

Spellbound

by Elisa Hall

Second Prize

We were fourteen. The beginning was a birthday party, hidden in a cupboard. The others counted to ten, coming, ready or not! Pressed against each other silent until discovered and in that time we were stretched along our lengths, all parts touching. Her breath a tendril on my neck and it was there in the darkness that her hands interrogated me purposefully and I learned I was another creature. After that I studied her. I wanted to be like her more than I wanted to be myself. Those other girls we hung out with could blow perfect smoke rings but they were mean they would fight you. She was mighty compared to them. It was clear not to let them see what I had become.

Her name meant heavenly. Celeste. French names were in vogue then. She had old fashioned cupid bow lips like those silent black and white movie stars. She stuck her hipbones out sideways playing pool, leaning forward over the cue pocketing the black and then the white which rolled in after it. She laughed then showing her teeth with the gap and the tender front of her neck. She rolled her cigarettes and I watched her fingers carefully.

She invited me to stay at her house.

"You girls are so over the top," Celeste's mother said, rolling her eyes, chiding at us dressed in faux fur and glitter platform boots and blue eyeshadow to go to the shops and buy hot chips. Her mother didn't know what we did in the dark. How we listened to David Bowie singing "All you pretty things" and knew it was about us. Our eyebrows were plucked away to a single line, hair cut like David Bowie. We presented like identical twins in high waisted jeans and giant hoop earrings, but Celeste was confident unlike me, and I rode invisible and spellbound in her slipstream.

Celeste took me down to the horse paddocks in the gully behind her house, holding my hand, leading the way. She was always the leader, like when we danced to T Rex.

"Well you're dirty and sweet," she sang, "You've got a hubcap diamond star halo," as she swung her hips from side to side and smirked at me.

"Imagine being David Bowie's kid and having a song written for you," she sighed. It made my heart strain with wanting.

She laid me down on the dusty horse blanket, red and blue checks with the horse Jay standing near us towering over us but gentle, his breath streaming foggy out of his nostrils and the air smelling like fresh hay and

the sunlight warm on our smooth young skin. After she had taken off both her clothes and mine and we had goosebumps from the freshness of the air, she said.

“You could be Marilyn Monroe when she was Norma Jean. Before she reinvented herself.”

She lay on top of me the length of me again and kissed me and the clouds rushed past as my pupils opened and closed. And then, pointing to herself,

“See that? That's my pearl.”

I never met another girl who did that.

I sat next to Celeste in maths class and forced myself to balance within her gravitational pull. The boys teased her and pulled at her bra straps. She was friendly enough but she was inscrutable to them. She touched her little finger to mine with our secret code. We wore silver bracelets up our arms, one for each person we were supposed to have slept with but mine were all for her no boy had touched me. We were in trouble with the Principal for wearing them; he knew the meaning and he called us little whores but we wore them for each other. Fugitive. Defiant.

There were nights in her bed with candlelight deep shadows and flickering, where we'd wrest off our pyjamas and touch each other until we were both open as split pomegranates juices and all.

“What do you want for your life?” she asked.

“You. A thousand times you and I will love you forever.”

She laughed her delightful laugh as my eyes brimmed with tears bursting and my heart exploded like coloured fireworks erupting skywards.

In the morning I messed up the trundle to look as dishevelled as I was.

“You're a good girl,” her mother said to me at the table.

“She is,” said Celeste, and I couldn't look at her then.