going to kiss me or rob me?"



I bark out a laugh. Someone coughs nearby.

For all his griping, Malachi takes my hips in a fierce hold, his cane clattering to the floorboards. He tugs me closer, sealing me against his long body, and *god*, he's all sharp angles and strong muscle. A thudding heartbeat and something rigid already prodding my stomach.

I don't plunge straight in there. Over the last few weeks, I've figured out that Mal's like a wild animal. You've gotta coax him. Leave out saucers of milk and wait for hours on a metaphorical deck. Avoid eye contact while he gets used to your presence.

I drag the tip of my nose up his throat.

Mal's groan is more vibration than noise. His fingers flex on my hips. "Your nose is cold."

I hum in agreement. "And you're so toasty warm."

Maybe our mouths are taking their time, but the rest of our bodies don't have the same hang ups. I'm pressing closer against him, squishing my breasts against his chest, my nipples peaked and sensitive and dying to be touched under my green dress. And Mal's hips are rocking, thrusting into me almost imperceptibly, but that rhythm's contagious. I rock back, breath panting against his neck.

His palms slide up my body. Testing. Squeezing.

*Lord*, I want him. I'm slick and aching, so hollow. My skin's flushed and my heart's tripping over itself, it's racing so

fast. My fingers shake as I run my hands up his neck, burrowing into that thick, dark hair.

It's surprisingly soft. I get a waft of shampoo.

"Mal."

He muffles my whisper with his mouth, and I inhale sharply. Guess he wants me more than I gave him credit for. And it's just as well, because I'm useless as soon as his lips meet mine, clinging to his hair and pushing onto my toes, leaning my whole damn body against him. I don't even think about his poor leg, and when I remember and go to ease off, he growls and flattens a palm over my lower back, keeping me in close.

His mouth is hot. Teasing. Wicked.

Blood thunders through my veins, and I squeeze my thighs together with a whimper. The sounds of the library are long gone, drowned out by my pulse thudding in my ears and our shared breaths, our rustling clothes, the creak of the bookshelf as it takes more of our weight.

Mal licks into my mouth like he owns me.

And he does. Crap, he does, so I let him tilt my head back. Let him nip my bottom lip, then trail hot kisses down the side of my throat. My hands must have found his shirt, because I'm clutching fistfuls of fabric, squeezing until my knuckles go white.

Oh my god. I can't read about political theory tonight.

Mal kneads my breast, rubbing his thumb over my aching nipple through my dress, so hopefully that means he's over studying too.

"We should go," I whisper.

"Yes," he agrees, but then he's pulling the hem of my dress up between us. I help him in a daze, inching my legs apart and tugging my panties to the side.

Those long, elegant fingers that I've admired for weeks—they trail up my trembling thigh, then slide along my slit. He's tracing my outline, not delving deep, not touching me where I need, and I let out a groan then thump my forehead against Mal's shoulder.

The pad of one fingertip eases me apart. Grazes the tight nub of my clit, and I stop breathing. Mal's panting enough for both of us.

His finger delves deeper. And *now* he realizes how wet I am, how soaked and slick and needy, and his whole body is taut with tension, his strong arm shifting between us as he rubs me. Explores my pussy.

I lick the spot on his neck where I can see his pulse tapping.

Malachi butts his head against mine like a cat, then pushes a finger inside me.

*God.*

I swallow it back: every muttered curse, every plea, every keening moan. All the sounds I'd make if we were alone,

safely locked in a room, away from these turning pages and tapping keys.

I choke it all back until it's clogging my throat and all I can do is wheeze out a single breath at a time, clutching Mal's shirt as he pumps one finger, then two, in and out of my slick channel. His thumb finds my clit, swirling over and over it in relentless circles, and my body flashes hot, a wildfire charring my insides. Then my muscles lock and I'm clamping down on him, gripping and grinding, coming silently with air choked in my throat.

One breath.

Two.

A bead of sweat trickles down my spine.

I settle back into my body, and the floorboards creak under my feet. God, I'm sticky. Flushed bright red, too. I hope he's not grossed out—hope he wasn't expecting some sexy, experienced siren.

But Mal says nothing. He pulls his fingers out gently, tugging my panties back into place and letting my dress drop with a flutter of fabric. A kiss brushes against my temple, and then he's staring around us at the shadows, looking lost.

With a jolt, I realize what he's after. His cane. I drop into a crouch, finding it quickly and brushing the dust off before I stand up. Mal's watching me, his eyes unreadable in the darkness.

I go to hand it to him, then remember his fingers.

“Don’t—” Mal starts to say, but it’s too late. I’ve done it. Grabbed his hand and wiped his fingers on the skirt of my dress.

I don’t care—I’d do it again anytime. I’m not going to make Mal walk around with my pussy juice slicking up his cane. There’s no way that’s user friendly.

“Come on,” I murmur, passing it over and grabbing his free hand. “Let’s get out of here. I’ve never done this before, and there’s more I’d like you to teach me, mister tutor.”

It’s clearly shit flirting, because Mal lets me pull him through the stacks, cane clicking against the floor, but he’s silent. He doesn’t even speak once we’re out of the library, standing in the cool night air.

“Your place or mine?” I offer weakly, aiming for a joke but landing flat. God, just kill me. A lightning strike would do it.

My tutor watches me from beneath those thick eyebrows. The breeze ruffles his dark hair.

He waits so long to speak, my heart has time to shrivel inside me and sink to the bottom of my belly. He waits so freaking long that I wonder if I should just leave, yearning for that lightning strike all the while.

Then: “My place.” Malachi takes my hand again without another word, and my poor heart gives a little flutter from where it’s resting near my liver. We turn to go and pause as a campus security guard rounds the corner of the library, one of the beautiful campus princesses clutched in his burly arms.

She's slender and perfect, oozing daddy's wealth and power. He's rough and bearded, at least a decade older than her. At *least*.

They're laughing together, their faces super close. The guard turns beet red when he sees us.

"I hurt my ankle," the girl blurts, her voice strangled and high.

Malachi taps his leg with his cane. "Same."

It's enough to break the tension. The guard hurries past down the path, and we turn the other way, heading off campus toward the town, glancing back over our shoulders and shooting each other tiny smiles.

It's their business. We know how to mind ours.

But we don't speak again for the whole walk to Malachi's apartment. And with every step, I'm more sure: I've messed this up.

## Six

# Malachi



I've messed this up.

*There's more I'd like you to teach me.* That's what Freya said, towing me through the darkened library stacks, her hand gripped tight in mine, my lips still tingling from our kiss.

*I'd like you to teach me.*

Fuck. *Fuck.* Should I have told her that I'm a—that I've never done this before either? When the hell would that have come up before today? Does she only want me for this because of some tutor kink?

God. Kill me now.

If I had any final scraps of pride, I'd make some excuse and end this already. Send her home without the masterful fuck that she wants, but also without my inexpert fumbblings.

Jesus Christ. She'll figure it out in seconds. Will she laugh at me? Judge me for it? Look at me with disappointment in those big, blue eyes? I'd die.

No. No.

My thoughts may be crashing around my skull, but Freya's hand is steady in mine. Her thumb draws gentle circles over my knuckles as we walk, and I draw in a deep breath, holding her hand tighter.

Freya Pippit does not judge people—she's a better person than I am. And she cares about me, I know it, even if her attraction to me is purely based on the tutor thing.

“What do you want me to teach you?” I murmur, prodding the bruise. Reveling in the mess I've made for myself.

Freya shrugs, and she won't look at me. The salt and pine breeze ruffles her short hair. “Political theory,” she says, and my stomach sinks.

Yeah. I've fucked this up.

I don't live far from campus. Two streets over on a tree-dotted hill, on the third floor of a pale stone building. There's no elevator, and I guess I rented a place on the third floor to make a point to myself, but now I wish that I wasn't so fucking difficult about everything as Freya walks slowly up the steps by my side.

She doesn't comment on the stairs.

I can't look at her as I climb, teeth clenched and leg throbbing.

I distract myself with thoughts of the library. I made her come with my hand okay. And she was so wet, so hot and responsive. A dream. Maybe the rest will come naturally too—if she still wants it.



Ushering Freya into my apartment feels a bit like when she touches my cane—painfully intimate, like I’m cracking open my rib cage and giving her a peek. I flick a table lamp on, casting the living room in a warm glow, and she takes in the squashy black sofa, the empty mug and pile of books on the coffee table, the brown-tipped houseplant I keep almost killing with neglect.

“You should water that plant.”

“Yup.” I should do a lot of things—like punch myself in the face next time I’m considering bringing Freya here. It’s like dragging a goddess to the underworld. There’s no *soul* here, no life, and I never fully noticed that before seeing Freya with her bright green dress prodding my lone blue sofa cushion. I don’t even have decent coffee, damn it. Only instant. “Would you like a drink?”

I’ll buy a coffee machine if she comes again.

She won’t come again.

“I’m good.” Yeah. I thought not.

Now that she’s here, now that I’ve successfully lured her to my lair, I don’t know what the hell to do with her. Freya watches me closely, her eyebrows pinched in concern, and my mouth is dry. Should I put on a movie?

This is why I’ve never done this before. One of the reasons, anyway. It’s all bullshit, all a nightmare, and I don’t know what I was thinking, bringing her here. There are other

tutors on campus who can *teach* Freya—though my chest twists at the thought—and I can go back to my peaceful solitude.

“Do you want me to go, Mal?” She looks sad. Like she already knows the answer.

“No.” I’m not in control of my own mouth. I just know I can’t send her out into the world, out with those other tutors and those students who pant all over her in lectures. “No. Please stay.”

Freya softens, and her smile is like a beacon. I stare at it, heart thumping, as she crosses to me and takes my hand. She pulls me to the sofa, then pushes me to sit. Playing hostess in my apartment, since I’ve lost my damn mind.

“I can’t teach you,” I tell her bleakly. Might as well come right out with it. “I can’t do the tutor thing—not for this. I’ve never done this before.”

I brace for her to frown; to turn and leave. But Freya blinks at me, then *brightens*, her smile even wider. Her hand braces by my shoulder, then she’s climbing onto my lap, careful to keep her weight on my good leg, knees sinking into the sofa cushions beside my hip.

“Can’t believe no one snapped you up before.” She smooths her palms over my chest, fingertips tracing my collarbone. “You’re so sexy and grumpy.”

My laugh is choked. “I was never interested.”

“Are you now?”

How can she ask me that? Does she really not know? Well, that ends now.

“With you?” I glare at her pink, pouty lips like they’ve offended me. Grab her hips and rock her over my lap, showing her *exactly* how interested I am. “Fuck yes.”

A flush creeps up her neck. Freya grips my shoulders, rolling against the hard line of my cock, then pauses when she sees my face. “But? What is it, Mal?”

I take a deep breath.

“But I’m not interested in being a novelty fuck. Not even for you, Freya. Not because of the tutor thing, and not because of my cane.” I couldn’t stand that. Not from anyone, and especially not from Freya.

She nods slowly, like she’s considering. Then flicks my earlobe. “Is that what you think of me, Malachi Belman?”

...No. I guess not.

That’s not Freya. Fuck, it’s her first time too, and I’m accusing her of treating me like a bucket list item? Does that sound like her? Hell no. I’ve—I’ve lost it. I’m not thinking straight.

“Sorry.” Her smile is soft, but I owe her more than one word. “I left my brain in the library stacks. I was freaking out the whole walk over.”

Freya nods. “I could tell.”

I've made an ass of myself nonstop for the last half hour, but I suddenly feel lighter than air. I'm in my apartment. Freya's plump ass is resting on my thighs. She's warm and soft and smiling under my touch, her breath catching as I run my palms up her waist. I reach up and brush my fingers through the short strands of her hair.

She doesn't have lectures after this. She doesn't need to run off to work. I've got her all night.

"I might suck, Freya."

She shrugs. "Me too. We'll get better."

Yeah. Yeah, we will. And if I haven't scared her off with all that crap, maybe she's here to stay. Maybe I really could be that lucky.

Freya dips her head, her lips soft and warm against mine, and I wrap my arms around her. Squeeze her until she squeaks, my heart slamming against my ribs.

*Mine. Mine. Mine.*

I kiss her until she's panting, her eyes glassy and cheeks flushed. I kiss her until she grinds down against the hard line of my cock, needy and breathless and whimpering, and tugs on my shirt like she'll tear it clean off.

I rock up against her, my hunger for her a knife in my gut. Bouncing her; urging her on.

I want in. I want her so fucking badly.

This girl has ruined me. I've never felt like this before.

“Freya. Fuck.”

## Seven

# Freya



“**F**reya. Fuck.”

Mal’s no poet, but he gets his point across. And he *wants* me, his brown eyes so dark they’re nearly black. His features are hard, his face stark with hunger.

God, I need to feel him. I scrabble at his pants button, our heads ducked and watching my clumsy fingers. Jeez. I can’t—this stupid button—

“You’re killing me,” Malachi says after a long moment.

“I can’t—*freaking—there*. Got it.” I yank his pants open, triumphant.

“It’s hardly Fort Knox.”

“Easy for you to say. All you have to do is slide your hands under my dress.”

Even as the words come out, Mal grins, running his palms up my thighs. His thumbs dip into the center, rubbing me through the fabric of my panties, and I tilt my head back, lips

parting. It wasn't long ago that he pushed his fingers inside me, but I'm needy again. Pulsing and hollow. Slick and ready.

Mal zones in on my clit, rubbing it through the cotton.

Yeah. Hell yeah. He may not have done this before, but the man's a natural. How could he not be, when he's so sure and clever in everything else? Even now, his dark eyes flicker over me. Reading my every reaction and changing tactics accordingly.

"You like a firm hand," Mal murmurs.

His smirk is pure sin.

Pirate. Such a sexy pirate.

"And what do *you* like?"

"You, Freya." A thumb nudges under my panties, sliding through my folds. "Only you." He shifts his wrist, delving deeper, plunging his thumb inside my pussy, rubbing against my walls, and his voice is strained. "Fuck, you're wet. You're soaking through your panties."

Guilty as charged.

"I'm going to lick you later. Going to eat this pussy." He draws his thumb out and cups me suddenly, surrounding me with his big palm, and I whimper, rocking against him. So empty again.

"Mal. Please."

"Later. If I don't get my cock inside you, I'm going to go mad."

Agreed. Agreed, agreed. Nothing else will do, and I need him *now*. I yank at his clothes, tugging his pants and underwear roughly down his hips until his cock stands free, thick and hard between us.

It points at the ceiling. There's a bead of moisture on the tip, and I inhale sharply as I wrap my fingers around the shaft. "It's warm."

Mal's wheezes out a laugh. "What did you expect?" He's thrusting into my grip, his hips rocking beneath me, and I can't help laughing too. I'm not even sure what about. It's just all so perfect, so light, so *fun*.

Who knew the surly tutor could be so lighthearted? Who knew he might look at me like this—like he can't believe his luck that he's touching me? Like I'm the ultimate gift?

I hop down off Mal's lap and shimmy my underwear down my legs. I step away, leaving them curled on the rug, and hesitate before yanking my dress over my head.

I've never thought I'm much to look at. I'm not especially big or small. More pear shaped than hourglass. I've got small tits and dimpled thighs and my belly's not flat, and there are moles scattered over my pale skin.

But Malachi stares with something like awe. He grips his own cock, working it slowly, eyes dragging over every dip and curve of my body. Lingering on my puffy nipples and the trimmed strip of hair between my legs.

His mouth curves. "Not a natural blonde, then."



I snort, climbing back onto his lap. The sight of him touching himself like that has made me all wobbly. “Not born platinum blonde? Sadly, no. Sorry to disappoint.”

He nips my bare shoulder, gathering me back into his arms. “You could *never* disappoint, Freya Pippit.”

Oh, boy. This man is going to wreck me, I know it.

And Mal is clearly in no rush to undress, but I want his shirt open, at least. I’ve been wondering about the chest hair situation for weeks, staring at his open collar during all our library sessions. I’ve come this far, and inquiring minds need to *know*.

He helps me undo the buttons after the first one. Just as well, or we’d be here for days. The shirt falls open, and I sit back on his thighs, taking in the view with a happy sigh.

Swells of muscle. Smooth, olive skin and tight brown nipples, dusted with dark chest hair that trails a path all the way down to his waistband. I trace the furry line with a fingertip, watching his belly jerk under my touch.

“Perfect.” I flatten my palm over Mal’s heart, feeling it thump. His chest is warm and hard—just like him. “I watched you doing shirtless pull ups through your office window once ages ago, but I couldn’t see if you had chest hair. The angle wasn’t right.”

Malachi blinks at me, then snorts. “Little pervert.”

He’s right.

I *am* a little pervert, I'm *his* little pervert, and he's everything I've been hoping for all these weeks and months. Everything I've dreamed of each night with busy fingers swirling between my thighs. I tweak his nipple with another happy sigh, then bend forward to lick it. Suck it into my mouth. Malachi curses loudly, thrusting up beneath me, and I sit back again with a smirk on my face.

Our eyes meet. His pupils are blown.

My smirk fades.

Mal's cock twitches when I brush his hand away, circling it with my own instead. My fingers are paler, so much smaller than his, and I *know* I'm holding him too lightly but I'm afraid to squeeze in case I hurt him.

We'll get better at this. We will.

My thumb swipes over the head. Spreading another bead of moisture. Mal hisses, gripping my hips tight, fingertips digging into my soft flesh.

"So shall I just—"

"Yeah."

It's awkward. A little clumsy. I push up onto my knees, lining up his cock with my entrance, and my cheeks are pink. This is so damn weird. But Mal's frowning at the place where his cock brushes against my slick folds, his lips parted and his gaze fixated, and something anxious settles inside me.

"You'll still want me, right? Even if our first time is bad?"

Mal squeezes my hips tighter. He glares up at me, annoyed that I'd even ask, and that's so him. "Of course, Freya. I'll always want you."

I hold his gaze and tell him, "Likewise."

Then I'm sinking down, and even though I'm wet, it burns. I pause after I get the head inside, legs trembling and breaths shallow, and *god*. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

But Mal strokes up and down my spine with one hand. Starts rubbing circles over my clit with the other, and it tickles, but it helps too. Eases the burn. "We can stop, Freya." He sounds pained. He hates seeing me hurting.

Ah, hell. Now my chest is burning too, because my sexy pirate is such a good man. A good man I *am* going to fuck, damn it.

"No. It's okay, I just need a—need a minute." I puff out a breath, flexing my hands on his shoulders and wiggling my hips. I slide down an inch, and it goes easier this time. "You're really big. I mean, I think you are. I don't have a frame of reference."

Malachi swallows hard. "I know I'm supposed to feel all caveman about that, but right now, I'd rather have a pencil dick."

My laugh eases the tension in my belly. Helps me sink down another inch, then another, until gravity drags me all the way down his thick length and my thighs rest on his lap. His

pants brush against my bare skin. “God, don’t jinx it. We’ll be glad for this monster after a few more tries.”

Honestly, I’m already glad of it. Now that I’ve taken him in, now that I’ve stretched and adjusted, he’s so *thick* inside me. A big, jutting length, and when I rock against him, my nerves glitter like fairy lights. Oh, *hell* yeah.

And Malachi snorts, resting his forehead against mine. His skin is hot. “If you say so, Freya. I just want to make you feel good.”

He does. He *does*. It might be clumsy at first, until we find our rhythm; it might involve stickiness and weird, slurping noises from where our bodies join. It’s not staged and not scripted, and his sofa groans beneath us, and I’m sure my weight on his lap is making his legs numb, but it’s also... perfect.

“Freya.” Mal’s wearing his in-love-with-me scowl. He tips his head back against the sofa, watching my ride his lap, gripping my hips and urging me on. “Fuck. Freya. You’re so warm. So tight. Like a dream.”

I grip him tighter with my pussy and he groans.

Then he’s flipping us over, laying me back on the sofa cushions, and I feel a flash of worry about his leg before Mal’s on top of me, shoving my thighs wide.

“Let me back in there,” he growls, and *god*, I love bossy Mal. He shoves deep inside me with one thrust, hips pistoning, pounding me into the sofa. Every thrust knocks the breath

from my lungs, and my toes curl behind his back. “You saved this for me, didn’t you? So let me have it.”

Uh-huh. Oh, yeah. He can have whatever he wants. He already owns all of me.

“*Mal.*”

“Let me hear it, baby.”

Jesus. I can’t do anything but moan—I can barely *breathe*. But Mal bares his teeth, savage and pleased, and fucks me harder, his thumb dancing over my clit the whole time, winding me tighter and tighter and tighter.

“Please. Oh my god. It’s too much—I can’t help—*Mal.*”

I didn’t expect to come on my first time, but I didn’t account for my tutor fucking me like a freaking demon. My insides pull taut, everything shuddering and clenched, and then my skin flushes hot as waves of sensation flood through my body. Wave, after wave, after wave. My hips jerk beneath him, my teeth clamped tight, but I’m not in control. I’m riding his cock and soaking up every ounce of pleasure he gives me.

Mal watches me with equal parts hunger and awe.

I finish coming with a tiny squeak.

Then he’s burying his face in the crook of my neck with a laugh, pumping inside me a few more times before stilling, wedged deep.

Pulse after pulse of warmth fills my channel. Trickles onto my thighs.

“We’re going to ruin your sofa,” I whisper.

Mal grunts, still coming.

When he collapses on top of me, he catches most of his weight on his elbows. I slide my hands inside his open shirt, hugging his hot, bare back and tugging him down harder.

“Stay close.”

He’s laughing again. We’re always laughing. Whenever I’m around Mal, I’ve got a giggle lined up ready in my throat—and it’s surprising, after how grumpy he was in our first sessions. How tensely things began.

That grumpy tutor nibbles my earlobe. “I can die happy now.”

I smooth my hands down to grip his ass. “I’d rather you didn’t.”

This feels almost too good to be true, but if there’s one thing I’ve learned in life, it’s to appreciate the blessings. To know when you’re on to a good thing—and I’m on to the *best* thing.

“Mal?”

He licks my pulse point. “Yeah?”

“Want to order pizza?”

He rolls off me and tucks himself away before snatching up his cane. His limp is only a tiny bit worse than before when he goes to hunt down his phone. “I thought you’d never ask.”

I've still got loans to pay back. He's on track for a demanding career as a professor. I'm graduating this summer, and then the future is wide open and empty in front of us.

I scrub at the wet patch on his sofa with a smirk.

We'll figure it out.

## Eight

## Mal



**F**ive years later

This lecture is taking an eternity. Most days I love my job, love every minute I spend teaching classes and writing papers, but I've got a naked photo from Freya burning up my phone, and I made the rookie error of checking my messages right before class.

She *knows* I have a lecture right now, the imp.

I dig the palm of my hand into my eye, pointing at another raised hand. "Yes?"

I'll field their questions. I'll talk through all the slides. I'm good at my job, damn it, even when my wife is trying to drive me mad.

She looked so fucking good in that photo. Stark naked, except for an artfully draped throw, tucked around the early swell of her baby bump. Stretched out over our sofa, with a mischievous smile and the caption: "Remember old times?"



*Old times.* The cheek. I fucked her on that sofa two days ago.

Another student raises a hand, and I point at him. “Yes?”

Of course, I’m glad that Freya’s made a name for herself as a freelance graphic designer. She can set her own hours, choose her rates and clients, and it’s more freedom than she’s ever had. It’s everything she deserves, especially after working so hard to get here.

But it also means she’s free now to torment me during the day. I can’t wait to get home and show her the consequences of that.

Another student’s arm. Another question. I focus on that, willing my cockstand to go away. I will not step out from behind this lectern with a hard-on, damn it.

Fucking hell, Freya.

Forty minutes later, I’m in our building’s elevator, rumbling up to the fourth floor. My grip flexes on my cane, and I’m already flushed hot under my clothes, tugging the second button open at my collar. Already hard and jutting against my zipper. I draw my phone out of my pocket and look at the photo again, thumb rubbing at the screen.

Her cheeks are pink. Her lips well bitten.

Fuck. Did she start without me?

The elevator doors slide apart.

My cane taps against the floorboards. My key twists in the lock, the door swings open, and there she is. Still naked. Still stretched out and grinning.

“How was the lecture?”

Oh, this is happening. I toss my things down and shove the door shut behind me. Lean my cane against the wall and limp over to her side.

“Pleased with yourself?”

“Uh-huh.” Her blue eyes sparkle, and I can’t help it. I grip the sofa, working my way on to my knees.

It’s not really a punishment, but I shove her legs apart. Spank the side of her ass until her skin is pink and her breaths are ragged.

I lean forward, panting against her slick, swollen pussy. She *did* start without me. I should punish her for that too, but all I can do is lick a stripe up her slit. Suck her clit into my mouth and plunge two fingers into her wet heat.

If she got things going, that’s fine. I don’t need to be gentle, then.

“Mal.” Freya’s groaning, her grip tight in my hair. “Oh, shit. *Mal.*”

Yeah. She’ll call my name a lot more before we’re done.

Because she’s mine. My *everything*. And all I care about is making her feel good; all I want is to see her gazing up at me like that, eyes brimming with love.

Her breath hitches. “You’ve got your I-love-Freya scowl on.”

That’s every scowl.

I don’t point that out. She’ll see.

I turn my wrist instead, thumb rubbing against her clit, and she bows off the sofa with a broken moan. “Are you ready for your lesson, Freya? Then let’s begin.”

\* \* \*

Thanks for reading The Tutor! I hope you loved Mal and Freya. :)

For the security guard and the campus princess, check out [The Guard](#). *I’m limping home at night, barefoot with a busted ankle. Then a white knight sweeps me off my feet.*

& for a bonus instalove story, grab your copy of [Beauty & The Kingpin](#).

Happy reading!

xxx

# Teaser: The Guard

Her name is Alyssa. She'll graduate this summer, and her degree is in Art History.

"It's what you study when you love art but can't actually paint," she explains ruefully. I chuckle, shifting her slender body in my arms.

My radio crackles at my hip as we go, a non-stop stream of calls for help. The other security guards can handle it. I'm already a man on a mission, the bright moon overhead lighting the way.

"I can walk," Alyssa offers for the dozenth time as I round the English department building. "I'm pretty heavy—"

"No, you're not." I mean, she's no feather. A human body weighs something, no matter how cute it is. But it's nothing I can't handle, and besides—I *like* having her in my arms. Maybe it's selfish, but I don't want to put her down. Not until the last possible second.

"So what did *you* study?" Alyssa asks, biting her lip, all shy.

I snort. "I didn't." And her poor cheeks flush bright red, like she really forgot that not everyone goes to college. I guess it's understandable when we're walking across the center of a campus, but still.

We have lived very different lives.

“I do some wood carving, though,” I tell her, taking pity. She clearly didn’t mean any harm. “In a workshop on my days off. So maybe I’d have done something artsy too.”

She brightens at that, the awkwardness forgotten, and we chatter away easily for a few minutes. She talks about her favorite painters and sculptors I’ve never heard of; I tell her about the antique cabinet I’m restoring. It’d be two separate conversations, except we keep stealing shy looks at each other. So eager to keep talking, even though in some ways it’s like we’re speaking beginner’s French.

The breeze dances her hair against my neck. Her shampoo smells like lavender.

God. She’s so fucking pretty.

The paths are mostly deserted on this part of campus, luckily, so barely anyone sees me mooning over this girl. Losing my head over someone who’d never look at me twice; so caught up in her beauty I’m surprised I don’t walk us into a wall. When we pass the entrance of the library, a couple stares at us, their eyebrows raised, but I clear my throat and walk on, Alyssa cradled against my chest.

“I can walk,” she whispers again.

I shake my head, holding her tighter.

“How’d you hurt your ankle?” I ask her instead.

I scan the shadowed path as I walk, my boots thudding against the dirt. Her high heels are still dangling somewhere,

bobbing with every step, and her bare limbs have a silver sheen in the moonlight.

Alyssa frowns over my shoulder. “I jumped out of a window. A low one.”

Uh. She did what now?

“*Why?*”

I grit my teeth, trying not to squeeze her too tight. There’s no good reason to jump out a window then limp through the darkness on your own. Not one. And if someone forced her into that—they’ll answer to me. I swear it.

Her mouth twists. “I had a bad date.”

I slam to a halt, breathing hard.

I’m cursing loudly, ready to charge back across campus and grab that *bad date* by the throat, when cool fingertips rest against my lips. Cutting me off.

“It was nothing like that. Nothing *really* bad. It just sucked, and I didn’t want to deal with it, you know? So I hopped out the window. Easy as pie.”

I raise an eyebrow, staring pointedly at her swollen ankle, but my blood’s cooling, and I start walking again. Alyssa wasn’t *chased* out the window, so, fine. There are enough people losing their heads tonight without me being one of them.

“It was a mistake,” she says.

“Yup.” Her poor leg.

“I don’t regret it, though.” I stare at her, disbelieving, and Alyssa flicks my gray shirt collar, her fingertips coming so close to my throat. “Because now I’ve met you,” she finishes brightly. Ah, fuck. She’s so sweet. Her gaze dips to my name tag and a smile spreads over her face. “*Brick*. It’s a funny name, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Why are you called that?”

My old man’s humor. Short for shithouse.

I juggle her against my chest again—let her feel the hard swells of muscle, my big belly, the thick cage of my arms. How her little body is dwarfed by mine; how the ground trembles with each of my steps. Let that be an answer.

Her cheeks are pink when I rumble, “Why do you think?”

Alyssa bites her lip and smiles. Yeah, she knows. And when we turn the corner onto her street, I’m grinning too.

So. Not a bad shift after all.

One of the best I’ve ever worked.

\* \* \*

Check out The Guard [here!](#)



*Cassie Mint*



# About the Author

Cassie writes outrageous, OTT instalove with tons of sugar and spice. She loves cookie dough, summer barbecues, and her gorgeous cat Missy.

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