

## CHAPTER 1



Ashley White paced back and forth in front of what might possibly be the fruition of all her hopes and dreams; the Rose & Thorn. The only BDSM club within 100 miles. She'd planned to visit for years, but recent events had given her the last push she needed to follow through. Absentmindedly lighting a cigarette, she inhaled furiously, relying on the small fag to impart the courage she needed to walk through the doors.

The seemingly generic building could have passed for any warehouse in the city. She wondered what she would find inside those doors. Would it be the answer to all of her dreams and fantasies, or an epic mistake?

Throwing the cigarette down onto the sidewalk, she ground the butt under her boot, steeled her shoulders and walked into the club. Where the front of the building was unremarkable and blended in, the inside was regal and demanded attention. The lobby was small, with dark burgundy chairs and couches. A small chandelier hung in the middle of the ceiling, casting rainbows around the room.

Ashley glanced around the foyer trying to appear more confident than how she felt. Ordinarily, she didn't have one bit of self-doubt. She was five foot six, with a very slender waist, average

in size but incredibly perky breasts, and a perfect bubble butt. Her velvety deep mocha skin was, as always, blemish free. Waist length cornrows had been fashioned into one thick braid down her back just for this occasion. With large silver hoops, a skin tight red latex dress, and spiky black thigh high boots, she knew she looked fucking hot. The problem wasn't her looks, it was that she was trying to present herself as a Domme. Something with which she had no experience.

Throughout college, especially listening to her best friend Bernie's fantasies about being taken in hand, she had noticed a certain attraction to the more S&M side of sex. She was thrilled at the thought of whips and chains. She had gotten off to dreams of cuffs, clamps, and ropes more times than she could count. However, she was convinced that she wasn't turned on at the thought of being the *receiver* of these tortures. She needed to be in charge. That need had been ingrained in her from birth. She was a proud black woman, and she'd sooner die than give anyone, especially a man, control over her body.

Ashley told herself that she didn't have any desire to be taken in hand. She had absolutely no interest in submission of any form. And, she definitely did *not* have fantasies about being forced to kneel, hands behind her back, while a man rammed his fully erect cock deep inside her mouth until he came, and his hot cum shot down her throat. That was the furthest thing from her mind and desires. Completely.

Her mouth felt dry as the oft played daydream streamed through her mind once more, and she shook her head trying to force it away. She needed to focus. She was here to experience the various types of play the club had to offer, so she could see what she was interested in delivering to a submissive under her hand. With more confidence than she felt, Ashley marched up to the front desk and handed the man her twenty dollars and driver's license so she could get signed in. She looked up into a familiar face, and

glancing at his name tag, did a double take and stammered, “Benjamin? Benjamin Jackson, Levi’s brother, right?”

He gave her a genuine smile. “Yep, that’s me. Oh! You’re Ashley. Bernie’s maid of honor.”

She nodded awkwardly. “Yeah, but what are you doing here? I didn’t know any of Levi’s brothers were into hardcore stuff. I just thought you guys all liked smacking the asses of defiant women.”

Benjamin let out a belly laugh. “Well, most of the Jackson men do seem to have a proclivity for assuming protector roles over miscreants of the female variety. But, I assure you that we’re not cookie cutters. Joey and I enjoy more intense play while Judah and Levi are more into the domestic discipline side of things.” He waggled his eyebrows. “Why? Do you need some discipline, Miss...” He glanced at her license and then gaped at her. “Chantoya Esther White? How on earth did you get Ashley from Chantoya or Esther?”

She snatched her license out of his hands. “None of your goddamn business.”

She knew that she was being overly rude, but her name was a sore spot for her and she didn’t feel like explaining it to him. Growing up attending hoity toity, predominantly white schools, she had quickly assumed a different name to try to fit in more. Not that she could hide her skin color or the fact that she wore hand me downs, but her name had been something she could control.

“And, no. I do not need *discipline* thank you very much. I’m a Top, not a Bottom. I’m just here to study more about that side of things. Why? Do you have a problem with women being on top? Too much testosterone in those Jackson veins of yours?”

He shook his head, not smiling anymore. “No. And I’d suggest that you stop trying to judge us. I have immense appreciation for both males and females on the top and bottom. I don’t buy into the belief that there is one spot for every person. Most of my family would fall into more traditional roles, but we all have our own ways of doing things. Like I said a minute ago, no cookie cutters

here. I'll say this though, Top or Bottom, I expect to be treated with respect and you're acting like a brat, not like a Domme."

Ashley scowled. "Can I go in now or do I need to lie prostrate at your almighty feet?"

He squinted his eyes at her but said nothing as he gestured for her to enter.

Though seeing a familiar face had flustered her, she tried to refocus. She was here to experience "Dungeon 101". It was supposed to be a beginner's introduction to BDSM play. Ashley figured that if she learned more about the specific types of play, she would better know what she was actually into.

She walked through the door and blinked, in shock. It was as if a replica of Benjamin had appeared in front of her. Same build, same hair, same eyes. The only obvious difference was that the man walking towards her was wearing a red shirt, and Benjamin had been in blue.

She vaguely remembered Bernie mentioning that Levi had twin brothers, so that must be it. She had met all of Levi's family at the wedding, but that day had been so full she hadn't really kept track of anyone.

He walked up to her, hand outstretched. "Hi! My name is Joseph Jackson, nice to meet you, welcome to The Rose & Thorn. Hey, you look familiar. Do we know each other from somewhere?"

She laughed awkwardly. "Yeah, I'm actually Bernie's best friend. I think we met each other at the wedding, but in the midst of the chaos I'm not sure if we were ever actually introduced. Ashley White."

He laughed as well. "That was a crazy day. I didn't know any of Bernie's friends were in the scene. That's excellent. Have you visited the Rose & Thorn before?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm kind of new to everything and I thought this might be a good time to learn, beginner's night and all that. Please don't say anything to Bernie. I didn't tell her I was coming, or she would have made a bigger deal out of it than it is."

He nodded. "Yeah, this is a great place to start. And don't worry, I've learned, in the short time we've known Bernie, that she is a bit excitable. I won't spill anything. Your secret's safe with me. So, what will happen tonight is we're going to start with a meeting in about fifteen minutes, we'll introduce you to a bit of the club's history, protocols, rules and regulations - all that business stuff. We'll spend some time talking about the various types of play we allow here. After all of the talking there will be stations set up with experts in each type of play who are happy to let you try different things, teach you how they work, etc. Then, the last part of the night is just open play. You're welcome to stay and watch or participate. There will be some chairs set up and anyone coming to play is fully aware and consenting to voyeurs. The only thing that is permissible most nights but not on beginner's night is intercourse. You will not see anything going into any holes."

Ashley laughed nervously.

With a chuckle, he tried to reassure her. "Don't worry, it's not as scary as it all sounds. You'll acclimate quickly and then it won't be a big deal."

"I'm not sure that I could ever handle people having sex in front of me. Porn is one thing, but watching people go at it in person might be a little much, even for me."

Joseph laughed heartily. "Well, there's no pressure to watch if it's not your thing. I'll be facilitating the meeting tonight and am supposed to make my rounds as host to make sure everything's running smoothly. But, I'd be honored if you'd allow me to be your guide."

Ashley nodded, relieved, but trying to maintain her confident facade. "Sure. I'd appreciate someone knowledgeable showing me the ropes."

His eyes glinted. "Are you into ropes, Ashley?"

She arched her eyebrows in surprise. "I... I don't know. It's just an expression. A colloquialism."

He laughed lightly. "I'm familiar with both the saying and the

definition of colloquialism. I was homeschooled most of my youth, we had nothing else to do but read the dictionary to each other and have word battles.”

Ashley looked shocked, unsure what to say, until he started laughing and she realized he was joking. “Well, you got me there. I don’t think I’d even heard of homeschooling until law school when we were doing some case studies. Oh! And, in *Mean Girls*, when they talk about the various assumptions people have. I always died at the boys who say –”

Joseph cut her off. “On the third day, God created the Remington bolt-action rifle, so that man could fight the dinosaurs. And the homo-sectuals.”

Ashley shouted, “Amen!” And then snorted. “It’s so not PC to say that, but I’m more concerned that a big strong man such as yourself knows the quote to such a teen girl movie.”

“Did I mention that we were homeschooled? Our community was pretty small and tight-knit, and that quote was the rage for most of high school.”

Ashley laughed, but before she could respond the lights flickered on and off.

“Ah, it’s time to start the meeting portion of the evening. Come take a seat up front by me, and we can continue this conversation later.”

Ashley followed him obediently, not even realizing he hadn’t left her any choice.

She walked to the front row of black folding chairs and sat down facing the two brothers who were standing behind a podium. Glancing around nervously, she assessed the crowd. About fifteen of the twenty or so chairs were filled. There seemed to be a good number of couples, some male/female, a few sets of two girls, and even a set of men who were holding hands and kissing. She was surprised to see she wasn’t the only woman there alone, but that no men appeared unattached. She wondered if it was easier for women to do something like this alone, and if coming alone as a

guy would make you look weak or something. Before she could dig further into her thoughts Joseph began speaking.

“Hello! Welcome to the Rose & Thorn! My name is Joseph, and this is my brother Benjamin. You may also call us by our scene names Phoenix and Griffin. We have been in the scene together for about a decade, going back to when Benjamin discovered the Rose & Thorn. Though, you could argue it began even before the Rose & Thorn, back when we played “Cowboys and Indians” when we were just little guys. We always made sure it was our job to tie up the bad guys.”

People chuckled across the room.

“Once we hit puberty we started experimenting with various things. Our parents have always been fairly open with their kids about their domestic discipline relationship, so it wasn’t something that was foreign to either of us. I realized quickly, that I was more interested in giving pleasure than I was in inflicting punishment. That isn’t to say that I won’t take a naughty young woman over my knee.” He glanced directly at Ashley, and she blushed. “But, I tend to enjoy using my tools for eroticism more.”

He turned to Benjamin at that point, who had a devilish grin across his face as he grabbed the mic from Joseph.

“I’m not the same as my brother in that regard. There is nothing I enjoy more than setting a naughty bottom on fire. To see someone under my authority, male or female, squirming as the juice from a ginger root truly sinks in, or knowing they are sitting on fresh marks that I laid there, or my very favorite, chained to a St. Andrews covered in crisscross welts from shoulders to ass.”

“He never attempts anything that isn’t completely consensual,” Joseph added. “Whether he will admit it or not, my dear brother can’t truly get his jollies unless the mister or miss is getting off on it as well. But, he does like the harder impact play, and truly disciplining, while I take more pleasure in the more artsy sides of BDSM. I love fire play, wax play, and suspension. We’re both very thoroughly educated and experienced in Shibari, or Kinbaku, an

intricate sort of Japanese rope work. So, if you ever have any questions or needs, whether you choose to partake of a membership here at the Rose & Thorn or not, we're more than happy to assist if we can."

Benjamin leaned onto the podium, mic in hand.

"Now, as the membership manager I get to talk about the business aspects of the Rose & Thorn. The way things are set up here in DC, and our desire to have a safe place for people to play, the Rose & Thorn is set up as a private club rather than a public entity. Everyone who is a part of the club pays dues, and to a certain extent "owns" a portion. Otherwise we would have to deal with the archaic "no nudity" laws and such. The irony is that, in order to maintain a good standing in the community, we ask our members to dress conservatively when they are outside of the building. So, you will often see our members much more clothed than those going around the corner to any of the bars or clubs in the area. It's annoying, but we try hard to not get a bad reputation."

As Benjamin continued discussing the business side of things Ashley let her mind wander. Looking at the brothers, she wondered how it would feel to have the two of them tie her up and hang her from something. She'd read a lot about suspension, but it was not something she had ever seen in person. With their strong muscles, they'd have no trouble subduing a sub who didn't want to be subdued. Her breath quickened, and she wondered what it would be like to fight those strong arms and feel them wrapping around her. Bernie had always said she was too much trouble for one man alone. She smirked. She just knew she was too much woman to be satisfied with monogamy.

Ashley focused when Joseph began talking about the stations.

"The stations set up around the room are each manned by experts in their fields. Benjamin, or Griffin, will be at the rope station, I'll assist him when he needs it, Ms. Cat at the flogger, Calypso and Cynic are at the spanking benches, Rooster is doing a single tail whip for us tonight, Miss Polly is doing the nipple and



genital clamps, and Miss Bonnie is doing the electric play. If you need anything, please come find me. I'll be wearing the orange vest with DM on it for Dungeon Monitor -"

"I prefer Dungeon Master when it's my turn," Benjamin interrupted.

"It's our job to make sure that everyone is playing safely, sanely, and consensually. The house safewords are yellow and red. Yellow means slow down, pause, something might be wrong, or that you're approaching your limits. Red means stop instantly! Something is very wrong. You, for whatever reason, are withdrawing consent. We take these words very seriously here and any Top who does not respect them is out, no second chances. That said, if a sub is abusing the safewords, then there are repercussions for them as well. But tonight don't worry about that. All of our demonstrators know that for tonight "Stop. No. Don't." mean just that, the rest of the time... well... No means yes and Elephant means no." He winked and the crowd laughed again. "All right! Let's get this show on the road. The stations are now open for your enjoyment and pleasure!"

Joseph walked over to Ashley as he slid into his vest and held out his hand. "Are you ready to explore, milady?"

She pushed his hand away and stood up. "I am. Something I made clear to your brother and am not sure I was as clear with you, is that I'm here to learn as a Top, not a Bottom. I have no interest in submitting to anyone, ever."

Joseph looked ready to argue, but simply nodded with a light smile. "Of course. That's an admirable goal. However, I think everyone who is on top should have experienced the bottom, so they know what they are doing. Which station would you like to check out first?"

Ashley gave a scrutinizing look around the room and swallowed, wondering what she had gotten herself into.