



Essence Excerpt

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Essence Excerpt

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7/18/03

Answers to some of the Essence Questions

2. I've no "lesson" to offer—I would rather the reader felt a compelling need to think about, talk about, the questions the novel raises.

4. No.

5. I think I have always written about love in some form and in certain circumstances—which is to say I am interested in how searches for it, its loss, its delight, its corruption animate characters. In this novel, I wanted to track the complex manifestations of love; to focus on its nexus of the personal and political, unconditional versus hard earned love, the poorly imagined and the florid; the deadly, the barren, the victorious. Love and language distinguish us as human.

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From: "Farrell, Liz" <LFarrell@icmtalent.com>
To: "Toni Morrison (E-mail)" <jhopp@worldnet.att.net>
Cc: "Gollhofer, Mary" <MGollhofer@icmtalent.com>
Subject: FW: Toni Morrison questions
Date: Wed, 16 Jul 2003 16:01:55 -0400

Dear Jon,

Will you run these questions from Essence's factchecker by Toni?

Thanks, Liz

-----Original Message-----

From: Allen, Tracy [mailto:TAllen@essence.com]
Sent: Wednesday, July 16, 2003 3:46 PM
To: 'lfarrell@icmtalent.com'
Cc: 'mgollhofer@icmtalent.com'
Subject: Toni Morrison questions

I need to confirm the following information for our October issue:

She won the Nobel Prize in [for?] Literature in 1993. *yes*Love has a coastal setting. *yes*Bill Cosey is the wealthy owner of the Cosey Hotel and Resort [just Cosey's Resort? Cosey Resort?] *1*After his death, women struggle with having been obsessed with him, having been damaged and saved by him---having loved him in some way. *yes*

Thanks very much!

Tracy Allen
Senior Editor, Research
ESSENCE
212.642.0648

Also Casey's Hotel

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Gail Greene
22nd / 23rd
Carla 16th Sept
[FAX]

ICM

INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE MANAGEMENT, INC.

FAX COVERSHEET**DATE:** June 9, 2003**TO:** Toni Morrison**RECEIVING FAX NO.** (609) 258-1454**FROM:** Liz Farrell**SENDING PHONE NO.** (212) 556-5646**No. of pages including coversheet:**

11

MESSAGE:

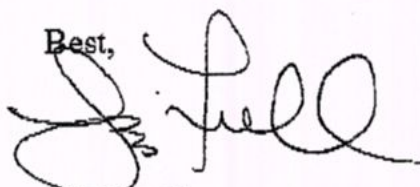
Dear Toni,

Last Friday I sent the *Essence* editor a copy of your upcoming novel, LOVE, with the three excerpts you suggested flagged for her attention. The editor read all three over the weekend, plus the entire book (of which every word she savored) and called me up this morning to ask whether you wouldn't mind considering one of the two following sections she carved out herself (pages are following).

If you don't mind taking a look and letting me know if you approve either excerpt, I would be grateful. If you would rather have *Essence* stick to the original plan and choose from one of the three you originally proposed, that's fine, too. Please call me and let me know how you feel either way.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,



Liz Farrell

(212) 556-5646

lfarrell@icmtalent.com

Excerpt
#1 OK
#2 Not

THIS MESSAGE IS INTENDED ONLY FOR THE USE OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO WHICH IT IS ADDRESSED AND MAY CONTAIN INFORMATION THAT IS PRIVILEGED, CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT FROM DISCLOSURE UNDER APPLICABLE FEDERAL OR STATE LAW. IF THE READER OF THIS MESSAGE IS NOT THE INTENDED RECIPIENT OR THE EMPLOYEE OR AGENT RESPONSIBLE FOR DELIVERING THE MESSAGE TO THE INTENDED RECIPIENT, YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT ANY DISSEMINATION OR COPYING OF THIS COMMUNICATION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED THIS COMMUNICATION IN ERROR, PLEASE NOTIFY US IMMEDIATELY BY TELEPHONE AND RETURN ORIGINAL MESSAGE TO US AT THE BELOW ADDRESS VIA REGULAR U.S. MAIL.

LOVE

money as though they were right. Yet a year or so into those fishing trips, Sandler began to see Cosey's wealth not as a hammer wielded by a tough-minded man, but more like the toy of a sentimental one. Rich people could act like sharks, but what drove them was a kid's sweet tooth. Childish yearnings that could thrive only in a meadow of girlish dreams: adoration, obedience, and full-time fun. Vida believed a powerful, generous friend gazed out from the portrait hanging behind the reception desk. That was because she didn't know who he was looking at.

Sandler climbed the stairs from the basement. The early retirement he'd been forced to take had seemed like a good idea at the time. Walking malks at midnight rested the mind without slowing it. Now he wondered if there was brain damage he hadn't counted on, since he was becoming more and more fixed on the past rather than the moment he stood in. When he entered the kitchen, Vida was folding clothes and singing along to some bluesy country music on the radio. Thinking, maybe, of those cracked-glass eyes rather than the ones in the painting, he grabbed her shoulders, turned her around, and held on tight while they danced.

Excerpt
①

Maybe girl tears, worse than the reason he shed them, were natural—a weakness the others recognized and pinpointed even before he punked out. Even before the melt had flooded his chest when he saw her hands, curving down from the snow white shoelaces that bound them. They might have been mittens pinned crookedly on a clothesline, hung there by some slut who didn't care what the neighbors said. And the plum polish on nails bitten to the quick gave the mitter-tiny hands a womanly look and made Romen think she herself was the slut—the one with no regard for what people might think.

He was next in line. And ready, too, in spite of the little hands and in spite of the mewling in her throat. He stood near the head-

← Start here
(#1)

board charged by Theo's brays and his head bobbing above the girl's face, which was turned to the wall and hidden beneath hair undone by writhing. His belt unbuckled, anticipation ripe, he was about to become the Romen he'd always known he was: chiseled, dangerous, loose. Last of a group of six. Three had left as soon as they were finished—slapping fives on their way out of the bedroom and back to where the party raged. Freddie and Jamal sat on the floor, spent but watching as Theo, who had been first, took seconds. Slower this time, his whinny the only sound because the girl wasn't mewling anymore. By the time he withdrew, the room smelled of vegetables and rotten grapes and wet clay and only the silence was fresh.

Romen stepped forward to take Theo's place, then watched in wonder as his hands moved to the headboard. The knot binding her right wrist came undone as soon as he touched it and her hand fell over the bedside. She did not use it at all—not to hit nor scratch or push back her hair. Romen untied the other hand still hanging from the Pro Ked laces. Then he wrapped her in the spread she was lying on and hoisted her into a sitting position. He picked up her shoes, high-heeled, an X of pink leather across the front—good for nothing but dancing and showing off. He could hear the whooping laughter—that came first—then the jokes and finally the anger, but he got her out of there through the dancing crowd and onto the porch. Trembling, she held on tight to the shoes he handed her. If either had been drunk earlier, they weren't anymore. A cold wind took their breath away.

He thought her name was Faye or Faith and was about to say something when suddenly he couldn't stand the sight of her. If she thanked him, he would strangle her. Fortunately, she didn't say a word. Eyes frozen wide, she put on her shoes and straightened her skirt. Both of their coats, his new leather jacket and whatever she had worn, were inside the house.

The door opened, two girls ran out, one carrying a coat, the other holding up a purse.

I. O. V. E

"Pretty-Fay! What happened?"

Romen turned to go.

"What happened to you, girl? Hey, you! You do something to her?"

Romen kept walking.

"Come back here! He bother you? Well, who? Who? Look at your hair! Here, put your coat on. Pretty-Fay! Say something, girl!"

He heard their shrieks, their concern, as cymbal clashes, stressing, but not competing with, the trumpet blast of what Theo had called him: the worst name there was; the one word whose reverberation, once airborne, only a fired gun could end. Otherwise there was no end—ever.

For the past three days he had been a joke. His easily won friendship—four months old now—lost. Holding the stare of any one of the five others, except for Freddie, was a dare, an invitation, and even when he didn't stare back or meet their eyes at all, the trumpet spoke his name. They gathered without him at the link fence; left the booth at Patty's Burgers when he sat down. Even the flirtiest girls sensed his undesirability, as though all at once his clothes were jiver: T-shirt too white, pants too pressed; sneakers laced all wrong.

On the first day following the party, nobody refused him court time but he never got a pass and when he intercepted he had to try for a dunk wherever his position because there was no one to receive the ball. They dropped their hands and looked at him. If he made a rebound they fouled it away from him and the trumpet spat before he could see who blew it. Finally they just tripped him and walked off the court. Romen sat there, panting, eager to fight but knowing that if he answered the fouls, the tripping, the trumpet spit, it would be the same as defending the girl again. Somebody he didn't know and didn't want to. If he fought back, he would be fighting not for himself, but for her, Pretty-Fay; proving the connection between them—the wrong connection. As though he and her had

been tied to a bed; his legs and hers forced open.

Lucas Breen, one of the white boys whose hoop skill was envied, dribbled and shot all alone at the far end of the court. Romen got up and started to join him, but realized in time that there was another word in the trumpet's repertoire. He passed Lucas with a glance, muttering, "Hey."

The second day was miserable, lonelier. Freddie brought him the jacket he'd left and said, "Hey, man. Don't get shook," but didn't hang around to say more. After he saw Pretty-Fay's friends, the two who had come running out with her coat and purse, waving at him through the window of the school bus, he began to ride the commuter bus. Readily he chose the inconvenience of walking two miles to and from the stop to avoid the possibility of seeing Pretty-Fay herself. He never did. Nor did anyone else.

The third day they beat him up. All five, including Freddie. Smart, too. They hit him everywhere except his face, just in case he was a snitch as well, happy to explain a broken mouth or swollen eye; girl enough to point a weak finger at them if questioned. All five. Romen fought well; raised a lump or two, kneed deep into a groin, tore a shirt till they got his hands behind his back and tried to break his ribs and empty his stomach at the same time. That last was starting to happen when a car drove up and honked. Everybody scattered, including Romen, who stumbled away holding his stomach, more fearful of being rescued than of passing out with vomit on his jeans. He threw up behind a mimosa tree in the woods back of Patty's. Contemplating his grandmother's cooking in the grass, he began to wonder if he could ever live his body down. He did not question Theo's contempt or Freddie's disgust. He shared both and couldn't understand what had made him melt at that moment—his heart bursting like a pump for a wounded creature who a few seconds earlier had been a feast he was eager to gnaw. If he'd found her in the street, his reaction would have been the same, but in the company of and part of the pack who put her there—shit! What was

I. O V E

that thing that had moved him to untie her, cover her, Jesus! Cover her! Cover her up! Get her on her feet and out of there? The little mitten hands? The naked male behinds convulsing one after another after another after another? The vegetable odor mixed with a solid booming bass on the other side of the door? As he put his arm around her and led her away, he was still erect, folding only as they stepped together out into the cold. What made him do it? Or rather, who?

But he knew who it was. It was the real Romen who had sabotaged the newly chiseled, dangerous one. The fake Romen, preening over a stranger's bed, was tricked by the real Romen, who was still in charge here in his own bed, forcing him to hide under a pillow and shed girl tears. The trumpet stuttering in his head.

- end here -
(excerpt #1)

She stepped out onto the road and had not gone fifty feet when a truckful of uncles clattered behind her. She jumped left, of course, instead of right, but they had anticipated that. When the front fender knocked her sideways, the rear tire crushed her toes.

A bumpy ride in the bed of the truck, a place on Vivian's cot, whiskey in her mouth, camphor in her nose—nothing woke her until the pain ratcheted down to unbearable. Junior opened her eyes to fever and a hurt so stunning she could not fill her lungs. Breath came and went in thimblefuls. Day after day she lay there, first unable, then refusing, to cry or speak to Vivian, who was telling her how thankful she should be that the uncles had found her sprawled on the roadside, her baby girl Junior struck down by a car driven, no doubt, by a town bastard too biggety to stop after running over a little girl and check to see if she was dead or leastwise give her a lift.

In silence Junior watched her toes swell, redden, turn blue, then black, then marble, then merge. The crayons were gone and the hand that once held them now clutched a knife ready for Vosh or an uncle or anyone stopping her from committing the Settlement version of crime: leaving, getting out. Clean away from people who chased her down, ran over her foot, lied about it, called her lucky, and who preferred the company of a snake to a girl. In one year she was gone. Two more and she was fed, bathed, clothed, educable, and thriving. Behind bars.

Junior was eleven when she ran away and wandered for weeks without attention being paid. Then suddenly noticed when she stole a G.I. Joe doll from an "Everything for a Dollar" store, taken into custody when she wouldn't give it back, transferred to a shelter when she bit the woman who yanked it from her, remanded to Correctional when she refused to provide any information other than her first name. "Junior Smith," they wrote, and "Junior Smith" she remained until the state let her go and she reclaimed her true name with an *e* added for style.

- END Here -
(Excerpt #2)

L O V E

liked to walk around with his private parts in his hand singing hymns of praise, jolted her up from the floor, out of reaching hands and through the door. The uncles chased her, but she was swift. Chained dogs growled; loose ones joined in. On her way down the path, she saw Vivian returning from the privy.

"Ma!" she called.

"Leave her 'lone, you goddamn polecats!" screamed Vivian. She took a few running steps before fatigue ended in futile rock-throwing at the backs of her younger brothers. "Leave her 'lone! Come back here, you skunks! You better mind me!"

Urgent, heartfelt if not optimistic, the words were a comfort to the running girl. Barefoot, clutching a jumbo box of crayons, Junior dodged, hid from, and managed to lose the howling uncles. She found herself in the kind of wood lumbermen salivate over. Pecans the size of which had not been seen since the twenties. Maples boasting six and seven trunk-size arms. Locusts, butternut, white cedar, ash. Healthy trees mixed with sick ones. Huge black cauliflower flowers of disease grew on some. Others looked healthy until a wind, light and playful, ruffled their crown. Then they cracked and fell like coronary victims, copper and gold meal pouring from the break.

Darting, then pausing, Junior arrived at a sunlit stand of bamboo strangling in Virginia creeper. The howling had stopped. She waited, then climbed a Northern Spy to scan the mountainside and what she could see of the valley. No uncles in sight. Just the parting of trees where the creek ran. And beyond it the road.

The sun was high when she got to its edge. Of no importance to her were flesh cuts or twigs embedded in her hair, but she mourned the seven crayons broken in flight before she got to use even one. Vivian could not protect her from Vosh or the uncles, so she decided to find Peter Paul's house, wait for him somewhere nearby, and—what? Well, he would help her somehow. But she would never, ever, ask him to return the baby cottonmouth.

Excerpt
#2~~ice. If there were no earnings, they stole.~~

Unlike the tranquillity of its name, the Settlement heaved with loyalty and license, and the only crime was departure. One such treason was undertaken by a girl with merged toes called Junior. Her mother, Vivian, had meant to name her right away. Three days had passed after the hard delivery before she could stay awake long enough to make a decision—during which time the baby girl's father called the newborn "Junior," either after himself—Ethan Payne Jr.—or after his longing, for although Vivian already had four boy children, none of them was Ethan's. Vivian finally did choose a name for the baby and may even have used it once or twice after Ethan moved back to his father's house. But "Junior" stuck. Nothing more was required until the child entered District Ten and a last name was demanded of her. "Junior Vivian," she murmured, and when the teacher smiled into her hand, the girl scratched her elbow, having just realized she could have said "June."

← Start
Here
(#2)

Settlement girls were discouraged from schooling, but each of Junior's uncles, male cousins, and half brothers had spent some time at District Ten. Unlike any one of them, she was seldom truant. At home, with no one or anyone in charge, she felt like one of the Settlement dogs. Fifty strong, they swung between short chains and unfettered roaming. Between fights and meals they slept lashed to trees or curled near a door. Left to their own devices, hounds mated with shepherds, collies with Labradors. By 1975, when Junior was born, they were an odd, original, astonishingly handsome breed instantly recognizable to folks who knew as a Settlement dog—adept at keeping outsiders out, but at their brilliant best when hunting.

During years of longing for her father, Junior begged relentlessly to visit him.

"Will you hush up?" was all Vivian said, until one day she answered, "Army. That's what I heard."

"When's he coming back?"

"Oh, he weren't nothing, baby. Nothing at all. Go play now."

L O V E

She did, but she kept on looking out for the tall, handsome man who named her after himself to show how he felt about her. She just had to wait.

Bored at last with the dogs and her mother, faster and slyer than her brothers, afraid of her uncles and unamused by their wives, Junior welcomed District Ten, first to get away from the Settlement, then for itself. She was the first Rural to speak up and make a stab at homework. The girls in her class avoided her and the few who tried to sprinkle the seeds of friendship were quickly forced to choose between the untidy Rural with one dress and the crafty vengeance little girls know how to exact. Junior lost every time, but behaved as though the rejection was her victory, smiling when she saw the one-recess friend retreat to her original fold. It was a boy who succeeded at befriending her. The teachers thought it was because he fed her Yodels and Sno Balls from his lunch bag, since Junior's lunch might be a single apple or a mayonnaise sandwich stuffed in the pocket of the woman's sweater she wore. The pupils, however, believed he was playing dirty with her down in a ditch somewhere after school—and they told him so. But he was a proud boy, son of the bottling plant manager, who could hire and fire their parents—and he told them so.

His name was Peter Paul Fortas, and having lived through eleven years of being called Pee Pee, he had grown insolent and unyielding to popular opinion. Peter Paul and Junior were not interested in each other's bodies. Junior wanted to know about vats of coke syrup and capping machines. Peter Paul wanted to know if it was true about brown bears on the mountain and whether it was the calves or the smell of milk that attracted snakes. They traded information like racetrack tipsters, skipping biography to get to the meat of the game. Once, however, he asked her if she was Colored. Junior said she didn't know but would find out for him. He said it didn't matter, because he couldn't invite Gentiles to his house anyway. He didn't want her feelings hurt. She nodded, pleased with the

serious, pretty word he had called her.

He pilfered for her: a ballpoint pen, a pair of socks, a yellow barrette for her finger-combed hair. When, for Christmas, she gave him a baby cottonmouth curled in a bottle and he gave her a jumbo box of crayons, it was hard to tell which one was happier.

But the cottonmouth was a snake, after all, and it did them in.

Some of Junior's uncles, idle teenagers whose brains had been insulted by the bleakness of their lives, alternated between brutality and corn. They did not believe the jarred snake had been for a class assignment, as Junior told them when asked, "What's 'et you hauling off, gal?" Or if they did believe her, the act was deeply offensive to them. Something belonging to the Settlement was being transferred to the site of a failure so dismal it had not registered on them as failure at all—but as the triumph of natural light over institutional darkness. Or perhaps it was too late for possum, or one of them had not shared his beer. Whatever the reason, the uncles were wide awake the morning after Christmas and fun-seeking.

Junior was asleep. Her head on a stained "Jesus Saves" pillow, wrapped in a blanket serving also as a mattress. The pillow, a Christmas gift from an uncle's wife who got it from the trash box of her then-employer, encouraged dreams. The crayons, held to her chest, decorated them. So colorful was her sleep, an uncle had to tap her behind with his boot more than once to wake her. They questioned her about the snake again. The crayon-colored dreams drained slowly as Junior tried to figure out what they wanted, there being no point in wondering the why of anything with them. They didn't know themselves why they set fire to a car seat rather than remove it. Or why a snake was important to them. They wanted the cottonmouth returned to its rightful home.

Among the threats if she didn't go get it were "to break your pretty little butt" and "hand you over to Vosh." This latter she had heard many times before, and the possibility that it could happen, that she could be handed over to the old man in the valley who