

Tales My Mother Told Me

She induced the squaw by friendly gestures, to come into the house (all conversation was in sign language, punctuated by guttural ughs) and she proceeded to touch every article in the kitchen.

"This" and "Ugh" over and over. Then she tried articles in the bedroom, even to pillow and counterpane, but the response was only a look of bored contempt. Finally as a last resort she pointed to clothes hanging under a shelf on the wall. A little ray of hope came into the dark eyes -- and at last -- the coveted article came to light!

What do you think it was?

A bustle! A huge contraption of wires and tape, worn by fashionable ladies under immense puffs and yards of plaitings and ruffles. The squaw fairly clutched her prize and all the hundred wrinkles of her dark countenance squeezed together into a picture of satisfaction.

She knew where it was to be worn, too! Placing the bustle carefully on her generous rump, she tied the tapes securely around her waist. With a final grunt of farewell she walked alone with great dignity down the path into the woods. The bustle rose and fell with every step. My grandmother sank into a chair, fanned her face with the dish towel and used strong language. "Well, I never!"

My mother, then a little girl, had always accepted the Indians with trust and friendship, until one evening while coming home from some games in the forest, she was confronted by a big brave. He looked her over carefully. My mother had dark eyes and long black hair. Laying his hand lightly on her head, Thundercloud said: "Make good papoose!"

Mother gave a yelp of fright and ran for home as if a whole war party were at her heels. For years, she said, after dark, she would see an Indian lurking behind every tree or stump ready to take her scalp -- or at least abduct her into the Indian tribes.

It was only when she was nearly grown and had met with an accident that the feeling was dispelled. My grandmother didn't like to have my mother ride horseback. The roads were poor, trees thick; if one were in trouble it might be days before an injured person would be found. But riding was in my mother's blood and I am afraid she disobeyed.

The nearest neighbor, a mile and a half away, had a horse which could be ridden. Not knowing of the injunction against riding, he allowed Sara to use Firefly frequently. One day while she was riding down a wooded path, something startled the horse. It bolted; my mother hit a big tree branch and was dislodged from the saddle. Her foot was caught in the stirrup and she was dragged along the ground, only a miracle saving her from being killed by the flying hoofs.