Hot Dog Summer

Summer should be about hot dogs, fireworks, vacations, and all kinds of other fun things. But when the door slammed shut behind Mom, well… She slumped into her favorite chair and rubbed her hands down her face.

"Charles got it," she said "He had the experience they were looking for, they told me, the leadership they wanted. That go get 'er attitude."

That lie knocked the wind from me like a punch to the gut.

Now we couldn't afford the vacation Mom and Dad had been planning. Hot dogs, probably. They're cheap. At least the town fireworks would be free.

"Go do your homework," Dad said.

"But it's –"

"George," he said.

And it's not like he just said my name. He said it the way parents always say your name when you're in trouble, like how they drag out a syllable so it's more *Geooorge*. I hate that.

I mean, really, he wanted me to write my school paper on July 3rd. *July* 3rd. Not exactly the middle of the school year. Not that my stupid seventh grade teacher Mr. Howe listened when I grumbled about him assigning summer work. Not that Dad listened, either. And not that Mom would listen now that she didn't get the promotion. Or, rather, she didn't get it *again*.

My parents' voices in the living room were little more than a mumble drowned by the beats of Sybil's music playing from across the hall as she blabbed away to a friend on the phone.

I pulled a library book from the stack in my room and thumbed through the pages.

An illustration of a Revolutionary War soldier sitting under a tree bleeding caught my eye, and I stopped. I read about Deborah Sampson; a woman who pretended to be a man so she could fight the British. Interesting, sure. But she wasn't exactly who Mr. Howe was talking about when he asked us to write two pages on what voices we thought were left out of the Revolutionary War, whose voices still aren't heard today. Not hardly.

After all, there are all kinds of famous women from the Revolutionary War. Like Abigail Adams and… Well, lots. All kinds of women from then have had their stories told.

Mom raised her voice in the living room, though not loud enough so I could hear anything. I leaned back in my chair, closer to the door. I'd left it open a crack. Sybil opened hers then, and our eyes met and she looked how I felt: Worried.

I'm a kid, not oblivious. I knew prices kept going up because of one war or another, or someone's whim in Washington. It's hard not to, when dinner is what it always is each night.

More boxed mac and cheese.

More popcorn parties with a movie on television.

And more pancakes, for a not-so-special-anymore breakfast for dinner.

Mom and Dad's voices dropped to a whisper again, and Sybil shut her door. I grabbed another book, and another, and another, and…

Each and every one was about the same group of guys who signed the Declaration, who wrote the Constitution. Who took up arms because, *All men are created equal.* I groaned. "Boring." And I dragged it out just the same as Dad.

Something occurred to me then.

Because all *men* were created equal.

Huh. Okay. Maybe Deborah Sampson was on to something.

I pulled out a page of paper and wrote, *Women during the Revolutionary War were often overlooked, much like today, with the way my mom was passed over for another promotion.*

Fireworks popped outside then, and I jumped.

We should've been outside watching. We should've been eating hot dogs. And we should've been talking about our summer vacation plans. Instead, I glanced at the pile of library books on my desk and wondered, how many other voices were silenced? How many other stories untold? How many stories never *will* be told? We always come back to the same men in each and every story. Why is that? And are things really any better now? Will they be any better for Sybil?

The house phone ringing broke my concentration. It never rings. Not since my parents refused Sybil her own phone, since she'd always be on it. So instead, she's always on ours.

I leaned back to look out the door, and I saw Sybil again. *Work,* she mouthed.

It was like a second gut punch, when I'd barely started breathing again after the first.

Dad answered but handed the phone to Mom without saying a word, because there was nothing to say. I could just see them both at the end of the hall. Not masking her mood after the day she had – and likely being called to do yet more from home – Mom answered, "Yes?"

For a breath, there was no air. For a breath, Sybil and I waited. And then in a breath, as I watched Mom, I knew our summer would be a lot better than hot dogs, fireworks, and vacations.