

ITCHING FOR IT



Jolie du Pre

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Cover art and design by Martine Jardin

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Published by eXtasy Books, a division of Zumaya Publications, 2005

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Dedication

Thanks to everyone at the Erotica Readers and
Writers Association and to my hubby.

Chapter One

When Cassie woke, her stomach felt like someone had crawled inside and ripped everything out. Even worse, her head ached as if tortured by a jackhammer and the inside of her mouth was drier than the Sahara. But despite that, she still didn't feel as bad as she could have. She learned a long time ago to cut back on the wine when she attended parties. Not enough to feel normal, but enough to get out of bed.

It was ten a.m., the only time she had had to sleep late in months. Her flight from New York to Chicago would leave in approximately four hours. Finally, she'd be going home. The book tour had been particularly grueling. 'Ebony' was a blessing, but also a curse.

"Good morning, babe," Melanie purred, placing her arm over Cassie as they lay in bed. The scent of sex still lingered in the air, the sheets a crumpled mess, hanging out of the ends of the bed.

"Good morning," Cassie replied. She'd done it again, but she hadn't planned on it. After Sharla, she had decided to leave women alone for a while.

"What, we're just going to end it? And that's it?" Sharla had said as Cassie walked away for the last time. It had been fun. The sex was good; not great, just good. But Sharla liked culture, and that was hard to find. They had dates at the theatre followed by dinners at swanky restaurants. They went to art openings and museums.

Then that feeling started, when Sharla began to call three times a day instead of just once. It got worse the day she bought Cassie an expensive present that cost an entire paycheck. No one does that unless they're serious, Cassie thought.

But Cassie was itching for it. The thrill of Manhattan always got to her. It was a melting pot all right, filled with every possible female you could describe. Cassie could sit at a café, stare at the beauties for hours on end and never get bored. And she had struggled far too long to get with a New York publisher, but no more. Her dream of entering a Manhattan bookstore filled with thousands of books and a crowd waiting in line for her autograph had come true.

At the book signing and after-party, she couldn't believe how many lesbians were waiting to see her. Like Melanie. Sexy Melanie. She was there, gazing, asking too many questions as they always do. Her skin was the same coffee brown as Cassie's, but healthier, glowing. Her dark eyes beamed with excitement. She stood close, in a tight dress that showed off every muscle. She was looking so good, looking like she could take Cassie for a ride. Which

she did, all night.

Yet this morning, Cassie hadn't really looked at Melanie. She felt her, but she hadn't really looked at her. Melanie's arm, wrapped over Cassie's body, so soft last night, was like a strap now. I live in Chicago, not Manhattan, Cassie thought.

"Would you like to get some breakfast?"

"No, I'm not hungry," Cassie said. "I've got a flight soon, so I should probably get ready."

Melanie stepped out of bed, and this time Cassie looked because she couldn't help it. She hadn't seen a back that taut or an ass that firm in a while. When Melanie turned around, Cassie stared, alternating between her perky tits and the fluff on her mound. Then she looked away. There was no sense in it. She was going back to Chicago.

"Well, I guess I should go. You're going to call me when you get to Chicago, right? And you got my e-mail address?"

"Yeah, you know it was fun. I wish we lived in the same city." Cassie didn't know why she said that. She liked Chicago. Manhattan was toxic, like a drug she should avoid.

When Melanie started to dress, Cassie felt relieved. Melanie was leaving, just like she wanted, but there was also a touch of sadness. Even when she knew she'd never see them again, it was hard to see them go. "Hey, give me a hug," she said.

Melanie walked over to Cassie and smiled. "Don't go breaking any hearts in Chicago," she whispered in Cassie's ear as they embraced.

Cassie looked at her and grinned, but the words stuck like a knife.

* * * *

Back in her apartment in Chicago, a pile of mail lay scattered by her front door. Cassie picked it up and set it on the dining room table, then hung up her coat, kicked off her shoes and placed her luggage against the wall. With all the mail to go through, unpacking could wait. She went in the kitchen, grabbed a can of soda and poured herself a glass.

Looking through the mail, she found a royalty check for 'Ebony,' her third book. Lesbians had noticed the work of Cassandra Brown, and now she was one of the top authors of lesbian literature. Often her characters were black, but many of them were of other races. As a result, her work had crossed racial lines, making her popular with all lesbians. She was getting there; she was making it, and sometimes she had to pinch herself.

The tour had gone well. It was exhausting, but at every location, the places were packed. She couldn't possibly remember how many hands she shook or how many signatures she gave. The largest crowd had been in New York, and even amongst all those faces, Melanie's had stood out.

Cassie drank some more of her soda, remembering the feel of Melanie's skin, delicate and fine as silk. It was best that a woman like that not live in Chicago, she thought. She was too busy for relationships, too

busy writing to spend lots of time with women. Things just got too crowded. She couldn't feel crowded.

She went to therapy and spoke often about living alone with her mother and how her mother never said, 'I love you', never hugged her or displayed much affection at all, how attempts at love were pushed away. Her therapist said that's why she did the same, push women away. Cassie thought it might be a possibility, but she didn't want to think about it. Eventually, she stopped going. The memories were too painful to dig any deeper.

She learned to accept the way she was. And if anything, there was no shortage of women. She was a famous writer, and lesbians were chasing her all over the world. When she felt crowded, there was always another one.

Chapter Two

The health food store was too close to Cassie's apartment for comfort. It was a reminder of how her attempts to eat better fizzled with all the writing, the late nights, and being on the road. Buying whole, organic food took work. Who had time? It was easier to order carryout, or to throw a frozen dinner in the microwave.

Still, when Cassie ate better, she felt better, so she decided to make another visit to the store. It felt invigorating once she was there, like every nerve in her body suddenly snapped to attention. And it didn't hurt that Katrice was working, so beautiful with her long auburn dreads and hazel eyes. Her smile was wide, and it was rare to find a blemish on her caramel skin. Katrice was a huge fan who read all of Cassie's books. 'Ebony' was her favorite.

"Cassie!" Katrice said, "I haven't seen you in so long. Where have you been?"

"Been on the road," Cassie responded, "but now it's time to get back in sync."

"Great! We've got a fresh batch of bananas you might want to look at."

Katrice never wore a bra. Her large breasts strained against the fabric of her blouses. Cassie often fantasized about releasing them.

"Katrice, you know I hate bananas. Remember?"

"Oh, yes, about as much as you hate the Sunflower."

Cassie knew she'd mention it. It wasn't that she hated the Sunflower; she simply hadn't the time. But now that the tour was over, giving a reading at the small lesbian bookstore might be nice. Katrice was part owner, along with three other women.

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Okay, I'll do it."

Katrice's face lit up like the sky on the Fourth of July. No woman should ever have teeth that straight, Cassie thought.

"Are you bringing Jennifer?" Cassie asked.

"Jen and I broke up."

"Oh?"

"It's been five months now. You've been away."

Cassie's thoughts went straight to sex. It had been less than a week since she slept with Melanie, since she had broken the pact she had initiated with herself to stay away from women. Now it was business as usual. Was she really what her friend Anita had called her in jest? "You ain't nothin' but a ho," she had said.

"Well, I had no idea you broke up. How do you feel now that you're single?"

"I'm okay; I'm better off without her." Katrice

smiled again, but this time she stared straight into Cassie's eyes, and it was the quiver between Cassie's thighs that made her smile back.

* * * *

Cassie received a call from Donna, one of the owners of the Sunflower, to arrange for the reading. Donna overflowed with joy, sometimes stumbling over her words, and Cassie felt a tinge of guilt for not having agreed sooner.

"I'm really, really glad you said yes! It means so much to us!"

"My pleasure. I'm going to enjoy it."

On the day of the reading, Cassie looked through her closet for the perfect dress that looked sexy, but felt comfortable. Gone were the days when she shopped only at the sales racks. Now she was actually able to buy clothes because she liked them, not because they were a bargain. She pulled out a purple handmade silk dress. It would work well with her dark skin and brown eyes. Black women look good in purple, Cassie thought.

The phone rang. It was Katrice.

"I just wanted to say that I'm so glad you agreed to do this. I can't wait to see you."

"Hey, no problem. And who knows, maybe I'll find a lover tonight."

Katrice laughed, but there was no sense of nervousness.

* * * *

The Sunflower was a small bookstore in a section of town populated with many gays and lesbians. The store had been in existence for at least twenty years and was well known in the lesbian community. Katrice had become co-owner three years ago.

Even though the store was small, it was packed wall to wall with women of various colors and shapes. Word had spread quickly about Cassandra's arrival, and women begun gathering hours early.

"We're very pleased to have Cassandra Brown at the Sunflower," Donna said to the crowd. "Ms. Brown is the author of 'Dreams,' 'The Second Time Around,' and 'Ebony,' a collection of African American lesbian stories set in the city of Los Angeles. 'Ebony' has become a bestseller among lesbian and non-lesbian women across the globe. Please welcome Cassandra Brown as she reads from her latest book, 'Ebony'."

The room roared with applause as Cassie reached the podium. Staring at a large group of lesbians excited Cassie, and often made her wet. She didn't have to search the room far to find Katrice, up front with her familiar smile.

Afterwards, before the autograph session, she grabbed Katrice's hand. "You're hanging around, right?" Cassie asked.

"Yes, I'm not going anywhere." Katrice responded.

* * * *

Once the last autograph was signed and the last hand was shook, Cassie took Katrice to Katrice's favorite restaurant, *La Quinta*. Cassie hated Mexican food, but tonight she would have taken Katrice anywhere.

When they arrived, Cassie was glad to see that at least the atmosphere was nice. It was a cozy little place. The lights were not too bright, and each wooden table had a colorful Mexican cloth and a vase of flowers. There were a few booths along the back. Cassie and Katrice chose one of those.

"You know I've got to go to work tomorrow," Katrice said, raising a Margarita to her lips after finishing her meal. Cassie enjoyed watching her lick the salt off the rim.

"Call off."

"Easy for you to say. You're not the one struggling for money."

"If you were with me, you wouldn't need to worry about money."

Katrice's eyes grew big. "My, my, such a gallant statement. But we all know how much Cassie likes the girls. Is it me you want to take care of, or my tits, which you keep staring at?"

Katrice smiled, then she laughed, and even though Cassie felt flushed with embarrassment, she found herself laughing too.

"I guess I've got a bit of a reputation, huh?" Cassie said.

"Yeah, we dykes like to talk, you know?"

"Yeah, I know."

Cassie fell silent, thinking about all the women she

had fucked, let alone just the ones in Chicago.

"Hey, you!" Katrice said. "I'm wet, but you're going to dry me up with that depressed expression on your face."

Cassie looked into Katrice's eyes, no longer embarrassed. "Well, I certainly don't want to do that." She motioned for the waiter. "Check, please."

* * * *

Lying on satin sheets, Cassie held Katrice's breasts. The areolas were as large as silver dollars and Cassie traced her tongue over the nipples, causing them to become erect. She sucked on one, then the other and then back to the first.

Katrice threw her head back and moaned. The dragonfly tattoo on Katrice's neck glistened with her sweat. If it was possible to drown in a woman's cleavage, Cassie could do it. Her hands squeezed Katrice's breasts while she gently bit the skin.

The entire time Cassie felt Katrice's pubic hair, beneath her panties, rubbing against her stomach. Her scent was strong, and Cassie longed to explore. Like a bitch in heat, she put her lips on Katrice's and slid her tongue inside while she gently stroked Katrice's dreads.

Tonight, Cassie wanted to be on top. When Katrice tried to change positions, Cassie pushed her back. She pinned her hands against the sheets and stared into her eyes.

"May I take your panties off?" Cassie asked. It

sounded more like a command rather than a question.

"Yes," Katrice whispered.

Cassie pulled the panties slowly down Katrice's thick legs to her ankles. Her bushy mound stared Cassie in the face; her juices dampened the sheet.

Cassie brought her tongue up Katrice's leg. Katrice's scent grew stronger as Cassie got closer to her pussy. Then she pounced on Katrice's bush like an animal, pulling and sucking on her clit. Katrice opened her legs wider, screaming out in passion. Cassie placed her hands on Katrice's backside, squeezing her ass as she buried her face in her. Cassie's juices ran down her thighs as Katrice bucked and hollered in orgasm.

Afterwards, Cassie covered Katrice with the sheet and held her tight. Katrice was exhausted, and soon she'd be asleep.

Cassie smiled. If she was a slut, a ho or whatever they wanted to call her, so what? She'd be a fool to pass on the chance to fuck a woman as fine as Katrice.

Chapter Three

*I*t was nine-thirty a.m., and Katrice was coming over to Cassie's to fix a pancake breakfast. When Cassie made pancakes, she grabbed a box of mix and added eggs and milk. But not Katrice; her concoction would be dairy-free.

Katrice had made breakfast once before, lugged her juicer and prepared Cassie a mixture of beets, parsley, spinach, carrots and apples. It didn't look very appetizing, but Cassie felt good after she drank it. It was no wonder that Katrice always looked so healthy, with her bright eyes and clear skin. Cassie bought a juicer the next day, but it still sat in the box.

Cassie showered, put on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and pulled her hair into a ponytail. She had been up since five a.m. working on her new novel. Now was the time for a break.

When Katrice arrived, she held a bag of groceries. Cassie kissed her on the lips and then carried the bag to the kitchen counter.

"I'm dying to see that juicer of yours," Katrice said. "Where is it?"

"In that box on the floor."

"Oh, it's a deluxe! Way better than mine. Did you get much work done this morning?"

"Yes, but I'm starving now."

"Are you going to tell me what your book is about?"

"Well, I don't like to talk about my work until it's out there."

"All right, I respect that." Katrice walked over to the counter and began to prepare breakfast. It was June, and the weather in Chicago was warm. She wore a summer dress with bright flowers that hugged her large, luscious bottom.

Cassie walked up behind her, put her hands on her bottom and kissed her neck. It had been two months since Cassie first brought Katrice home. They made love many times after that, and often chatted on the phone. But Katrice had been away at a family reunion, so they hadn't been together, or talked to each other, in about a week.

"I've missed you," Cassie said. "Do you know that?"

"Yes, I know."

"Have you missed me?"

"Yeah, of course."

Cassie nibbled Katrice's neck and Katrice moaned softly. "I like you, and I want to be friends, you know?" Katrice said.

"I am your friend."

Katrice turned to face Cassie and kissed her lips. Cassie put her hands under Katrice's dress. Skin and pubic hair greeted her touch.

"Jesus, you're not wearing any underwear!" Cassie said.

"No, I guess I'm not."

Cassie pulled Katrice close and kissed her again.

"What about breakfast?" Katrice asked.

"What about it?"

Cassie slid her finger into Katrice's vagina while they kissed slowly and deliberately. Katrice pushed her ass against the counter for support and spread her legs as Cassie increased the speed of her penetration. Kissing Cassie deeper and faster, Katrice held on to Cassie's head and rocked herself against her palm. "Mmmmm," Katrice moaned. She was getting close and Cassie knew it. Her breathing grew ragged and Cassie felt her heart beating fast under her dress. "Oh, God!" Katrice exclaimed. As her body reached orgasm, her juices flowed onto Cassie's hand as Cassie continued to move her finger frantically in and out of her.

The women held each other in silence.

"I love to make you come," Cassie whispered. "It's the best thing in the world."

"You're a pro at it. Now I'm going to need a few minutes to compose myself if I intend to cook."

"Good, 'cause I'm hungry."

The two women laughed and kissed each other again.

* * * *

It was late, and Cassie felt her writing was going

nowhere. All her sentences seemed to sound the same. It had been raining for two hours straight, and the crash of the water against the ground interfered with the thoughts in her brain. She felt lonely, like an orphaned child, and could think of nothing but Katrice. No woman had ever affected her that way before. All she wanted to do was to go over to Katrice's apartment and be with her.

She didn't call; she just showed up. And when she did, Katrice welcomed her, even though she had been asleep. She offered her some green tea. They didn't have sex; they just held each other. Cassie couldn't remember when she had felt so safe.

* * * *

That July, a month later, Cassie prepared to attend a writer's conference downtown. Katrice agreed to come as her guest, but would meet her on Saturday instead of Friday.

On Friday evening, the start of the conference, Cassie checked into her hotel room. After settling in, she changed into a red linen pantsuit, fastened her favorite pin to her top and fixed her hair and makeup. She would teach a workshop Saturday morning, sign copies of 'Ebony' Saturday afternoon and give a lecture Saturday night. However, on Friday night she could attend the dinner, listen to the speakers and just enjoy the evening. She ventured out into the reception hall and looked around. A large number of people were already there, chatting with each other. Most

had nametags, and many were holding drinks.

"Hello! That brooch you're wearing is one of my pieces."

Cassie looked over at the woman who was speaking to her.

"You're Ashanti Morgan?" Cassie was shocked to meet the up and coming artist who was making a big hit in Manhattan. Ashanti was stunning with deep blue eyes, which appeared to be natural, and dark chocolate skin. Cassie had never seen a blue-eyed black person before.

"Yes, and you're Cassandra Brown. Now that we've made our introductions, why don't we get a drink?"

"Well, okay. I don't see any harm in that."

They walked over to the bar. Ashanti smiled at the bartender and said, "Give this woman a glass of Merlot, please. You like Merlot, don't you, Cassandra?"

"Yes. How'd you know?"

"I think I know what you like."

"Oh, really? What, are you psychic or something?"

"Actually, yes, since I was a little girl."

Cassie stared at Ashanti as she took a sip of her wine. This tall, lean, black woman with blue eyes probably was quite psychic.

"Listen, Cassandra, I say we ditch the over-cooked peas and dried-out beef that they'll serve tonight and go get some real dinner."

"I hadn't planned on leaving the conference."

"Well, honey, it's time to change your plans."

Cassie hesitated, but she left with Ashanti before she could think more about why she should not.

Chapter Four

“*T*ake us to 929 West Belmont,” Ashanti ordered the cab driver as she and Cassie climbed in. She sat close. The smell of her sweet perfume filled the air, and the edge of her black dress gathered at her thighs, exposing her long, dark legs. Cassie tried not to stare at them.

The cab stopped at *Ann Sathers*. “This is a good restaurant,” Ashanti said. “You like it here, right?”

Cassie liked it. Just last week she had been there with Katrice.

Over dinner, Ashanti talked non-stop about her jewelry business. She was intelligent and even interesting, but it was hard for Cassie to get a word in about her novel writing. After a while, Cassie grew weary and found herself tuning out, staring at Ashanti’s blue eyes and falling into a slight trance. She thought about Katrice, and she wished it were her that she was having dinner with. But Katrice couldn’t say no to the health food store. They needed her to do inventory. She’d have to arrive at the conference Saturday morning. This annoyed Cassie, but she tried to understand.

* * * *

After dinner, they took a cab back to the conference. Once they stepped out of the cab and paid the driver, Ashanti grabbed Cassie's hand.

"Your room or mine?" Ashanti asked.

"Excuse me?"

"Your room or mine?"

"Look, Ashanti, the dinner was nice, but there's still time for me to catch the rest of the lectures. I'm not heading back to my room, or yours." Cassie said.

"Okay, all right. Let's go see what's going on, then."

They went inside and walked to the dining room, only to find the last speaker wrapping up.

"Well, hon, it looks like you're too late," Ashanti said. "Let's get another drink."

"I'm just going to go to bed. I've got a class to teach tomorrow."

"Yes, I know. I'm one of your students. It's only nine. I won't keep you up too late."

"I think I've had enough to drink."

"Girl, you don't have to drive anywhere. One more drink?"

Cassie sighed. "All right, one more."

"And this time I want to hear about you. I've been gabbing all night."

* * * *

Sitting in the hotel's bar, holding another glass of Merlot, Cassie talked about the success of 'Ebony.' Ashanti asked questions and seemed to be genuinely intrigued. It was as if she was a different person than in the restaurant. Cassie felt more mellow and her concerns about her class began to fade.

"You're feeling good, aren't you?" Ashanti asked.

"Yeah, a little bit. No one has bothered me since I've been with you. That's kind of nice."

"I told them all to stay away. Ashanti's here!"

She moved her stool closer and rubbed her leg against Cassie's. Cassie looked down. Ashanti had beautiful legs that Cassie wanted to touch, so she did. She gently raised Ashanti's dress, placing her hand on her knee. Then she looked her in the face.

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, really."

"Why are you here and taking a class of mine? You should be off somewhere making jewelry, right?"

Ashanti laughed. "I'd like to start writing and I figured this was a good place to begin." She looked at the bartender. "Two more."

"Ashanti..."

"Come on! The bar's clearing out. Let's take these drinks and finish them somewhere else. Your room or mine?"

"You don't give up, do you?" Cassie asked.

"Give up? Why would I do that?"

Ashanti smiled at Cassie. Cassie smiled back.

"Mine."

* * * *

Cassie's self-imposed two-wine-limit was broken as she finished her fourth Merlot. She was officially drunk and when Ashanti put her lips on hers, she didn't resist. Pushing Cassie on the bed, Ashanti climbed on top of her as Cassie lay still, startled by her strength. Ashanti gazed at Cassie. She, too, was drunk, and now her blue eyes took on an even glossier appearance. She removed Cassie's clothing until she was completely naked.

"Just lie there and don't move," Ashanti ordered.

She stood up and took off her black dress and sandals. The only item she wore underneath her dress was a sheer black thong. Cassie breathed in deep as Ashanti slipped the thong down her long legs and off her feet before climbing back on top.

Rubbing their naked bodies together, they kissed furiously. Ashanti's thin frame moved rapidly against Cassie's larger one.

Then Ashanti stopped kissing. "I want you to sit on my face," she said.

Cassie laughed. "What? I'll smother you! You're so skinny."

"Put that ass on my face right now!"

"Okay, okay!"

When she pulled herself on top of Ashanti, thoughts of Katrice began to enter her mind. But they soon dissipated when Ashanti's hands squeezed her bottom and her tongue ravished her clit. She leaned her head against the wall as she rode Ashanti's

mouth.

Suddenly, Ashanti turned her around to the opposite direction, amazing Cassie, once again, with her strength. Her wet, shaved pussy was now in front of Cassie's face. As Ashanti continued to eat her, Cassie dropped her face between Ashanti's dark thighs and madly licked her pussy.

Both women moaned loudly as they enjoyed each other. When it was over, they lay on the bed exhausted, and soon fell asleep.

* * * *

In the morning, when the sunlight hit Cassie's face, she woke and jumped out of bed. Ashanti lay asleep on the other side. Cassie nudged her awake.

"Ashanti, you've got to go!"

"What time is it?" Ashanti asked, half asleep.

"It's eight o'clock. Thank God I woke up. Now I have a fucking hangover. You've got to leave." Cassie grabbed her robe off the chair and put it on.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. We've got a class," Ashanti said. She got out of bed and put her clothes on. Then she glanced at herself in the mirror. "Shit, I look a hot mess!"

"Ashanti, please. You've got to go!"

There was a knock on the door.

"Oh, shit."

"What?"

Cassie stood silent. There was another knock.

"Well, aren't you going to answer it?"

Cassie couldn't speak or move.

"Fine, I'll do it," Ashanti said.

"Wait," Cassie whispered, but it was too late. Ashanti opened the door.

"My, who's this lovely woman?"

"I'm Katrice." She looked at Cassie through the doorway; tears began to fill her eyes. "And I was just leaving."

"Katrice, wait!" Cassie screamed.

But Katrice ran through the hall and disappeared down the stairs.

Chapter Five

Cassie stood staring down the hall long after Katrice was gone. A rush of nausea overtook her and she ran past Ashanti to the bathroom, slammed the door and threw up.

"Are you okay?" Ashanti asked, standing outside the bathroom door.

Cassie flushed the toilet and then rinsed her mouth with water from the sink. She could still see Katrice's face, eyes sodden with tears, vividly in her mind. Not only am I a ho, she thought, but I'm also a shit.

"Yeah, I'm okay. You should probably go now."

"I'm sorry if I caused a problem, but you didn't tell me you had a woman. A beautiful one, too. She is your girl, right?"

Cassie leaned over the sink and stared at herself in the mirror. Women had come and gone in her life and she had never thought of herself committed to anyone. That was, until this morning.

She walked out of the bathroom and looked Ashanti in the eye. "Yes. She's my girl."

* * * *

Before the start of her class, Cassie tried to reach Katrice on her cell phone, but there was no answer. Her students were eager to learn, and she would have to center her thoughts on teaching. She hadn't eaten anything since she got sick. Her stomach felt like it had been punched a million times, and she felt better sitting down. Ashanti sat in the fifth row, but Cassie tried not to look at her. I just want to get this over with, she thought.

When the conference was over, and she was back at her place, she called Katrice three times, but it was obvious that she was not answering her calls. She decided to find her.

First, she stopped by Katrice's apartment. But when she rang the buzzer, there was no answer. She looked around to see if her car was there, but it wasn't. Next, she visited the health food store. Still there was no sign of her. The only place left was the Sunflower. When she arrived, Katrice was there, talking to one of the other owners. She took a deep breath and walked up to her.

"Hi, Katrice."

Katrice flashed Cassie a wide smile. Isn't she upset? Cassie thought.

"Hi! I hope your weekend was successful."

"Can we talk somewhere privately?"

"Sure, let's go into the office. No one's there at the moment."

They entered the office and closed the door.

"Katrice..."

"No need to explain. I knew what I was getting myself into when I slept with you the first time. My mistake was in assuming that you could be anything other than your reputation."

"But I can be! I made a terrible mistake," Cassie grabbed Katrice's hands. "Katrice, you mean a lot to me. I realize that now. Please give me another chance."

Katrice pulled her hands from Cassie's. "You're a wonderful writer, and I admire you for that. I can't thank you enough for agreeing to speak here. We've sold lots of your books. Look, we can still be friends." She picked some papers off of the desk and opened the door. "I've got to run now, but I'll see you around."

"I love you," Cassie said.

Katrice turned and looked at her for what seemed like an eternity.

"I love you, too," she responded, "but I don't ever want you to touch me again."

* * * *

Four days had passed since Cassie had spoken with Katrice. The dishes in her sink had piled up, and there were four empty pizza cartons thrown on the floor in the corner of the kitchen. Instead of writing, she watched talk shows on television, beginning with Jerry Springer in the morning and ending with Oprah at night.

She sat in her chair, wearing the same robe, and

nothing else, each day. It smelled of underarm musk and pizza, but she had no interest in changing, much less to do laundry. She wasn't sure how many hours she had cried.

This is what it felt like to hurt. When Katrice had looked at her and said those words, she meant them.

Last Saturday, after the class, Ashanti cheerfully said goodbye and went on her way. She had no further feelings for Cassie, and Cassie had no further feelings for her. That's the way it was. Sometimes they walked away unscathed and sometimes they were hurt. But the wall was torn down this time, and it was Cassie's turn to fall. I deserve it, Cassie thought, what goes around, comes around.

* * * *

It was Saturday and exactly one week since Katrice had found Cassie with Ashanti. Today was the day Cassie would try to pull herself together. She hadn't left her apartment in a week, and she could no longer stand her dirty body and surroundings. She got into the shower and scrubbed her skin and her hair. She put on some clean clothes, dried her hair and put it up in a bun.

Her kitchen was the scariest. The dishes were a mountain of plates, bowls and cups and the trash had piled up, too. She attacked that room first, putting the trash into two big garbage bags. She stuffed the dishwasher and had to wash by hand the dishes that wouldn't fit. She wiped off the counter and then took

out a mop and a bucket to clean the kitchen floor.

Then she went for the living room. Magazines and books were thrown about, and she put them on the shelves. She pulled out the vacuum to clean the rug. A basket of silk flowers that Katrice had brought her from Lincoln Park sat in the corner. She stopped vacuuming to stare at them, and the tears came back.

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At around eight that night, the doorbell rang. The sound almost made Cassie jump.

She spoke into the intercom. "Hello?"

"Hi, it's Katrice. Can I come up?"

Cassie leaned on the door, unable to speak at first. She thought her heart would jump out of her chest. "Yes, come up!"

She wanted to run down the stairs and meet Katrice, but she thought better of it. Instead, she waited in the doorway for her to appear.

Appear she did, looking more beautiful than ever before. She wore a red sundress that perfectly complimented her glowing skin. Her breasts bounced gently as she ascended the stairs. It was as if a ray of sunshine illuminated her entrance.

When Cassie saw Katrice, she smiled wide. Katrice did the same, yet they didn't touch each other as they went inside.

Katrice put her purse down and scanned the room with her eyes. The silence was uncomfortable, but Cassie knew not to interrupt it.

"I've come to apologize," Katrice said.

"Why? I hurt you."

"Yes, you did. But you told me you loved me. Have you ever said that to another woman?"

Cassie shook her head.

"I didn't think so. I do believe, though, that you were telling me the truth."

"I was."

"I know. But it was me who lied when I told you I never wanted you to touch me again."

Cassie grabbed Katrice and held her tight. She rubbed her hands on her hair, down her body, touching her breasts and breathing in the scent of her skin. She kissed her gently on the mouth. They looked at each other for a long time.

"Would you make love to me, please?" Katrice asked.

"I think I can do that," Cassie replied.

Katrice brought her mouth to Cassie's ear. "And if you hurt me again, I'll kill you," she whispered.

"Don't worry," Cassie said. "I'm not ready to die."

End

About the Author

*J*olie du Pré's erotica has appeared on the Web, in print and at eXtasy Books.