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THE DAY THE DRUMMER FELL OUT OF THE WINDOW--1885
By Blanche Somerville

The boom of the old cannon on the point below Downieville, and the firing of anvils at the blacksmith's shop below us, awakened us early that morning. We (my older sister, younger brother and I) dressed hurriedly, but lingered for a look at my treasurers, the firecrackers and other things that had taken 50 cents of my 4th of July money.

Our house was high on the hill above town, and as we looked down the sun was rising and the flag just being raised on the flag pole at the Plaza. The town was gaily decorated, for it had invited the country around to a gala celebration.

As we looked, a buggy drawn by a spanking team of bay horses whirled up to the hotel, and the occupants alighted. The men helped the women over the mud and steps to the sidewalk. Both men and women wore long dusters; the women were heavily veiled for mountain roads were dusty then. Many other vehicles were to follow, for the neighboring towns sent their delegations to help celebrate the glorious Fourth.

I hurried into the house to get ready for my part in the day's program. The younger girls were to be states in the float representing the United States of America. So, dressed in my white dress, all decorated and starched, flounced and be-ribboned, I made my way down to the Plaza, where we assembled to take our places on our float, which was decorated with red, white and blue bunting.

As I went on, excitement grew and thrills raced through and through me. Fir and spruce trees lined the streets, their fragrance mingling with the smell of freshly sprinkled streets, laced through with the odor of bombs and firecrackers---the unforgettable 4th of July smell. There is nothing like it now.

Up at the Plaza all seemed confusion. Would we ever be ready? Then our States' names were draped over our shoulders and across



our fronts. I was New Jersey, wishing to be New York instead. We were lifted to our places, lining the float both sides, equally. Then came our beautiful Goddess of Liberty, blond hair flowing; gold-crowned, white robed, she occupied her throne. Beside her stood Uncle Sam, with striped trousers, blue coat, tall hat.

Now the Grand Marshal rode by on his prancing black horse, getting the parade in order. Leading, a vehicle bearing several youths with the colors. The breeze lifting the flags to reveal the red, white and blue. Then the brass band, the drummer with his big bass drum. He seemed about as round as his drum.

Everyone was contributing his part that day, Native Sons and Daughters, civic and fraternal orders, school children, horseback riders, and to be seen later, The Clampers. All had a part in the wonderful parade.

Ready at last, the drum gave the signal, "Left, left, left-right-left." Then swinging into a march, the band went on, and soon we followed. The driver seemed hardly able to hold his four horse team.

Past China Town, the brewery, the upper light bridge, the foundry, the old school house, the residences, to the rear corner, then across the upper bridge where two branches of the Yuba unite, and into town again. Then across the lower bridge to the Court House, where the Sheriff and aides greeted us. The band responded with a number, I think it was "Hail Columbia." Back to the Plaza we disbanded for an interval to rest and find rest and find refreshments.

I retrieved my handkerchief with the money tied in one corner, and then went to the ice cream parlor for home made ice cream and cake, Mrs. S. had made. How good it was!

The patriotic program was held in Armory Hall, above the livery stable, and so my parents gathered us together as it was a "must" to attend that. How right they were!

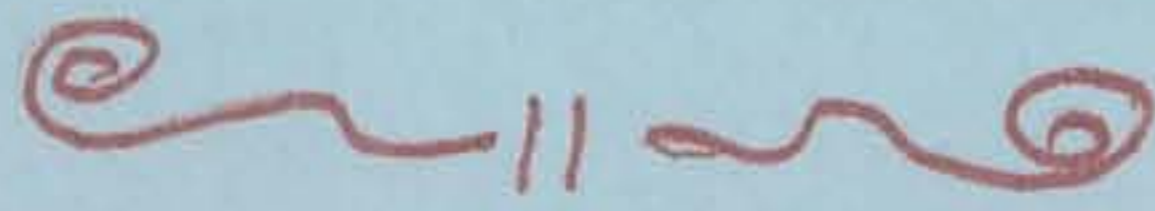
The hall was well filled as we entered, the dignitaries chosen for the occasion seated on the decorated rostrum, a table with a water pitcher and glass at hand. The chairman introduced the officers and guests of the day, then a soprano soloist came on to lead in the "Star Spangled Banner." The band playing the melody softly. We stood for that.

The band was present taking their places in the upper right corner of the hall near an open window. The drummer, mopping his face took his seat in the open window.

The reading of the Declaration of Independence followed. It seemed very tiresome to me, but we heard it, all of it. The chairman said he was to present "a few remarks." As often happens, those few remarks went on and on. It was very warm, the benches were hard, my feet didn't touch the floor. I went to sleep.

Awakened by a sudden commotion, up near the band, I saw the sun shining through the open window where the drummer had been. He had been sleepy too, and fell backward onto a shed roof far below. We waited silently until word came back he was not seriously injured. But the chairman had lost the thread of his "few remarks" so he introduced the honored speaker of the day.

The speaker was given the courtesy of complete attention which he held by his charming manner, so genial, friendly and sincere. I suppose there was much I did not understand, but as he finished I knew one thing; I was glad and proud to be an American. That speaker



was Tiley L. Ford, later to become Attorney General for the State of California.

Then the chairman read some announcements; there would be a picnic lunch served at the grounds up the river, followed by sports, games, contests, and baseball. In the evening another big event, a Clamper parade.

The little minister said the benediction, then we stood to sing "America." We welcomed the free period of the afternoon.

We enjoyed the afternoon with our guests. Everyone seemed ready for the picnic lunch, most of all the cold pink lemonade.

Now at least there was time for our fireworks. We had firecrackers, big and little, sparklers, whirling pin wheels, shooting stars, and a number of punks, or joss sticks with which we lighted our treasurers. No matches!

About 5 o'clock mother called us in for the traditional 4th of July dinner. We had fried chicken and cream gravy, new potatoes, peas, corn, a vegetable salad and for dessert, chocolate cake or cherry pie, and best of all, watermelon.

But the celebration was only half over. As it grew dark, there was a half-hour of fireworks, a grand display we thought. Then came the Clampers' parade, a feature unique to the mountain communities.

It was a torchlight procession, like a combination circus parade and masquerade. First a vehicle bringing the Noble Grand Humbug and a companion with huge horn, the Clampers' hew-gag; there was a raucous band, the unpredictable goat, a donkey and clown, a two-humped camel with human feet. Other animals and features joined the fun.

Near the end came a rooster opening and closing his yellow "beak" --I was sure I knew who that was. At the very last a blue devil, with horns and tail, and pitch fork.

The celebration was to be concluded with a grand ball, held in the Amory Hall. Mother said we could go look for a while. The hall was quite filled when we came in, the ladies in their beautiful gowns, escorts in black or dark suits. The musicians were getting their instruments ready, softly tuning violins and cello with the piano. An odd looking thin man with clarinet seemed to be ready.

The caller announced the Grand March, taen here they came, led by lovely Eva and her tall escort. She wore a gown blue as her eyes, her dark hair piled high on her head. She was graceful and dignified. I loved her petite sister who followed, brown hair brown eyes, in a cloud of pink tulle. And as all the rest came on I knew many of them: The stately judge, with his slender wife, Tiley Ford and his sparkling brunette partner--the gay, red-haired lawyer with his companion--and all the rest, a goodly company indeed.

The music changed, they swung into the quadrille, directed by the caller. The "round dances" followed, waltzes, polkas, schottisches, versovian, with an occasional quadrille. Gaiety increased, as they danced the Virginia Reel, then the hilarious Paul Jones. The rhythm, the melody, the light and color and gaiety were entrancing but finally my father said, "Time to go home."

Reluctantly, I stumbled the narrow stairs, out onto the board sidewalk; past a darkened doorway, where a figure huddled, apparently asleep. He had celebrated too well.

We went on into the black velvet darkness, the strains of "Over The Waves" coming to us faintly. The end of the day for us, and perhaps, almost the end of an era.

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