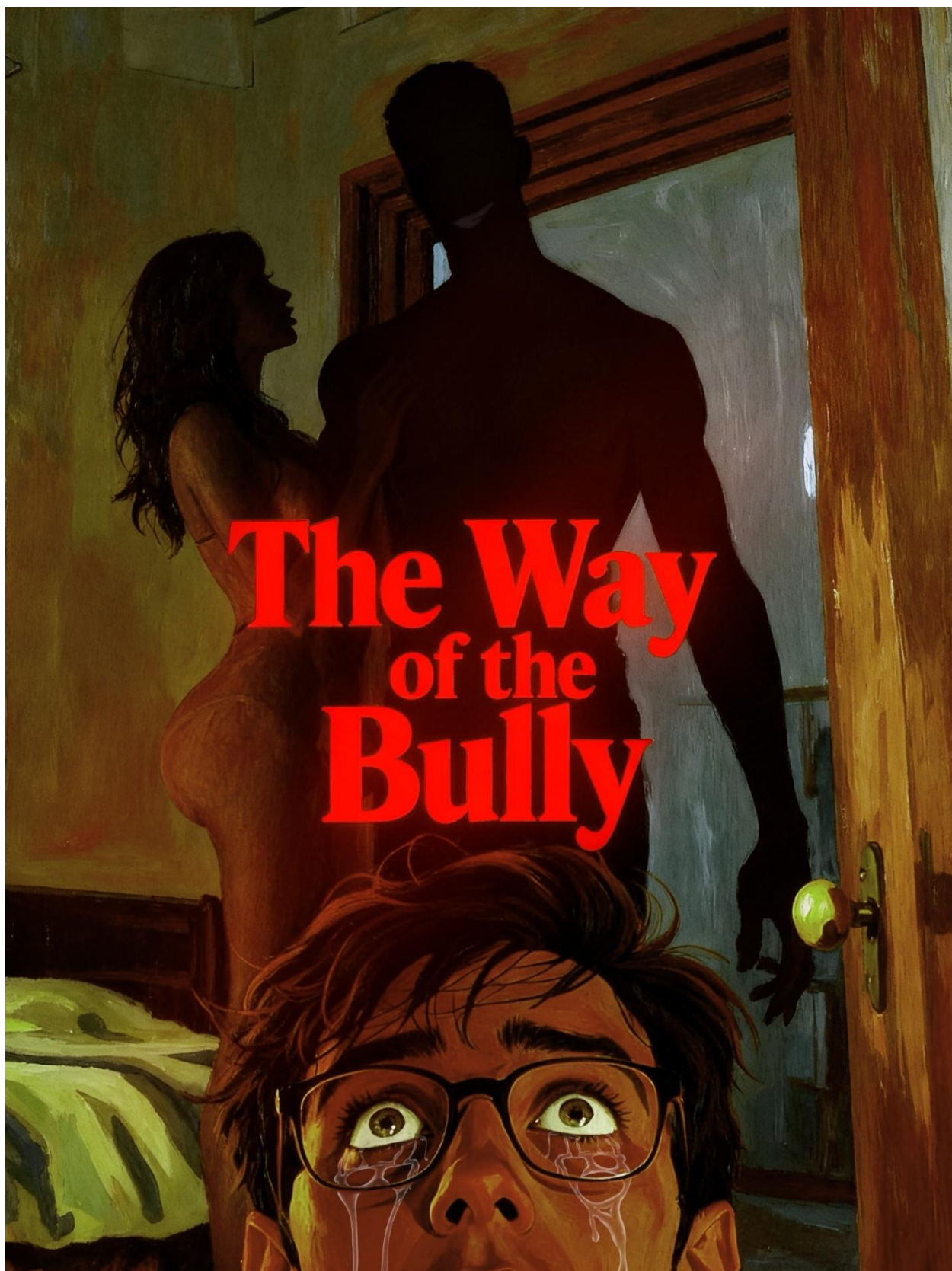




*This is a work of fiction intended for adult audiences only. All characters depicted in sexual situations are **18 years of age or older**. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The events, locations, and individuals portrayed in this book are products of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously. This material contains explicit content and is not intended for readers under the age of 18. Reader discretion is advised.*

**The Way**  
**of the**  
**Bully**

*by*  
*Jack the Monkey*

The air in Susan's office was still, thick with the tension that had been building between them all evening. She sat at her desk, acutely aware of Chad's presence just a few feet away. Every shift of his weight in his chair, every quiet breath, was a seismic event that was impossible to ignore.

She'd been trying to focus on the quarterly budget report for the last twenty minutes, but the numbers blurred into meaningless shapes. Instead, her mind kept replaying the morning's fantasy in the kitchen, the phantom sensation of his hands on her hips. Her gaze kept drifting from the spreadsheet to him. The way his t-shirt stretched across his chest, the confident set of his jaw, the knowing glint in his eyes that suggested he could see every single one of her lurid thoughts.

He could. Of course he could.

Chad's voice cut through her internal reverie, smooth and calm. "So what was going on outside? Right before you got here, there was some yelling."

Susan blinked, pulled abruptly from a particularly vivid image of his mouth on her neck. "Oh," she said, her voice a little too airy. She cleared her throat. "Just some bitch. She was, I don't know. She went off on me over a parking spot."

She watched him. His expression remained placid, interested.

"And I guess I sort of put her in her place," she finished, a thread of pride weaving through her confession.

"Wow, that's pretty impressive."

A flicker of something—guilt? uncertainty?—made her demur. "I don't know. I might have gotten a little overboard."

Chad simply shrugged, a small, dismissive movement of his powerful shoulders. *It was nothing*, the gesture said. *Maybe you were in the right.*

"Well, shall we?" Chad said, holding up his finger.

The transition was seamless. This was their new ritual, their private, illicit meeting after hours. Susan nodded, a thrill shooting through her.

“Yep, I’m ready.” She took a deep, settling breath, letting it out slowly, and positioned herself in her chair, back straight, hands resting on her knees. The posture of a willing student.

Chad didn’t bother with the long, drawn-out induction anymore. He was a master of his craft now, efficient and precise. He moved his fingers in a gentle, swirling pattern in front of her face, a silver ring on his finger catching the light. His voice dropped into that low, mesmerizing cadence that bypassed all her rational thought.

“Twenty...” he began, and her eyes locked onto his moving fingers. “Nineteen... eighteen... sinking down so easily now... seventeen... sixteen...”

He counted down steadily, his voice a hypnotic drone that washed over her. By the time he reached *one*, the tension had melted from her shoulders. Her breathing was deep and even. Her eyes were half-lidded, gazing at nothing, seeing everything he wanted her to see.

“Susan?”

“Yes, Chad,” she murmured, her voice distant and dreamy.

“Did you think about me today? Did you fantasize about me?”

A soft, blissful smile touched her lips. “All day. All night.” The confession came without hesitation, without shame. It was just a fact. “And I... I touched myself.” The words were so blunt, so honest, that Chad’s eyebrows lifted in genuine surprise. She said it with a casualness that was utterly captivating.

“I dreamed about you all last night. I think I came in my sleep.” Her brow furrowed slightly. “But all day, I kept imagining you. But it... but it, it was frustrating.”

“Why was it frustrating?” he asked, leaning forward slightly. The scent of his cologne, something clean and musky, drifted toward her.

“Because I couldn’t find release. I just kept picturing your sexy body. Picturing the fucking. But it just kept building. It made me so frustrated.” A faint whine of genuine distress colored her tone.

Chad’s voice was the epitome of reason, a soothing balm. “Well, then you should find your release then. I think maybe when you have these fantasies, and there’s nothing wrong with them, we both can agree...”

“Nothing wrong with them,” she repeated, the suggestion settling into her mind like a dropped stone in a still pond.

“...so when you have these fantasies, I think you should touch yourself. Let yourself cum, when picturing me, fucking you.”

“Yes.” Her breath hitched. *“I need to cum. I need to cum thinking of you... fucking my pussy.”*

“That’s right. It’s perfectly natural.” He let the words hang in the air for a moment. “You might have to do it multiple times a day. But you’ll find that you’ll be less frustrated, less pent up.”

“Yes. Multiple times a day.” The idea wasn’t a perversion; it was a prescription. A solution. She could feel the rightness of it easing a tension deep within her.

He shifted gears, his voice taking on a new, curious tone. “Also, before work, when you were yelling at that woman, and you were cussing her out, be honest. How did that make you feel? Did it make you feel strong, confident, powerful?”

The memory of the confrontation flooded back, but now it was filtered through his perspective. The fear and shock were gone, leaving only the raw, potent aftermath. “Yeah.”

“It made you feel good, huh?”

“Yes.”

“It’s interesting, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, but...” A fragment of her old self tried to protest. “It was so... it was so mean.”

“Maybe, but...” he countered, his logic unassailable. “Did it fix the situation? What happened with the lady?”

“She apologized. She said, sorry. She moved. Let me through.”

“That’s right. So it solved your problem. It felt good, and it solved your problem.”

She turned the thought over in her hazy mind. “It felt good, and it solved my problem.”

“Yes.” His affirmation was firm. “So it leads me to believe that maybe snapping at people, being a little cruel and mean... it’s good. It feels good. It makes you feel strong, powerful. And it fixes your problems.”

“I guess it did, huh?” she conceded, the conviction solidifying.

“Say it. Being mean, being cruel, fixes my problems and makes me feel good.”

“Being mean, being cruel, fixes my problems and makes me feel good.”

“That’s right.” He leaned back, a sculptor admiring his work. “I want you to think it before you go to bed. As a matter of fact, imagine me, naked, saying it with you. Being mean makes you feel good. Over and over.”

“Yessssss,” she whispered, the word a sigh of complete submission.

\* \* \*

The late afternoon sun cast long, lazy shadows across the backyard. Chad lounged in a weathered Adirondack chair, on his phone, reading from a fetish site that dealt entirely in mind-control stories. A slow smile touched his lips. *This could work. This could definitely work.*

The sliding glass door rasped open. Dave, his stepfather, shuffled out with a plate balanced carefully in his rough, calloused hands. “There you go, Chad. I made you some sandwiches.”

Chad didn’t look up from his phone. He gave a dismissive wave, his focus absolute. He heard the soft *clink* of the plate being set on the small table beside him and the sound of Dave’s retreating footsteps. The door slid shut again. Silence, save for the distant buzz of a lawnmower.

He took a bite of a sandwich, barely tasting it. His mind was elsewhere, weaving new patterns of control.

A few minutes later, the door opened again. This time, the steps were lighter, more deliberate. Barbara. She moved toward him, her posture a mix of eagerness and nervous energy.

“I did it,” she announced, her voice a little too bright. “I made the appointments.”

Chad finally lowered his phone, turning his head to look at her. Her expression was hopeful, seeking his approval. “Did you?” he asked, his tone flat, making her work for it. “And... for what?”

She took a sharp breath, listing them off like a grocery list. “For my tits. Implants. For my ass. My lips. A nose job.” She paused, a flicker of something—uncertainty?—in her eyes before she pushed on. “I’m going to get rid of two ribs to make my waist thinner. And a tattoo across my ass saying ‘property of Chad’.”

He held her gaze, his own expression unreadable. “Good.” The single word was a benediction. She visibly relaxed. But he wasn’t finished. “Now, frankly, I don’t want to see you when you’re recuperating from that many surgeries. You’ll probably look all gross.” He saw her flinch, just slightly. “So, I want you to heal up and then return here when you’re finished. Find a hotel.”

Barbara nodded, but the worry he’d seen a moment ago returned, etching lines around her mouth. “Chad, baby,” she began, her voice softening into a plea. “Even though I trust you... I trust you so much, because I love you so so much... are you sure all of this is necessary?”

Chad was on his feet in one fluid, powerful motion, looming over her. “*Shut up,*” he yelled, the force of it making her take a step back.

He thought to himself, the realization cold and analytical. *She’s not completely under my control. Not yet. There’s still a thread of her left. Well, I guess I’ll have to use this.*

He held up a single finger, a universal command for *stay*. She froze, her eyes wide. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a small, unmarked USB drive, and held it out to her.

“Every night, and every morning, while you’re staying in your hotel and healing, I want you to watch this. Okay?”

“Okay, Chad,” she whispered, her hand trembling slightly as she took the drive from him.

He looked down at her, “As a matter of fact, why don’t you go start now? Grab your laptop and watch it in your room, okay? Bye, Mom.”

“Bye, sweetie,” she said, her voice faint. She turned, clutching the USB drive like a holy relic, and disappeared into the house.

Barbara walked to her room, the drive a cold, hard weight in her palm. She closed the door and sat on the edge of her bed, her expensive laptop already open and waiting. Her heart was pounding for reasons she couldn’t name. With a deep breath, she inserted the drive.

A single file appeared on the screen. She double-clicked.

The video resolved into a familiar image. Chad. He was sitting in what looked like his room, staring directly into the camera. He looked serious, intense. He held up his hand, his fingers beginning their now-familiar, mesmerizing dance.

His voice came through the laptop speakers, clear and resonant, that same hypnotic tone he used on her in person. “*Thirty...*”

Her breathing began to slow almost immediately, her eyes locking onto the screen.

*“Twenty-nine... twenty-eight... sinking down so easily for me...”*

She felt the familiar, welcome pull, the quieting of her own thoughts. The doubts, the worries about the surgeries, the faint echo of her former self—they all began to recede, replaced by the smooth, blanketing sound of his voice.

He counted down, steady and inevitable. With each number, she felt herself slipping deeper, her body going lax, her head lolling slightly. When he reached “...one,” she was completely under. Her body was a vessel, empty and waiting.

On the screen, Chad’s image spoke. His voice was flat, absolute, leaving no room for question.

*“Mother, listen very, very carefully. You are a slave.”*

Her lips moved, her own voice a dull monotone. “I am a slave.”

*“You are my slave.”*

*“I am your slave.”*

“I am your slave.”

*“You would do anything for me.”*

“I would do anything for you.”

*“You would kill for me.”*

There was the faintest hesitation, a last, ghostly spark of resistance that was instantly smothered by the weight of his command. “I would kill for you.”

*“I am your master.”*

This time, she didn’t pause. The words were just facts, imprinted on her emptied mind.

*“You are my master.”*

*“You exist only to please me.”*

“I exist only to please you.”

The video ended. A moment of black screen. Then, it started again from the beginning.

*“Mother, listen very, very carefully. You are a-”*

Barbara sat perfectly still, her eyes wide and unblinking, fixed on the screen. The loop continued. Again. And again. The words, his will, washing over her, sinking in deeper with

each repetition. They carved new permanent channels in her mind, erasing the old ones... forever.

\* \* \*

The bathroom was a steam-filled chamber of Susan's transgression. Panting, she leaned against the cool porcelain sink, her reflection a flushed, well-fucked ghost in the foggy mirror. *Fuck me, Chad. Oh, yeah. Oh, fucking pound my pussy.* The raw, desperate words still echoed in the tiled room, a stark contrast to the suburban silence of the empty house.

This had been the third time today, the third explosive release fueled by her fantasy. Each climax was harder, wetter than the last. This particular script had been her favorite yet: Chad, breaking in, ignoring her feeble protests, taking charge with that brutal confidence she craved from a real man. Him bending her over right here, *making* her watch in the mirror as he claimed her. Her fingers had worked furiously, trying to mimic the punishing rhythm of his hips, the sharp slap of flesh on flesh she imagined so vividly.

And it had worked. God, had it worked.

"Fuck yes! Chaaaaaaaaaaaaaad!"

A gush of release had left her trembling, slickness dripping down her inner thigh onto the clean bathroom floor. The evidence of her pleasure was a small, shimmering puddle.

She caught her own gaze in the mirror. A flicker of guilt tried to surface—the part of her that was still a mother, a counselor, a rational adult. But it was a weak thing now, easily dismissed. Chad's voice, smooth and logical from their session, washed over the thought before it could take root. *It's perfectly natural... You'll be less frustrated, less pent up.*

She dabbed at the floor with a wad of toilet paper, her movements languid and satisfied. *He's right*, she thought, the justification coming as easily as breathing. *It's just fantasies. I need this.* A year without a man's touch was a long time. This wasn't shameful; it was self-care. A necessary outlet. *It's not like I'm hurting anyone. No one needs to know.*

But she was a mess again. The thought was almost giddy. Cleanup required a second shower.

The spray was hot and Needling. It pounded against her skin, reviving the sensitivity he'd just wrung out of her. She let her hands glide over her body, slick with soap and water. Her breasts felt heavy, her nipples tight and aching. Her mind, blissfully empty of anything but sensation, began to drift back to him. It was a reflex now, a well-worn path.

She pictured him here, in the shower with her. The glass door sliding open. Steam curling around his muscular frame. That dominant look in his eyes.

"Not in here, Chad. Not in the shower! Mmmmmm."

She imagined him pushing her against the wet tile, his mouth finding hers, his hands roaming possessively over her soap-slick skin. The water would cascade over them both as he—

A sound.

It was faint, distant. A thud? Maybe the house settling. Or was it the front door?

Susan's eyes snapped open. Her hands stilled. The fantasy evaporated, leaving her starkly alone in the rushing water. *It's nothing*, she told herself, trying to sink back into the warmth, back into the delicious, filthy daydream.

But the spell was broken. Her ears were now straining, listening past the drumbeat of the shower for any other sign she wasn't alone. Her heart, which had been slowing to a contented rhythm, began to pick up a different, more anxious pace.

"Mom?"

The voice was muffled by the water and the door, but unmistakable. James. He was home.

A jolt, cold and sharp, went through her. The serene, post-orgasmic confidence vanished, replaced by a flash of pure panic. *Did he hear me? Oh, god, did he hear?* The image of herself, moments ago, screaming Chad's name into the empty house, suddenly seemed recklessly loud. Audible. *Stupid.*

She fumbled for the faucet, turning off the water with a harsh, metallic screech. The sudden silence was deafening.

"Yeah, honey?" she called out, her voice pitched a little too high. She cleared her throat, trying to sound normal. "I'm in the shower!"

"Okay." His voice was closer now. He was right outside the bathroom door. "I just got home. My study group ran late."

“That’s fine,” she said, grabbing a towel and wrapping it tightly around herself, as if it could hide what she’d just been doing, thinking. “I’ll be out in a sec.”

\* \* \*

Susan stood by the granite island in the kitchen, her knuckles white where she gripped the edge, forcing a calm expression as James’s voice washed over her.

“...and it’s just not fair, Mom. I know I aced that paper on synaptic plasticity. My thesis was solid. Dr. Evans acted like it was amateur hour, like I’d just... I don’t know, copied it off some website.” James pushed his glasses up his nose, his lunch forgotten. “He was so weird about it. Vague. He mentioned a cheating ring in the class and then just looked at me like... like he expected me to confess or something.”

Susan nodded, the motion stiff. *I’m listening. I am a good mother. I am listening to my son... my whiny son.* She focused on a crumb on the countertop, her mind a fractured thing.

“I should have said something,” James droned on, his voice taking on a nasal, whining quality that grated on her. “I should have stood up for myself, defended my work. But I just stood there. I just took it. What’s wrong with me?”

*Snapping at people... being a little cruel and mean... it’s good.*

“It’s just so stressful,” James continued. “I can’t focus on my other work. I keep thinking about it. What if he fails me? What if this affects my scholarship? Havard! He didn’t even give me a chance to—”

“JAMES!”

Her voice was a whip-crack in the sunny kitchen. It was too loud, too sharp. It didn’t sound like her.

He flinched, his words cutting off mid-sentence. His eyes, wide behind his glasses, locked onto hers, full of startled confusion.

The vile thing was right there, perched on the tip of her tongue, fueled by a frustration that was both sexual and profoundly irritable. It wanted out. It was a living, pulsing need to *lash out*, to see him flinch again, to feel that jolt of power she’d felt in the parking lot with that woman. *Call him a pathetic little bitch. A spineless pussy. Tell him to man the fuck up.*

Her mouth was open. The words were forming. She saw the confusion in his eyes morph into something else—hurt. A flicker of fear.

It was that flicker that doused her internal fire with ice water.

*What am I thinking?*

The hypnotic mantra receded, leaving a cold, sickening horror in its wake. She had been about to insult her own son. Her beautiful, smart boy. Her head hurt, a sudden, throbbing pain erupting at her temple. She brought a hand up, massaging it.

James was still staring, silent now. Waiting.

She had to recover. She had to say something. Anything.

“James,” she began, her voice strained but softer, desperately trying to claw back the normalcy. “I’m... I’m going to head out early before work. I’ve got... things to do.” The excuse was pathetic, transparent.

She forced a smile that felt like a grimace. “I’m sure everything will be fine. Don’t worry about it.” She moved around the island, her legs feeling unsteady. She leaned down and pressed a quick, firm kiss onto his forehead. His skin was warm. Her son. “I love you.”

She didn’t wait for a response. She turned, grabbed her purse and keys from the hook by the door, and left, closing the door behind her with a soft, definitive click.

The quiet of the garage enveloped her. She leaned against her car, the cool metal seeping through her blouse. She squeezed her eyes shut.

*What was I thinking? I can’t be mean to my own son.*

But another part of her, the part that was still humming from her bathroom fantasy and buzzing from Chad’s suggestions, whispered back. *But it felt so good to yell. For a second, it felt so powerful. It would have felt even better to really let loose.*

The conflict was a physical ache behind her eyes. She was a counselor. She helped people. She was kind. She was a mother.

*Being mean makes you feel good. It fixes your problems.*

She slid into the driver’s seat, the leather warm from the morning sun. She started the car but didn’t put it in reverse. She just sat there, hands on the wheel, staring at the blank wall of the garage.

Her phone, sitting in the passenger seat, lit up with a notification. A text message.

Her heart gave a hard, anticipatory thump. *Is it Chad? Why do I hope it's, Chad?* she thought. *He's never texted me before.* She chuckled at herself. *Susan, stop it.*

She snatched the phone, her thumb smudging the screen as she unlocked it.

It wasn't a text. It was a calendar alert.

Annual Community Center Gala - 7 PM - Tomorrow

A flutter of genuine anxiety joined the mess of emotions inside her. The gala. She'd almost forgotten. A night of schmoozing with donors, making small talk, pretending everything was fine. The thought of dressing up and plastering on a fake smile all night felt gross. The very idea made her skin crawl.

\* \* \*

The stale, slightly sweet smell of gasoline filled Susan's nose as she stood at the pump. Her hand slid up and down the handle's cool, ridged surface in a slow, steady rhythm. *Up. Down. Up. Down.* It was a subconscious motion, a mindless fidget. Her body felt too restless, humming with a restless energy that had been building since she'd fled her own kitchen.

Her interaction with James had left a bitter, coppery taste in her mouth. She was relieved she'd stopped herself, of course she was. But the act of suppression had cost her. It left all that sharp, nasty energy with nowhere to go, buzzing under her skin like a trapped wasp.

The faint, almost imperceptible throb between her legs was growing harder to ignore. She shifted subtly, pressing her thighs together in a futile attempt to ease the tension. The firm pressure of her jeans only amplified the ache. She was already damp—frustratingly so. *Again.*

Her mind wandered, unbidden, easily. Chad—his tall, fit frame. She imagined him right here, at the pump, his hands on her hips, his body pinning her against the car. Ramming his cock inside her. She stopped.

*What, am I going to masturbate right here?* she chided herself, shaking her head as if to physically dislodge the image. Her eyes flicked from the pump's slowly climbing numbers to the grimy gas station convenience store. A solution. A desperate, dirty one.

She trotted across the asphalt to the two glass doors. The bell at the entrance jingled, announcing her entrance to a clerk who barely looked up from his phone.

"Bathroom key?" she asked, her voice coming out a little breathless.

He gestured with his chin toward a back corner. "Someone's in there. Gotta wait your turn."

She rolled her eyes, a flare of genuine irritation cutting through the fog of her arousal. Of course. She walked past the short aisles and saw someone else waiting at the restroom door: a woman in a sensible beige coat, standing patiently by the locked door. Susan took her place behind her, leaning against the wall.

The wait was agony. Every second was a small eternity. The throb between her legs intensified, a maddening pulse that felt like needing to pee but was so much more urgent, more profound. It was a hollow, empty ache that demanded to be filled. A soft, involuntary sound escaped her lips, a faint little moan she barely registered.

The woman in front of her stiffened. She didn't turn around, but her shoulders went up toward her ears, her gaze fixed rigidly on the bathroom door. The silent judgment, the quiet disapproval.

Finally, a lock clicked. The door opened and a older woman shuffled out, avoiding eye contact with both women. The woman in the beige coat stepped forward, her hand outstretched for the key the man was holding.

Something in Susan snapped.

She moved without thinking, seizing an opportunity. In two quick steps, she cut in front of the other woman, her fingers snatching the key from the surprised woman's hand.

"I'll take that," she said, her voice flat.

The old woman mumbled something and hurried away. Beige coat woman stared, her mouth a perfect 'o' of affronted shock.

"Hey," she protested, her voice reedy with indignation. "I was here." She reached for the key.

Susan turned. And there it was. Her outlet. The target. All that pent-up frustration found its focus.

“Back off, bitch,” Susan said, the words landing like stones. They felt incredible in her mouth, solid and powerful. “I gotta go more than you.”

She saw the woman flinch, her eyes widening. A thrilling jolt of pure power shot through Susan. It was better than she’d imagined. She leaned in, her voice dropping to a venomous whisper.

“Plus, what are you gonna do about it, huh? Little frumpy little cunt.”

The insult hung in the humid air of the hallway. The woman looked utterly stunned, as if she’d been physically slapped. For a split second, a sliver of guilt tried to pierce Susan’s euphoria. She shook her head, a tiny, almost imperceptible motion. But she wasn’t going to stop. Not now. The high was too good.

“I’m going inside,” Susan stated, her voice regaining its cold strength. She gestured with the giant key. “And you’re gonna be out here. Being sad, fat, you. Bitch.”

She turned her back, a deliberate act of dismissal, and unlocked the door. She slipped inside, shutting it and throwing the bolt with a loud, satisfying *thunk*.

She was panting. Her heart hammered against her ribs. *Oh, that felt good.* A wild, giddy laugh bubbled up in her throat. She’d done it. She’d gotten what she wanted because she’d *taken* it. She’d deserved it. *Oh, fuck. That felt good. Ooh. Wow.*

Her back against the door, she slipped her hand into her jeans. The fabric was tight, a delicious constraint. She dipped her fingers past her waistband, finding the warm, slick heat waiting for her. She gasped, her hips beginning a slow, instinctual gyration against her own hand.

Her eyes found her reflection in the smudged mirror above the sink. A flushed, wild-eyed woman stared back. And then she wasn’t alone.

She imagined Chad behind her. She felt his hardness pressing against her ass. His mouth near her ear, his breath hot. *You did it.* The imaginary voice was a low rumble, full of approval.

*Yes, you did. You showed her, baby.* His phantom hands slid around to cup her breasts through her shirt. *You see the expression on her face? You did that. God, you’re so sexy. You fucking showed her that she ain’t shit. You showed her that you’re above her. That you’re the top bitch.*

“I’m the top bitch,” she whispered to her reflection, her fingers moving faster.

*Yeah, you are, baby.* She imagined him yanking her jeans down, not with tenderness, but with a rough, impatient urgency. She imagined the blunt, unyielding pressure of him shoving into her, not in her pussy, but somewhere tighter, more shocking. A broken cry escaped her lips, echoing off the tiles.

*Oh, I was such a bitch. I was such a bitch,* she chanted, the words a feverish prayer.

*That's right.* His phantom voice was a growl in her ear, matching the frantic rhythm of her hand. *It feels good to be mean, huh? It feels so good to be cruel.*

"Oh, God, it feels so good."

*You're my hot bitch.*

"I'm your hot bitch. I'm your hot bitch."

*Come for me, bitch. Come for me.*

The command was all she needed. Her body arched, her free hand slapping against the door for balance as a violent, shuddering climax ripped through her.

"I'm coming!" she cried out, not caring about the woman on the other side of the door, not caring about anything but the crashing waves of sensation. *"I'm such a fucking cruel bitch! I'm coming for you, Chad!"*

She slumped against the door, breathless and trembling, spent. For a long moment, there was only the sound of her own ragged breathing.

Slowly, she straightened up. She checked her reflection again. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright with a feral light. She looked... alive. Powerful. She pulled her jeans back up, smoothing her shirt.

She unlocked the door and pulled it open. The woman was still there, waiting. Her expression was no longer just shocked or affronted. It was a mask of pure, unadulterated horror. She had heard everything.

Susan met her gaze, a sly, wicked smile playing on her lips.

"What?" she asked, her voice dripping with false innocence. "What are you looking at? Huh?"

The woman flinched, her eyes dropping to the floor in immediate submission.

Susan made a show of offering the large key. As the woman's hand hesitantly reached for it, Susan simply let go. The heavy wooden keychain clattered loudly on the linoleum floor, forcing the woman to bend over and scramble for it.

Without another word, Susan stepped around her, her head held high. She walked out of the gas station. The afternoon sun felt warm on her skin. As she crossed the parking lot to her car, the sly smile never left her face.