

She was born on the fourth of July amidst the parades, picnics, and scorching heat. They named her Liberty because it seemed fitting and patriotic considering the occasion. Marge, humming the Star-Spangled Banner, stared out the hospital window as the sky blossomed with fireworks in an array of patriotic colors, and Bert held their daughter.

They share the story every year, embellishing it here and there, always trying to convince people they'd aptly named their carefree and wild child. The other adults raised eyebrows and frowned, watching the mob of children race around the backyard, playing tag. Liberty, dark hair flying with the wind, feet bare and dusty, following the pack. Denim shorts already showing signs of all the adventures she's had thus far today. Top more gray than the crisp white it had been when they'd first put her in it. Bert grinned as Liberty whooped and screamed while she darts around, avoiding being tagged.

Exhausted and thirsty, Liberty settles in the shade with a cold slice of watermelon, its pink juices dribbling down her chin and onto her clothes. The humidity unbearable, the sun overhead, Liberty hurled water balloons like the other children, and gurgled with glee. Her laughter a secret melody to her parents' ears. Others whispered and shook their heads, but, unphased the words bounced off Bert, but lodged deep in Marge's heart.

When the hot, weary sun grew dim and began its descent to kiss the horizon, and fireflies emerged from sleep, Bert helped Liberty fill a jar to eat a slice of blueberry pie by nature's own flashlight. Sticky blue globs left purple hues on her already dirty top, but neither parent seemed to mind. When the pie was gone, they release the fireflies back into the night and join the crowd for sparklers.

Bert writes her name in the glowing spitting white light while Liberty laughs and Marge watches on, taking pictures to mark the occasion. He holds his girls tight when the firecrackers snapped and popped. When the night is dark at last, they clamber on the picnic blanket and watch the fireworks, loud and fierce, as each one explodes into an array of beautiful colors and shapes in the sky. Liberty, asleep in Bert's lap, Marge leaned against his shoulder, humming as he whispers the story of their daughter's birth.

Back home, Bert insists on carrying a sleeping Liberty to her room. Marge paused outside the

door for a moment before pushing it open. The dark child's room was stale, the crib in the corner dusty and unused. Diapers on a changing table lay where they fell, the closet ajar full of clothes with tags still on them.

Marge glanced around the room they only entered once a year. Bert's face fell and his arms dropped to his side. Here, in the quiet stillness of an unused room, the real story unfolds. The tale of Liberty, the baby who arrived prematurely amongst the pomp and circumstance, but departed all too soon.

Author's Note:

An older writing prompt entitled Born on the 4th of July, inspired this week's story. My mind ran in wild directions with it when I sat down with it sometime last year. I ended up writing several versions, but the one I opted to complete and tidy up is the one above.

It sways from my usual one hundred word pieces this year, and hopefully you, Dear Reader, don't mind. While editing the original raw piece, I limited myself to 500 words. I adore the freedom to write with unlimited words, but a firm word count helps stretch my writing skills, forcing me to focus on the details which are most important to convey the story to the reader.

The Reluctant Author