

MY PERFECT PROM

An original text by Lori Weber

My heart is beating fast when I ring Celine's bell.

"You look wonderful," her mom says. "Come in!"

"Honey, your date is here," her dad calls up the stairs. He says it casually, like he's used to dates coming to pick up Celine. I hope that's not true. I want to be the only one.

Celine is stunning in a satin vanilla gown. It's asymmetrical, off-beat, just like her. One side sits just above her knee, the other falls to her ankle. Her oak-coloured skin looks golden in this light and two sparkling earrings dangle to her shoulders, matching the sparkle in her belt.

My hand that holds the corsage is shaking. I can barely get it out of the plastic box. Celine keeps her eyes on mine as I fasten the band around her wrist.

She squeezes my fingers and winks at me. We didn't know if we'd make it this far, but we have.

"Have a great time at the prom," her mom says, hugging us both.

Her dad follows us to the limo, snapping shots through the smoky windows, just like paparazzi.

When we're finally alone, I reach across and kiss her, lightly. I don't want to smudge her makeup.

We hold hands as the limo winds through familiar streets, streets we've walked twice a day for the last five years, not always together.

A dozen limos are lined up ahead of us outside the school. We watch people spilling out from each one, girls in gowns, boys in suits. Our teachers are lined up on either side of the red carpet, clapping for everyone who walks between them.

It's our turn now. We watch their faces – all those teachers who gave us way too much homework, cheered us on, or chewed us out. The tests and lectures and dumb assignments flash before my eyes. "If you could invite three historical figures to dinner, who would it be?"

But wait – that's how I fell in love with Celine. Her answer was so awesome. Cleopatra, Sojourner Truth, and Marie Curie. Powerful women, leaders, inventors, just like she wanted to be one day. And I wanted to be there too, by her side, cheering her on.

People say you can't say "forever" at my age, because I'm too young, but I say they're wrong. I say I know what's in my heart and tonight my heart is bursting for Celine.

The gym has been transformed into the Solar System. Stars, comets, meteors and asteroids project onto the dark walls, and a milky way spans the black ceiling. The eight planets are suspended above us, each a different size and colour. Hula hoops hang around Saturn. Roomba robots zig and zag across the floor, flashing.

The techno music suits the space theme, and Celine and I are dancing our way across the floor.

Everywhere we look, we see our classmates transformed. People who've never looked our way watch us dance past, eyes wide. People who've bullied us stand against the wall, holding it up. They can't hurt us here – they can't hurt us ever again. None of the past five years matter. We're done. We're out of here.

Everyone is suddenly equal under the flashing disco ball of outer space. Pops of silver light pick out bow ties and red sneakers and bare shoulders and belt buckles. Hands in the air, feet thumping, hair flying. We are like some ancient tribe and this is our ritual. We are fierce.

This is our grand finale.

Being here with Celine, holding her tight when the music slows down even a notch, makes me feel like I can do anything. Tonight, the future that once was as scary as a dark alley at night seems

bright and possible. Tonight, I could reach out and grab the planets, even Uranus, the farthest one that is lit up above the basketball hoop.

We twirl the length of the gym and grab some punch. Our friends find us and circle us, orbiting us like little moons. Celine is the centre, the sun. If the moons are lit at all, it's because of the light that shines off her. She hugs everyone, sprinkling stardust on their shoulders.

I grab Celine's hand and pull her away. There's time for us all to be together, later, at the cottage, but right now, I want to go to Mars with Celine. We are Curiosity and Perseverance, landing in the pit of red clay up on the stage. It's actually rust-coloured confetti, knee deep. In the centre sits a rocket ship with a wide window. We climb the stool in the back and poke our faces through – her ear against mine, our hair electric, our fingers entwined – black and white in perfect harmony. We are astronauts, explorers, finding a new world. I breath in her scent – vanilla. The photographer signals for us to smile, but we're already smiling. We're in outer space, floating in a tin can of happiness.

The flash of the bulb blinds us and the gym vanishes.

The music stops and a loud speaker crackles to life. Our principal's voice comes on, almost breaking the spell except for Celine's hand in mine which keeps me grounded in Mars.

"It's time to crown the king and queen of Prom 2021," she says. She uses the same voice as when she announces an assembly. I squeeze Celine's hand. I am not ready to come crashing down to earth.

Blah blah blah.... She calls out two names, but we aren't listening. We have snuck out the stage door and are running down the hallway in our stocking feet, sliding past classrooms we'll never have to sit in again.

We hear cheering behind us, but it's faint. We don't need to know who it is. We only need to know that we are here for each other.

“You are my queen, Celine,” I say to her.

“And you are mine, Cassandra,” she says, holding the sash on my red gown.

I see stars when she kisses me.