



## Love Third Pass Pages

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## Citation Information

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Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Love Third Pass Pages

1 folder

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Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:10:28 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/tq57nw616>

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Telephone: (212) 782-9000



B O R Z O I B O O K S

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

www.aaknopf.com

August 20, 2003

Toni Morrison  
240 Centre Street, 6B  
New York, NY

Dear Toni,

Enclosed are the 3<sup>rd</sup> pass pages that incorporate the changes you made to the 2<sup>nd</sup> pass.

Let me know if everything looks alright.

Thanks for your patience with this, and with the dedication hassles.

All the best,

Margaux Wexberg

42  
P

"We had two victory celebrations. One at the hotel for the public; and a private one here at the house. People talked about it for years. That whole summer was a party; started in May and ended August 14. Flags everywhere. Firecrackers and rockets on the beach. Meat was rationed, but Papa had black-market connections so we had a truckload. I wasn't allowed in the kitchen, but they needed me then."

"Why wouldn't they let you in the kitchen?"

Heed wrinkled her nose. "Oh, I wasn't much of a cook. Besides, I was the wife, you know; the hostess, and the hostess never . . ."

Heed stopped. Memory of "hostessing" those two kinds of victory parties in 1945 was swamped by another pair of celebrations, two years later. A sixteenth-birthday-plus-graduation party for Christine. Again, a family dinner at the house preceding a public celebration at the hotel. In June of 1947, Heed had not seen her used-to-be friend in four years. The Christine that stepped out of Papa's Cadillac was nothing like the one who, in 1943, had left home rubbing tears from her cheeks with her palm. The eyes above those cheeks had widened—and cooled. Two braids had become a pageboy smooth as the wearer's smile. They did not pretend to like each other and, sitting at the table, hid curiosity like pros. The sun, dipping and red as watermelon, left its heat behind—moist and buzzing. Heed remembered the baby-powder smell from the bowl of gardenias, their edges browning like toast. And hands: a casual wave at a fly, a dinner napkin pressed to a damp upper lip; Papa's forefinger playing his mustache. In silence they waited for L. She had cooked a sumptuous meal and prepared a cake. Sixteen candles waited to be lit in a garden of sugar roses and ribbons of blue marzipan. The conversation had been polite, hollow, stressed by the grating ceiling fan and meaningful looks between May and Christine. Papa, in the grip of postwar excitement, had talked about his plans to improve the hotel, including a Carrier air-cooling system.

"Wouldn't that be wonderful," said Christine. "I had forgotten how hot it gets here."



she could be run over. But here she was and where were they? May in the ground, Christine penniless in the kitchen, L haunting Up Beach. Where they belonged. She had fought them all, won, and was still winning. Her bank account was fatter than ever. Only Vida had done fairly well with her life and that was because of Sandler, who had never mocked or insulted Bill Cosey's wife. He had respected her even when his own wife did not. It was he who came to her asking if she would hire his grandson. Polite. Staying for iced coffee in her bedroom. Vida would never have done that. Not just because she disliked Heed, but also because she was afraid of Christine—as she should be. The knife flashed at Cosey's funeral was real, and rumors of Christine's sloppy life included brawls, arrests, torching cars, and prostitution. There was no telling what a mind trained to gutter life would think of.

It was impossible that no one knew of the fights between them when Christine returned to take up permanent residence. Most were by mouth: quarrels about whether the double C's engraved on the silver was one letter doubled or the pairing of Christine's initials. It could be either, because Cosey had ordered the service after his first marriage but long before his second. They argued about twice-stolen rings and the real point of sticking them under a dead man's fingers. But there were also bruising fights with hands, feet, teeth, and soaring objects. For size and willingness Christine should have been the hands-down winner. With weak hands and no size, Heed should have lost every match. But the results were a tie at the least. For Heed's speed more than compensated for Christine's strength, and her swift cunning—anticipating, protecting, warding off—exhausted her enemy. Once—perhaps twice—a year, they punched, grabbed hair, wrestled, bit, slapped. Never drawing blood, never apologizing, never premeditating, yet drawn annually to pant through an episode that was as much rite as fight. Finally they stopped, moved into acid silence, and invented other ways to underscore bitterness. Along with age, recognition that neither one could leave played a part in their unnegotiated cease-fire. More on

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close by siphoned the air. This was the right place and there he was, letting her know in every way it had been waiting for her all along. As soon as she saw the stranger's portrait she knew she was home. She had dreamed him the first night, had ridden his shoulders through an orchard of green Granny apples heavy and thick on the boughs.

The next morning at breakfast—grapefruit, scrambled eggs, grits, toast, bacon—Christine was less hostile but still guarded. Junior tried to amuse her by poking fun at Heed. The lay of the land, so to speak, was not entirely clear, and she had no direction. It was when she'd finished eating and was back in Heed's bedroom that she knew for sure. The gift was unmistakable.

Awkward in Heed's red suit, Junior had stood at the window and looked again at the boy below while Heed rummaged in a footlocker. Earlier she had seen Christine shoot down the driveway, leaving the boy holding a pail and shivering in the yard. Now she watched him wipe his nose with the back of his wrist, then brush the residue on his jeans. Junior smiled. And was smiling still when Heed called out to her.

"Here it is! I found it." She held a photograph in a silver frame. "I keep valuables locked up in one place or another and sometimes I forget where."

Junior left the window, knelt next to the footlocker, and gazed at the photograph. A wedding. Five people. And him, the groom, looking to his right at a woman who, holding a single rose, focused a frozen smile at the camera.

"She looks like the woman downstairs, Christine," said Junior, pointing.

"Well, she's not," said Heed.

The woman with the rose held his arm, and although he was looking at her, his other arm was around the bare shoulder of his tiny bride. Heed was swamped by the oversize wedding gown falling from her shoulders and the orange blossoms in her hand were drooping. To Heed's left was a slick-looking handsome man smiling



ject that children and heavy drinkers enjoy, "My son, Billy, was about your age. When he died, I mean."

"Is that right?"

"We had some good times. Good times. More like pals than father and son. When I lost him . . . it was like somebody from the grave reached up and grabbed him for spite."

"Somebody?"

"I mean something."

"How'd he die?"

"Damnedest thing. Walking pneumonia they call it. No symptoms. A cough or two and the lights go out." He scowled into the water as though the mystery was floating down there. "I lost it for a while. Took a long time to get over it."

"But you did. Get over it."

"I did," he answered, smiling. "A pretty woman came along and the clouds just drifted off."

"See there. And you complaining."

"You're right. Still, I was so caught up with him, I never took the trouble to know him. I used to wonder why he picked a woman like May to marry. Maybe he was somebody else and I made him my . . . shadow. And now I'm thinking I don't understand anybody. So why should anybody understand me?"

"Hard to know people. All you can go by is what they do," Sandler said, wondering, Is he trying to say he's lonesome, misunderstood? Worrying about a son dead for twenty-some years? This man, with more friends than honey had bees, worrying about his reputation? With women fighting so hard for his attention you'd think he was a preacher. And he moaning about the burden of it? Sandler decided the whiskey had pushed Cosey to the crying phase. It had to be that, otherwise he was in the company of a fool. He could swallow hot rocks easier than he could the complaints of a rich man. Vaguely insulted, Sandler turned his attention to the bait box. If he waited long enough, Cosey would skip to another topic. Which he did, after singing a few refrains of a Platters song.

chosen one. Both of them, mother and daughter, went wild just thinking about his choice of an Up Beach girl for his bride. A girl without a nightgown or bathing suit. Who had never used two pieces of flatware to eat. Never knew food to be separated on special plates. Who slept on the floor and bathed on Saturday in a washtub full of the murky water left by her sisters. Who might never get rid of the cannery fish smell. Whose family salvaged newsprint not for reading but for the privy. Who could not form a correct sentence; who knew some block letters but not script. Under those circumstances, she had to be braced every minute of the day. Papa protected her, but he wasn't around all the time or in every place where people could mess with her, because May and Christine were not the only ones, as a particular afternoon proved. With the necessary prowess of the semiliterate, Heed had a flawless memory, and like most nonreaders, she was highly numerate. She remembered not only how many gulls had come to feed off a jellyfish but the patterns of their flight when disturbed. Money she grasped completely. In addition she had hearing as sharp and powerful as the blind.

The afternoon sizzled. She sat in the gazebo eating a light lunch. Green salad, ice water. Thirty yards away, a group of women lolled in the shade of the porch drinking rum punch. Two were actresses, one of whom had auditioned for *Anna Lucasta*; two were singers; the other one studied with Katherine Dunham. Their conversation wasn't loud, but Heed caught every word of it.

How could he marry her? Protection. From what? Other women. I don't think so. Does he play around? Probably. Are you crazy, sure he does. She's not bad-looking. Good figure. Way past good; she could be in the Cotton Club. Except for her color. And she'd have to smile some of the time. Needs to do something with her hair. Tell me about it. So, why, why'd he pick her? Beats me. She's hard to be around. Hard how? I don't know; she's sort of physical. (Long laughter.) Meaning? You know, jungle-y. (Choking laughter.)

While they talked, four rivulets coursed down the side of



when she pulled him to her. It was hide-and-seek then, tearing through spiderweb trellises. Losing, then finding each other in a pitch-black room; stumbling, bumping heads, tripping, falling, grabbing a foot, a neck, then the whole person, they dared darkness with loud laughter and moans of pleasure and pain. Birds screeched. Cartons toppled and crashed. Floorboards creaked, then split beneath them, raking their nakedness and sharpening their play, lending it a high seriousness he could never have imagined.

"No big deal?"

"Well, it did get, you know. Rough, I guess you'd say. Know what I mean?" He pushed—no, slammed—her against the wall after she squeezed his privates—and she had groaned happily instead of crying out when he bit her nipple, hard. It shifted then. From black to red. It was as though outside, looking on, he could see himself clearly in the dark—his bruised sweaty skin, his glittering teeth and half-closed eyes.

"What did you do, Romen? Out with it."

"Not me. Her."

"Will you just say it, boy?"

"She plays hard, that's all. I mean she likes being hurt."

Sandler braked at an intersection. It was a moment before he realized he had stopped at a green light. Romen was looking through the passenger window, waiting for some response, some grown-man comment worthy of his trust, his confidence, an answer to the question coiled in his confession. A chuckle from his grandfather would mean one thing. Reproach would mean another thing. Was there anything else? The traffic light changed.

"What do you think about that?" Sandler drove slowly through the red light pretending to be searching for an address.

"Weird. Wack." She didn't just like it. She preferred it. But the rush was in him as well. Standing next to himself, cold, unsmiling, watching himself inflict and suffer pain above scream level where a fresh kind of joy lay, the Romen who could not bear mittens laced to a bedpost, purple polish on bitten nails, the mud and vegetable



The hiking boots, purchased with Anna Krieg's instruction, are what she needs. The road to the hotel is treacherous for a hysterical pedestrian on a chilly night in tennis shoes and no socks. The tough-minded Anna Krieg would have been prepared: rucksack, water, flashlight, *brot*, dried fish, nuts. Christine had learned how to cook from her while they both, wives of American soldiers, were stationed in Germany. Barely twenty, devoted to the PX, Anna was adept with fresh vegetables, varieties of potatoes, seafood, but especially voluptuous desserts. Cooking lessons and beer made the evenings cheery and postponed the collapse of Christine's marriage into a desolation exactly like the quarters they lived in. In return for the friendship, Christine agreed one day to hike with Anna. She bought the good boots and rucksack Anna recommended and early one morning they set out. Halfway to the halfway point, Christine stopped and begged to cancel, to hitch back to the base. Her feet were on fire; her lungs hyphenating. Anna's face registered extreme disappointment but understanding too. "Poor, soft American, no stamina, no will." They turned back in silence.

When Christine opened the door she found Ernie locked in

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name singers, bandleaders. But he took Sandler, too, even though he was just a local man working in the cannery like most everybody then. But Papa could mix with all kinds . . .”

*He won't like this old-lady suit I got on.*

“People just adored him and he was good to everybody. Of course, his will left me the most, though to hear some people, a wife shouldn't be provided for . . .”

*Like the boys at Campus A shooting baskets, and us looking at them through the wire fence, daring them. Them looking back at us, promising us.*

“I was lucky, I know that. My mother was against it at first. Papa's age and all. But Daddy knew a true romance when he saw it. And look how it turned out. Almost thirty years of perfect bliss . . .”

*The Guards were jealous. Roughing them up because we kept on looking, greedy, like fans, watching those damp sweats rise.*

“Neither one of us even looked at anybody else. But it sure wasn't easy-greasy running the hotel. Everything was on me. With nobody to count on. Nobody . . .”

*Sixteen at least, maybe more. Shoots baskets, too. I can tell.*

“Are you listening to me? I'm giving you important information. You should be writing all this down.”

“I'll remember.”

Half an hour later, Junior had changed back into leather. When Romen saw her walking up the driveway, he thought what his grandfather must have thought, and grinned in spite of himself.

Junior liked that. Then, suddenly, like the boys at Campus A, he slouched—indifferent, ready to be turned down, ready to pounce. Junior didn't give him time to decide on the matter.

“Don't tell me you're fucking these old women too.”

Too.

Romen's embarrassment fought with a flush of pride. She assumed he was capable of it. Of having scored so many times he could choose any woman—and in pairs, Theo, in pairs.

“They tell you that?”

*For and with Ardelia*

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Canada Limited, Toronto. Distributed by Random House, Inc., New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Morrison, Toni.

Love / Toni Morrison.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-375-40944-0 (alk. paper)

1. African American women—Fiction. 2. Seaside resorts—Fiction.
3. Hotelkeepers—Fiction. 4. Rich people—Fiction.
5. Death—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3563.08749L68 2003

813'.54—dc21

2003052737

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication  
Morrison, Toni.

Love / Toni Morrison.

ISBN 0-676-97618-2

I. Title.

PS3563.08749L68 2003

813'.54

C2003-902090-8

Manufactured in the United States of America  
First Edition