

Mountain Mayhem

The McIntyre Adventures #6

MOUNTAIN MAYHEM

By
GERALD L. GUY



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MOUNTAIN MAYHEM

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Gerald L. Guy

DEDICATION

To my faithful readers. It's hard to believe this is the twentieth novel I have published. I couldn't have done it without each and every one of you. The fact you keep coming back is one of the great joys of my life.

LOOKING BACK

Highlights from the McIntyre Adventures

For readers who are new to The McIntyre Adventures, let me catch you up as well as familiarize you with some of the characters and the roles they play in this series of award-winning novels

Gus McIntyre is fourteen years old when outlaws attack he and his father en route to the gold fields of the Dakota Territory. His father is killed and Gus wanders for days until he is rescued by a group of Texas cattlemen who are driving Longhorns to the thriving gold mining town of Deadwood. Eventually, he will avenge his father's murder. (Run Like the Wind)

Working for the Circle-H Ranch, Gus is on the trail of cattle thieves when his is drygulched and wounded in an effort to retrieve the stolen steers. An ancient Apache chief, named *Tatonga*, befriends him and tends to his injuries. Then, they recover the Hamilton's stolen property and return to the ranch. (Run to Danger)

(These first two books were combined into a boxed set, entitled "PAYBACK: Eye for an Eye, Book #1.)"

Gus and Circle-H trail cook, Toots, are making their way back to the ranch with supplies when they discover a drifter, stranded in a sandstorm and near death. Before taking his last breath, the drifter slips a treasure map into the young cowhand's fingers. It is thought to be a guide to the lost wealth of deposed Mexican Emperor Maximilian. Outlaws, a federal agent and the KKK covet the lost treasure. Gus and two friends, Kate and Lizzy Sanders, own the maps and are forced seek refuge in the village of *Chief Tatonga*. Once there, they recover a portion of the treasure. (Chasing Gold, Book #2)

After six months in hiding, Gus and his friends return to the Circle-H Ranch with bags of valuable jewels and precious metals. Slowed by the weight of the treasure and spring rains, Gus begins telling his friends the tale of how his great-great-grandfather, James

Oliver McIntosh, came to the New World. The amazing story includes how James rescued his would-be bride, Rhona, who was held captive in a Cherokee camp in Kentucky. (Chasing the Past, Book #3)

With money to burn and the desire to begin a new life, Gus and his best friend, Junior Hamilton, decide to escort Kate and Lizzy to Denver, where chaos reigns. Meanwhile, James and Rhona McIntyre leave the home of Daniel and Rebecca Boone to start anew in the most northern territory of the Virginia Commonwealth. They are among the first white people to call the wilderness home. (Dangerous Crossings, Book #4)

Gus, Kate and Corncob find Junior hiding out in Saguache, Colorado. He's got a surprise for them, though. He's not only struck it rich in the San Juan Mountains but has landed himself a wife. Again, they become the target of unsavory outlaws who want their riches. Will they make it back to Texas unscathed? (Unwanted Pursuit, Book #5)

James and Rhona invite a kidnapped and abused Mohawk woman and her son into their home, but their coexistence is fraught with hardship and trial. As revolt against British tyranny darkens the skies above the American Colonies, the Scottish couple who found peace in the Allegheny Mountains cannot avoid pain and hardship. When all hell breaks loose, Col. George Washington arrives on the scene with another Scotsman who will help save the day. (Mountain Mayhem, Book #6)

Enjoy!

PREFACE

Have you ever noticed how life seems to magically flow through twists and turns, as if humans are mere marionettes and their movements directed by a force of much greater power?

It is true today, as well as it was in the eighteenth century when Rhona and James McIntyre reach the most northern region of the Virginia Commonwealth. They had fled the Carolinas and British demands, leaving behind their friends, Daniel and Rebecca Boone, to forge a new life in the mountainous region we now know as West Virginia.

In the days of British rule, the Appalachian Mountains mark the boundary of colonial civilization in the New World. The British Monarchy denies colonists expansion to the mountains and beyond because it knows a wide-spread population will be impossible to manage and tax. The American Colonies are one of King George's major sources of revenue. He uses it to fund global conflicts and acquisitions.

There is no stopping the migration of American settlers, however. When James McIntyre takes his young family up the New River to the uncharted territory, he finds green, fertile land that reminded him of his Scottish homeland. They are among the first white settlers to call the mountainous region home.

They survive in a stark and harsh land and never once consider their isolation a liability. Life has a way of playing tricks on busy and unsuspecting humans. Violence and turmoil erupt and alter the plans of the McIntyres.

As fate would have it, they are befriended by a young colonel in the Virginia Militia by the name of George Washington. The coincidental meeting and friendship provides momentary stability due to Washington's vast knowledge of the region.

Again, by chance, Washington meets another enterprising Scotsman, young Graeme O'Malley, during one of his many trips to the mountains. O'Malley was kidnapped and pressed into service

aboard a pirate ship at the age of twelve. He escapes a tyrannical captain in Norfolk and is rushes to grasp freedom in the western mountain range when their paths cross.

Washington convinces O'Malley and his partner, Tiberius Brown, to let his small patrol be their guide to the Elk Creek Valley, where the McIntyres can help them plant roots. Of course, the future father of a fledgling country, tries to convince the two runaways to join the cause of the Virginia Militia because the American Colonies are inching closer to rebellion against the British. With Red Coats violently forcing the King's will throughout the New World, freedom remains a fleeting dream.

“Mountain Mayhem” tells the story of how unlikely forces collide in the shadow of the Appalachian Mountains. The pages are filled with adventure and excitement. I hope you enjoy reading the sixth entry in The McIntyre Adventures as much as I enjoyed its creation.

“If all else fails, I will retreat up the Valley of Virginia, plant my flag on the Blue Ridge, rally around the Scotch-Irish of that region, and make my last stand for liberty amongst a people who will never submit to tyranny whilst there is a man left to draw a trigger.”

GEN. GEORGE WASHINGTON

1777, from Valley Forge

Gerald L. Guy

PART I

Chasing Spirits

CHAPTER I

Virginia Commonwealth, 1772

James McIntyre's heart hurt each time he looked at the Mohawk woman he helped rescue. She had been savagely beaten and abused while kidnapped by a pair of depraved mountain men. Her eyes were blackened, nose broken and lips split from the beatings she endured. He worried about what other horrible wounds she might be hiding.

They were en route to his homestead in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, the most northern territory of the Virginia Commonwealth. James hoped his wife, Rhona, would be able to help the woman recover from her injuries.

McIntyre was on a hunting excursion deep in the mountains when a desperate Indian boy, named Hawk, entered his night camp. Frantically, he sought the Scotsman's help to rescue his kidnapped mother. Two mountain men had entered the abandoned Mohawk village, killed the boy's grandfather and abducted his mother. Eight-year-old Hawk was able to escape detection and ran off to find help.

James and the boy bonded quickly as they pursued the two lawless French trappers. Hawk proved to be an excellent tracker, and McIntyre was able to overtake the men in a little over twenty-four hours. He overheard them laughing and battering the bound woman. He left Hawk in charge of his horse as he investigated and devised a plan to rescue the besieged woman. The last thing he wanted was for the young boy to witness his mother's abuse.

Undetected, he sneaked up on the night camp. What he discovered set his anger ablaze. Three people were grappling on the ground. One man grasped the woman by her bound hands. His feet were planted on her shoulders, stretching her arms above her head and rendering her defenseless. The other had her legs splayed and

laughed as he raped her. It was obvious, there was little fight left in the Mohawk woman.

He was armed with a flintlock pistol, a hunting knife and a razor-sharp sword he carried across his back in a sheath, a habit that began years ago in his native Scotland. It was his weapon of choice when engaged in close combat. He cocked the flintlock with one hand and unsheathed the sword with the other.

James took a deep breath, aimed and fired the heavy pistol into the back of the man who was holding the woman's arms. The bullet penetrated and exploded out his chest, leaving a gaping hole where his heart once beat.

The flash of gunpowder and deafening blast echoed through the night air. The bullet passed through its intended victim, lost velocity and managed to shatter a jug his rapist partner had raised to his lips. Shocked by the sudden disruption, the half-clothed Frenchman looked up to see James charging toward him with a sword raised above his head. His alarmed eyes grew to the size of small melons as he reached for his hunting knife.

He was too late. With a mighty sweep, James severed his head. It tumbled from the rapist's shoulders and landed with a thud in the remnants of the jug from which he had been drinking.

The body remained upright, still penetrating the victim. James planted a foot in the dead man's chest and kicked him backward. Then, he looked down at the severed head and said, "Take that ye bloody *muigh* (outcast). Ye rapin' days be over."

James pulled together what was left of the woman's tattered buckskin clothing, wrapped a blanket around her and shouted for the boy. The woman opened her eyes long enough to see her son at her side and passed out from her ordeal. James and Hawk loaded her on a travois and carted her to the Mohawk camp, where they rested for a day.

The woman was in an out of consciousness, but rest and nourishment hastened her recovery. James eventually invited her to join he and his family at their home at the base of the mountain.

The pair had little choice. Their tribe had migrated west to flee the encroachment of white settlers on their land. *Ojistah* (Morning Star) and her son stayed behind to care for her grandfather, an ancient shaman who had lost his vision and refused to leave the land of his ancestors.

Like her son, Star spoke almost perfect English. Her childhood was influenced by the teachings of the Catholic priests who brought Christianity to several of the tribes of northern New York. She learned to speak the white man's words but remained faithful, per her grandfather's wishes, to Mohawk beliefs and traditions. McIntyre insisted they follow him down the mountain.

"Ye will be safe there," he said. "Me wife, Rhona, will help ye tend to ya injuries. When ye are well, ye can decide what path ye and ya son take next."

She nodded her agreement.

Their descent was slow, given the woman's fragile condition. James suggested she ride on the travois that trailed one of the Indian ponies and carried the woman's lodge and belongings. She refused adamantly, insisting she and her son descend the mountain aboard their own pony. The Mohawk woman still was leery of the white man who saved her. She preferred to stay upright to keep an eye on him, despite her son's protests.

At the onset of their journey down the mountain, the boy rode in front of his mother, her arms wrapped protectively around him. As they progressed, the obstinate woman repeatedly nodded off. If not for Hawk, she would have slid to the ground and suffered additional injury. Finally, with James' help, Hawk slipped behind his mother, and the eight-year-old became the protector.

Star rested in his arms as they descended. James was eager to return home because his two-day hunting trip had stretched into a week, and he knew his wife would be worried.

James and Rhona had fled taxation and the king's profiteers, who ruled North Carolina and made survival in the heart of Colonial America unbearable. James, a skilled carpenter,

constructed a whaleboat and navigated the tough and tumble New River to the unsettled northwestern territory. The fertile land they discovered reminded the couple of their Scottish homeland. They were among the first white settlers to build a home in the mountainous country. In the past, native tribes hunted throughout the foothills and valleys. However, in their first year in their new home, the McIntyres had discovered no large native settlements. It was white trappers who presented the greatest worry.

With the help of Colonel George Washington, they settled in a lush valley that provided plenty of fresh water, rich, black soil for planting and an abundance of game. At the foot of the Allegheny Mountains, James had constructed a small cabin that provided sturdy shelter for his wife and six-year-old daughter, Belle.

Washington first explored the territory as a young assistant to a surveyor. Now, as an officer in the Virginia Militia, he often returned to enjoy the hot springs that were located north of where the McIntyres settled.

Amidst growing concern for her husband, Rhona breathed a sigh of relief when she saw him descending the mountain to their valley. He had been gone longer than expected. She was overjoyed to see him alive. Once he reached the valley, she knew he was only a few hours away and it looked — from a distance — his trip had been bountiful. With him was an entourage of a least five horses and visitors. She took a knee, wrapped an arm around their New England Retriever, Chessie, and ordered, “Go find James.”

She pointed in the direction of her returning husband, and Chessie leaped into action. A smart and well-trained animal, the retriever stood thirty-six inches at the withers and weighed well over 145 pounds. When she ran, she gobbled up terrain like a thoroughbred racehorse and very little stood in her way. She tore down trails and through the brambles and underbrush like a tiny tornado.

James led a single procession across the valley floor. He had two horses tethered to his saddle. Hawk and his mother followed. A second Indian pony and travois brought up the rear.

James' mount, a roan he called Blue because she was moody, began to act up as they ambled toward his home. James tried to rein the animal in, but she kicked and sidestepped frantically.

“Settle down, girl,” he pleaded. “We’re almost home. If ye throw one of ya temper tantrums now, I just might disown ya.”

His efforts to calm Blue were futile. Distracted by his mount and the welfare of the other riders, James failed to heed Blue’s warning. Suddenly, a black bear rose on its hind legs from a thicket and roared. Chaos ensued. Blue kicked and hopped, tossing James suddenly to the ground. They ran off with the mountain men’s two horses in tow.

Hawk, an extremely agile youth, was able to control his two ponies and jumped off to help James. He handed the reins to his mother and slapped the mount on the rump. It trotted off, carrying his mother and all their belongings a safe distance away.

As soon as his feet hit the ground, Hawk ran to where James had fallen and lay unconscious, much to the distress of his mother. She called out to her son to stop but the mature eight-year-old paid little heed. Helping his friend was foremost on his mind because the bear was ambling closer. Clearly, the bear was angry and hungry.

Hawk shook James’ shoulders, trying to revive him. He was out cold, though.

The bear, only twenty yards away, growled menacingly. Hawk could smell its rank breath as it prepared to charge.

The young Mohawk boy turned and positioned himself between the snarling beast and his friend. He pulled his hunting knife in defense as the beast lumbered forward. Hawk waved his arms and shouted, hoping to deter the animal’s advance.

Spital cascaded from the beast’s massive jaws, sensing its next meal was near and defenseless. The boy’s tactics worked for a split-second. The bear paused to snort and claw at the air. Clearly, it was unhappy humans had penetrated its lair.

Hawk wanted to run, but he could not abandon the man who had saved he and his mother.

The bear shook its head, eyes dark and foreboding.

Terrified by the massive beast that outweighed him by hundreds of pounds, Hawk bravely stood his ground. He kicked at James, but he still did not awaken.

He had to do something. What?

His mother, too weak to assist, gasped as the black bear once again raised onto its hind legs, towering over her son. It was ready to pounce. In her native tongue, she called for him to run.

Hawk remained frozen in the face of certain death. Then, out of nowhere, the voice of his grandfather reverberated through his brain. “The stone-thrower. Use it! Quick!”

With uncanny swiftness, his left hand put his knife in his mouth and reached for piece of granite. His right hand pulled a slingshot from his waistband. In one slick and coordinated motion, he set the stone in place, pulled back and fired.

Hawk’s shot struck the bear in the snout and lodged in one of its massive nostrils. Blood gushed as the bear snorted loudly in an effort to dislodge the painful object. Howling in pain, the bear clawed frantically at the air.

Out of nowhere, a second animal — a massive dog with long, red fur — leaped from the underbrush and entered the fray. It soared through the air, throwing all its weight and power against the behemoth. Chessie’s claws raked at the air until finding purchase in one of the bear’s eyes. Her jaws tore at one of the bear’s ears as the two animals toppled to the ground in a cacophony of angry snarls and snapping jaws. They tangled only a few feet away from where Hawk stood in defense of his fallen friend.

The young boy had stopped breathing, assured the bear’s massive claws would rake his body and kill both he and James. When the dog miraculously leaped into the melee, he turned his attention back to his friend. He had to awaken him.

Hawk grabbed him by both hands and tried to pull him into a sitting position. He put all his weight into it, his legs straining to give him the leverage he needed.

Stirred by the sudden movement, James' eyes opened with a start. The uncertainty of what had happened and the snarling of the animals, now circling each other in a standoff, snapped him out of his stupor.

He rubbed the knot on the back of his head and said, "*Crivvens!* What the hell?"

It took him a second to recall being thrown from Blue and was shocked to see Chessie engaging the black bear, which was three times her size. He knew his Retriever was no match for the animal. Obviously, the bear had been injured. Its face was covered in blood. Its claws searched wildly for the four-legged adversary but found nothing but air. The giant canine was too quick.

"Chessie, here!" James shouted, praying the bear's massive claws did not rake the beloved animal.

Barking frantically and panting, Chessie rushed to her master's side as James pulled his flintlock pistol from his belt, took aim and fired. He doubted the .50-caliber bullet would kill the bear, but he hoped to deter it.

Simultaneously, a second shot rang out. The explosion was so loud Hawk covered his ears.

James looked over his shoulder. A cloud of smoke hovered in the air and his flintlock rifle lay on the ground next to Star. Obviously, she had fired the weapon James had been carrying across his lap as he rode across the valley floor. The recoil had knocked her off her feet.

The woman's shot hit the bear square in the chest and killed it instantly. Hawk screeched in jubilation and ran to the fallen beast, his knife raised in defiance. He drove the blade into the bear's neck and blood squirted everywhere. Then, he sliced across the bear's massive chest, where the bullet fired by his mother entered. He

reached into the animal's chest and pulled out what was left of its damaged heart. The organ still pulsated as he held it in both hands.

He immediately rushed to his mother, who was seated in a clump of wildflowers. He smeared blood on each of her cheeks with his forefinger and handed her the remains. She smiled, took a bite and repeated the ritual for her son. He helped her to her feet.

Next, the two Indians walked proudly to James. The boy painted the Scotsman's cheeks with the blood of their assailant, handed him the bloody mass and said, "*Teayontskahou* (Eat)!"

James was familiar with the ritual of honoring the dead by eating their hearts. He smiled his approval, took a bite and handed it back to the young warrior. Hawk refused to take it, though. Instead, he pointed toward Chessie and said, "*Atearosera.*"

James knew the word meant "friend," nodded his approval and said, "Chessie, sit!"

The dog obeyed and laid down next to James. Chessie crossed her paws, and James handed the heart back to Hawk so he could do the honors of rewarding the dog. The Indian boy knelt beside her, cupped the heart in both hands and held it out to the retriever.

Chessie grabbed it between her jaws and, in a matter of seconds, gobbled down the red meat. She barked her approval. Mother and son giggled as they knelt to pet the head of the life-saving animal.

As James rubbed the back of his head, once again he relished the decision not to leave the dog behind in North Carolina.

CHAPTER 2

James whistled for Blue to come to him, and the roan complied. The two other horses still were tethered to his saddle. They still had a good distance to travel before they reached his cabin, nestled next to Elk Creek.

Aside from a horrendous headache, James was hungry. The bite of the bear's heart had stirred his appetite. He assumed his companions were hungry, too. He cut the liver from the bear's cavity and told Hawk to start a fire so they would have something to eat when they finished skinning the animal.

With the help of his companions, it took about two hours to remove the bearskin, and another for James to butcher the carcass and load it onto a second travois. They ate and resumed their journey.

By the time they reached the cabin, which sat on a small plateau and overlooked Elk Creek, it was late afternoon. James' wife and daughter were smiling as he rode in. Rhona was happy to see he brought visitors, but her smile turned to concern when she noticed the bruises on the Indian woman's face.

Belle was caressing Chessie as Rhona rushed to help the injured woman down from her horse. Helping to skin the bear had zapped much of Star's strength. She could barely stand on her own once Rhona helped her down.

"What happened, James?" Rhona asked.

"Tis a long story," James replied. "In a nutshell, she was shanghaied by trappers and treated poorly, as ye can see. The boy found me and we put a swift end to it. I fear she's endured more than her share of agony before we could rescue her"

Rhona put an arm around the native woman's shoulders and guided her to their home. She prodded her for more information,

using the Cherokee words she learned while in captivity in Kentake. The woman did not respond.

“She hasn’t said much since I rescued her, other than whispers to the boy. I believe she understands English; ‘cause the lad does. You might fix her some tea and see what you can learn about her injuries. Me and the boy will get a fire going and store this meat in the smokehouse.”

“Give me some time with her before ye return, James. Mayhap knock before ye barge in,” Rhona replied.

“Knock at me own door, she says,” James mused and patted Hawk on the shoulder. “Come with me; we’ve work to do.”

“Her name is Star,” he called out as he and the boy departed. They led the horses behind the cabin to a corral and two small outbuildings.

Rhona had seen many cases of abuse when she lived with the Cherokee. Star was a slight woman, a head shorter than Rhona and petite. She was undernourished and weak. She fed her a day-old biscuit and some tea, laced with a pinch of an herb mixture that would induce sleep.

A Mohawk medicine woman, named Raven, had shared and tutored Rhona in the location and application of the region’s herbs and plants that had medicinal properties. Raven claimed to be more than one hundred years old and a spirit-talker. She professed to be awaiting her replacement in a cave that was nearby and elaborately carved out of the side of a mountain. She was slain by James when the woman conjured an evil spirit that cast a spell on his wife. James considered the woman a witch and her sanctuary evil. He caused a rockslide to block the entrance and imprison whatever evil spirits lurked within the mountain.

Rhona prodded Star for information about her injuries, but the Mohawk woman remained stoic and silent. As she became drowsy, Rhona directed her to a buffalo blanket that lay next to the hearth. She helped remove her soiled clothing so they could be cleaned and helped her lie down. She covered her in the warm blankets and soon

the battered woman fell asleep. When she was sure Star was sleeping soundly with the help of the herb tea, Rhona began gently examining her injuries.

She was appalled by the bruising that covered the woman's face, arms and legs. She had been brutally abused. As she slept, Rhona mixed more herbs that would help Star with pain and hasten her healing. She cleaned and stitched the knife wounds her captors had made on her arms and legs. One across her right breast was particularly worrisome.

James returned with the boy in tow and bear steaks for their meal. Hawk was extremely worried about his mother, who languished next to the fire. When she wasn't screaming and thrashing about, she slept soundly. When she relived the nightmare of her captivity, though, her head jerked from side to side and her body trembled. Hawk knelt at her side and held her hand. It brought her calm.

Belle took an instant liking to the young boy. Of course, having lived in the isolation of their wilderness home, she had no other young people with whom to associate. She stayed at his side to provide unspoken comfort, something only another child could convey.

Finally, as the steaks cooked on the fire, James coaxed Hawk outside. They erected the family's teepee on a grassy knoll to the left of the house and stowed their belongs inside.

Hawk spoke freely of his concern for his mother.

"Me worried," he said. "Mother must be in severe pain.?"

"She has suffered a great ordeal," James explained. "Rhona gave her herbs that will make her sleep for some time. Donna worry. Rest can have great healing powers."

"But she is having bad dreams," Hawk explained. "I fear for her. I don't know how to help her?"

"Ya mother has endured much. Donna fear. She will awaken and be herself again. Ye will see, lad," James assured.

No matter what McIntyre said, he knew there was little hope of relieving the boy of his concern. The excitement he had seen in the boy's eyes earlier was gone. The eight-year-old clearly was beside himself with worry.

The minute they finished their meal, Hawk returned to his mother's side and began whispering to her in his native tongue. They all were moved by the boy's devotion. Belle continued to feel his pain. She resumed her vigil next to him, holding his hand until she eventually fell asleep.

When James tried to carry her off to her own bed, his daughter refused. Some strange bond had developed between Belle and the boy, who refused to leave his mother's side. Hawk looked at James with pleading eyes, and he allowed his daughter to remain. Soon, she again was asleep, her head resting on her new friend's lap.



STAR HAD BRIEF moments of lucidity, during which time Rhona fed her rich broth from the meat and bones of the bear James brought home. The woman didn't speak but nodded and gazed thankfully at her caregiver.

Regardless of what she did, the nightmares haunted Star for several days. Constantly, Rhona had to pull the children from the poor woman's reach as the patient screeched and clawed at her attackers. Rhona could help heal her physical injuries, but her mental anguish was unfamiliar territory.

James' wife had endured much suffering at the hands of the Cherokee when she was taken captive. She was a slave to a brutal warrior chief and his two wives, an outcast and eventually a doxy. Abuse made her stronger and more defiant. Finally, James' love helped her keep her own demons and the all-consuming hatred of her captors at bay.

Finally, Rhona was able to put it all behind her when James killed Eagle Claw, while they lived in a hidden valley among the Timucua tribe of Kentake.

Rhona continued to feed Star the herbal tea to ensure she rested. Nightmares continued to torment her sleep. She thrashed and screamed constantly. Rhona worried her mental state was beyond repair. Secretly, she wished her friend, Raven, was still alive to help her administer the proper care. Time would tell if the petite woman could resume a normal life.

On the third day, Rhona noticed a reddish tint had encircled the dark pupils of the patient; it made her uneasy. The women's bruises were beginning to fade, though, and her stitched wounds were free of infection. Again, she fed her herbal tea so her recovery could continue.

On the fifth day, Star sat up and wrapped her arms around her worried son. They exchanged soft words and smiled.

Rhona observed from afar and was happy the woman had regained consciousness. She handed a bowl of broth to Hawk and said, "Feed your mother."

The boy happily took the bowl, amidst his mother's protests and constant scowl. Finally, she shook her head and grabbed the bowl from her son. She partook of the broth voraciously and smiled when she was finished. She did not speak, but her eyes foretold her gratitude.

Rhona motioned and said, "Do you think you are strong enough to get up?"

She nodded and, with the help of her two caregivers, rose to her feet. Her first steps were shaky, but soon she recovered her balance and stood on her own. She nodded to Rhona, placed an arm around the shoulders of her son and pointed for the door. Hawk guided her toward the entrance to the cabin.

When she stepped outside, Rhona guessed it was the fresh air that invigorated the woman. She kissed her son's head and walked briskly to the teepee that was erected next to the cabin. Rhona and Hawk followed.

Without hesitation, Star tossed back the deerskin flap that served as a door and stepped inside. When Hawk followed, Star

held up her hand and shook her head. Again, she did not speak. Her eyes begged for time alone.

Rhona understood, grabbed Hawk and explained, “Aye, ya mother needs to be alone for a time. Why don’t ye go gather some kindling for a fire? I’m sure ya mother will want to heat the teepee. James is splitting wood out back. Bring some of that here for her.”

The boy did as he was instructed, providing enough fuel to maintain a fire throughout the day. He stacked it neatly outside the buffalo skin dwelling. With his last armful of firewood, he noticed smoke soaring from the opening at the top of the teepee. He smiled, knowing he finally had been helpful. He knew the fire would keep his mother warm and provide a venue for her recovery.

Star was preparing to enter the spirit world, a place her grandfather frequented. She had been an unwilling apprentice in the beginning. After years at the aged medicine man’s side, Star knew the songs, rituals and sacrificial acts he used to appease the Mohawk gods.

Hawk rushed into the cabin and pointed to some leafy plants Rhona had drying on a shelf. “Need *onónhkwa* (medicine)!” he said. She smiled and led him back outside to an herb garden, planted at the side of the cabin. Immediately, Hawk spotted what he needed and grabbed two handfuls. He raced back to the teepee, pulled back the flap and placed the sage inside without saying a word. He knew his mother would need it if she was to heal.

He gathered water and more firewood. Then, Hawk sat next to the teepee and waited. When he heard his mother’s soft voice begin a ceremonial chant, he smiled and returned to help James cut and stack firewood.

[BUY MOUNTAIN MAHEM](#)

