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VERITYLA

BE BRAVE

Cherry Bomb (Cassandra Atherton)

Posted on May 30, 2012 by [verityla](#) in [Novel Excerpts](#)



I wished it were a phantom pregnancy. I prayed I was really Christine and had been impregnated by the Angel of Music. Or the ghost of Gaston Leroux. Not you. Never you. Never Dale Fiddich. Not Mr Dale Fiddich of Ascot Vale. No letters after your name. Just the school roll at your fingertips. I scrolled through the results thinking that 'yahoo' must be a sick joke in this context. A sorry smorgasbord of choices. 'It won't be long now,' I told myself, 'not too much longer.' I scrolled more furiously. Titles blurred. Blue font filled the screen. I felt the buzz in my veins. Life blood. Blue veins. Blue like the computer screen. And the Wedgwood my mother had locked away in the crystal cabinet. Just in case. Fear of the two 'S's: smashing or selling. But I had never wanted to break china. Only men's hearts. And I couldn't be bothered stealing either. China and hearts weren't worth all that much in the end. They couldn't smother or suffocate or crush so I had no use for them. I clicked on the third website.

Sheryl Lynn Massip placed her six-month-old son behind the tyre of her car and ran him over, repeatedly crushing his head.

Josephine Mesa beat her two year old son with a toilet plunger then buried her battered baby in a trash bin.

I didn't have to read the screen, I knew it off by heart. But seeing it in print made it real. Made it possible. Made the blood rush to my head. Made the plane ticket under my pillow my last chance. Last week I had been given a Barbie suitcase on wheels. Small enough for hand luggage. Pink enough to be mine. You told me that New York would make it dirty. Your orange case was filthy from all the travelling. But I wasn't going to New York. Not this time. No little apartment in Brooklyn. No Empire Diner or Tom's Restaurant. No celebration eggs sunny side up. No eggs at all. Ever again.

If only they had photos on the website. Photos of the dead babies. Photos of the mothers' relief. The mothers' first uninterrupted night of sleep since the baby's birth. No conscience. No Macbeth to murder sleep or somnambulist Lady Mac to wring her hands. Just joy. Joy at the silence. At having your life back. At being in control again. And having bubble baths and a social life and young friends who have never contemplated being stitched up after giving birth. My best friend's dad fainted during a video of a woman giving birth in a Health and Human Relations class when I was in primary school. He had five daughters. We thought it was funny. He didn't faint during the video of the abortion. I closed the lid of the computer. I knew when I opened it again that Sheryl and Josephine would still be there. Waiting for me. Inviting me to join them. Special club. Perhaps there would be an addition. I decided to refresh the screen when I returned. Just in case I was already there. For my murderous thoughts. And vanity. I wanted a caramel macchiato. For all of us. Bitter but syrupy. If the barrista asked me if I wanted extra caramel on the top I would tell her 'only if you criss-cross it across the top. Like ballerina's ribbons'. I wondered fleetingly if anybody had ever strangled a baby with a pointe shoe ribbon. Starbucks. I remember what it was like. Before I knew. Before the plane ticket. Before the search for filicide.

I didn't know I was carrying your baby then, I just wanted more tenderness. But you were always scared. Too scared to touch me or bring me daffodils until I asked. You wanted the schoolgirl and I just wanted to play house. But I only had six more months to be a schoolgirl and a lifetime to be a wife. Meeting lonely men in Starbucks was the saddest thing I have ever done. Up until now. If they have sex with me then the onus is no longer on you. It

could be any of their babies. It wouldn't necessarily be yours then and that would make it easier. For when the time comes.

He sees me and I can feel him smiling into the back of my head. I continue writing. It's his lucky afternoon. He sits down and he tells me about his daughter and his passion for swimming. Solitary sport. Too much time to think in a place too much like the womb. I'm afraid of drowning even though I am a good swimmer. I represented my school in backstroke at the interschool sports. At Oak Park. I got caught on the ropes. Perilous zig zag. I peek at the clock on my mobile phone and hope he doesn't see me looking. If he had a knitted hat with a pom-pom on the top and a set of mittens he could be straight out of an American Christmas movie filled with snowmen and turkeys.

I know he is the one I have arranged to meet because he looks out of place here. Argyle scarf. Hair too long and shaggy. Not as good looking as Darcy in *Bridget Jones* but just as dated and daggy. He might even have looked better in a reindeer jumper than Colin Firth. If he has a daughter he could easily be the father of my baby after we have sex. Except of course that I am already pregnant. But that is just a minor detail. Insignificant in the scheme of things. He is nervous and tries to look into my eyes but I can't give him that. I can only give him my body. Once.

'How old are you?' he asks before we leave Starbucks.

'Old enough. Does it matter?' I smile at him.

'Well, I guess not. Are you older than my daughter?' he presses, taking my elbow like my old-fashioned grandfather.

'How old is she?' I reply.

'Fifteen,' he continues.

'Absolutely.' Absolutely leaves no doubt. I will absolutely have sex with him. Dale is absolutely the father of my unborn baby.

'But not by much?' he pushes.

I wanted to scream Freud and Oedipus. I wanted to fiddle with the salt shaker but there are no salt shakers on the tables at Starbucks. I always feel better when I feel up a salt shaker. I don't mind the glass ones but my preference is for the cold, metallic, phallic ones.

'Look, are you up for this or not?' I snap, already knowing what his answer will be.

I return to my computer. Hand on my stomach. Throw my sodden panties in the wash. I pick up Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. I pin up a poster of Brooke Shields and her children. I fantasise about leaving my child with Gwen Harwood in the park.

Late at night. I don't rely on the moonlight. I have an electric lamp. I switch on my computer. There is another one.

Asuka Lee electrocuted her baby in a bathtub and then buried her in the basement beneath her old toys and clothes.

It wouldn't be long.

Tags: [Cassandra Atherton](#)