

# The Raven and the Moon

by Susa Morgan Black

## Chapter One

### Raven Dreams

Jenny Morgan Ravenscraft sat on the back porch steps, arms wrapped around her skinny legs, watching the robins at the bird feeder in her back yard.

Birds were what Jenny loved best in the world. She had quite a collection of bird books, bird pictures, and ceramic models of birds in her room. Her other hobby was weather. She loved storms, rain, and winds, and could identify the different types of clouds in the sky - from the high, wispy cirrus clouds, to the heavy, brooding cumulonimbus clouds that gathered before a storm. She never got tired of watching the sky and its denizens.

"Lunch is ready, come on in." her mother called from the kitchen. Reluctantly, Jenny left her observation post on the porch and entered the kitchen. It was a cheerful, bright kitchen, with a yellow formica table, already set with barley soup, whole wheat bread, cheddar cheese and a sliced apple.

Her mom was a pretty woman, small and efficient. She was an airline stewardess and Jenny's dad was a pilot. Jenny and her parents travelled around the world on their vacations, with their special airline passes. Being in the air, among the birds and clouds, were the most exciting times in Jenny's life, and she had no doubt about wanting to be a pilot when she grew up. She munched her apple slowly and asked, "Where is Father now?"

"He's flying to Heathrow, darling. He should be back tomorrow night. We're thinking of going back to Britain this summer, would you like that? You haven't seen Wales yet!"

Jenny's eyes lit up, "Yes!" She had always wanted to go to Wales where her mother's side of the family came from. New places always excited Jenny. It was especially fun to go shopping with her parents, who loved antique stores, crafts shops, and bookshops. Their home was filled with curious items gathered from around the world.

She finished her lunch and cleaned up her dishes under her mother's approving eye. That afternoon, she took her bird book out and started searching for birds she might find in Wales.

Jenny's favorite birds were Ravens, probably because her last name was Ravenscraft, and her hair was black as a raven's wing. Ravens come from a family of birds, called CORVUS, which includes many other intelligent black birds, most of whom could even be taught to speak a few words. There were crows, rooks, magpies, jackdaws, and choughs. Ravens were the biggest bird in this family. Jenny knew most of the legends about ravens, spanning the world, from Norway to California. They were a sacred bird among many ancient and pagan cultures.

Sometimes ravens visited her neighborhood in the spring. They usually flew alone or in couples, and she had learned to distinguish them at a distance from crows in the sky, from their wedge shaped tails.

"CAW CAW CAW!" sounded a cry from a high branch in a pine tree in Jenny's back yard. She looked up, startled, and sure enough, there sat a large raven, looking down at her. Jenny sat transfixed. It held her eye for a few moments, then spread its wings and flew off, towards the mountains. A shiny black feather floated to the ground. Jenny raced to the feather and picked it up. It was a minor wing feather, about three inches long. She took her treasure up to her room and placed it in a special shoe box where she kept her treasures.

The oldest house in the neighborhood belonged to Jenny's grandmother, whom everyone called Granny Morgan. Granny often took care of Jenny when her parents were both scheduled to fly. The Morgan family had come from Glamorgan County, Wales around the turn of the century, and the house had been built by Jenny's great-grandfather. In the old days, there had been mining in the hills, which attracted the Welsh miners, but the mines had long ago petered out. Granny was also Jenny's best friend, even though there was more than fifty years difference in their ages. Granny knew all sorts of legends, lore, and that Jenny never grew tired of hearing. And like Jenny, ravens were Granny Morgan's favorite birds.

That evening, Jenny brought over her shoe box to show Granny the raven feather.

"How wonderful! Raven has given you a great gift. What do you intend to do with it?" Granny asked.

"I don't know, what should I do with it?"

"I'd make a dreamcatcher, and tie the feather in the center."

"What's a dreamcatcher?"

"It's something that the Sioux make to catch their dreams in. Tying a raven's feather in it will help you to hear Raven in your dreams. She's a magic bird, as you know, and a messenger from the ancient powers of the land." Granny went to her work bench. She was a skilled craftswoman and could weave, make baskets, string jewelry, paint, and make anything out of clay. She had a kiln in her back yard where she baked her sculptures. She often made things for Jenny and her parents.

Granny picked out a willow osier from a basket and some sinew from another basket. She twisted the osier in a circle, then wound some sinew around to fasten it. She then tied bits of sinew around the circle, and formed an intricate spider web design. Jenny watched in fascination. With a needle Granny poked a small hole at the thick base of the feather. Then she threaded the needle and pulled black thread through the hole and attached the feather to the willow and sinew web. She tied some extra thread on the web, so it could be hung from a nail. From a small jar on her cluttered shelf, she produced a sticky ointment and smeared it around the willow circle and along the strands of sinew, then rubbed it in.

"There now. I've anointed your dream catcher with mugwort salve, to bring you powerful dreams. Hang this above your bed when you want to remember your them." She handed it to Jenny, who took it reverently. She gently placed it in her shoe box.

Granny handed her something else. "This is a dream crystal. It's quartz, with a double termination, that is, it grew in a very special way in the earth, so that both ends come to a fine point. Put this under your pillow, too."

The crystal was placed in the box, alongside the dream catcher. Granny brought out a small amber glass jar, and scooped some of the mugwort salve into it. She handed it to Jenny, "This completes your dream kit. Just a dab in the middle of your forehead, where your Third Eye is.

Jenny couldn't wait to go to bed that night and see what happened. She and her mother had always come to Granny with their dreams and nightmares, and sometimes Granny would tell them what they meant.

"Remember, this isn't for every night. This is only for special nights when you want powerful dreams.

"How will I know if a night is special?"

"Well, full moons are particularly good nights for dreaming, and times when you are troubled and need advice from your special dream friends. The most dangerous time is dark moon. But, there's a full moon tonight."

"My dream friends? Who are they?"

"In many traditions, shamans and magic workers have special spirit guides. A lot of times, these are animals. There are a lot of tales where an animal guides a person on a sacred journey, like the white rabbit in Alice in Wonderland!"

Jenny remembered the white rabbit. It was one of her favorites.

Granny continued, "I think that the raven is your special guide. It's even in your name, and the color of your hair. I think that raven in the tree was sent to give you this feather as a sign of acceptance. Ravens are my guide, too. Maybe that's why we get along so well!" Granny hugged Jenny and they both started laughing.

Next, Granny brought out her famous chocolate chip and raisin cookies, along with two glasses of milk, and they munched happily away, while Jenny told Granny about their upcoming trip to Wales. Granny was very excited. She had been to Wales many times, to visit relatives.

"The Morgans from Wales descend from the Welsh Queen of fairies, Morgan Le Fay. And she is the same as the old Irish Goddess, Morrigan. The raven was sacred to Morrigan, and she could change herself into that bird whenever she wanted."

That night, Jenny took special care when she prepared for bed. After her bath, she said goodnight to her mother, who was surprised at her early bedtime. Usually Jenny fought to stay up late, reading. Sometimes she and her mother sat curled up on the couch together, with a bowl of popcorn, and watched old movies.

"Are you feeling all right, honey?"

"I'm OK, Mom. I'm just tired."

Jenny's bed was a big old thing, with a large oak frame and headboard. The headboard was carved with flowers and fairies, and she had always loved it. One of the little carved oak fairies in the middle of the headboard, held its hand out toward one of the flowers. The hand projected far enough out that Jenny could slip the black thread that held the dreamcatcher over it. She placed the crystal in a little leather pouch and slipped it inside her pillow. Then she ceremoniously dabbed a bit of mugwort ointment in the middle of her forehead. She settled into bed, and waited patiently for sleep.

Of course, she was wide awake with excitement, and sleep wouldn't come. She tossed and turned restlessly in bed. At last, with a sigh, she sat up.

Her room was filled with moonlight. She got out of bed and looked out her window. The moon was bright and filled the yard with light. From her second story bedroom, she could see the trees, the flowers, and the distant mountains. She sat in the dormer window and leaned against the cushions, wondering if she should try to read herself to sleep, or join her mother downstairs. She could barely hear the television set, and knew her Mom was watching a movie.

A shadow passed the moon, and she looked out again. She could see a dark shape in the distance - it was the raven. The raven flew in slow, lazy circles in the sky, passing in front of the radiant full moon. Jenny watched, mesmerized. Her eyes began to grow heavy, and she struggled to keep them open, to watch the raven. When she thought she could no longer hold her head up, the raven changed its course and flew toward her. It grew larger and larger. She knew ravens were the biggest of Corvus family, but nowhere near as big as eagles, yet this raven was huge.

It grew bigger still as it flew closer until the raven was in fact, bigger than she was! It filled her window frame, and stepped inside the dormer window menacingly. It cocked its head, its black eyes piercing hers. She scurried out of the dormer window and stood up. The raven's body was larger than her own, though she was still taller.

"CAW! CAW!" the raven cried, then cleared its throat and began again, "Sorry, I forgot you were human and can't understand Ravenspeak. There is very definitely something ravenish about you, though. As you have no wings yet, would you care to try mine?" The raven bowed its head. "Wrap your arms around my neck, and mind you don't let your legs get in the way of my wings. Come on, come on, the night won't last forever!"

Jenny could still hear the television set downstairs, she could see her own room clearly, she knew she wasn't dreaming. She looked back at her bed, at the dreamcatcher, and smiled. She had caught a dream!

She climbed upon the raven's back, wrapped her arms around its neck, and lay with her body nestled along the back of the bird. The bird was strong, it pushed itself with its passenger out the window, and flapped its mighty wings.

They were in the air! The black feathers rose and fell rhythmically around her. The moon had begun to set over the mountains.

"CAW ! CAW! CAW!" the raven cried, then explained to Jenny, "I greet the moon, my mistress." The raven flew toward the mountains and the moon.

The sky grew darker, and Jenny could see the stars more clearly. The Milky Way looked like a starry pathway across the sky, leading to another galaxy. The raven seemed to fly through the stars, the air sparkled and shimmered with their light. As they drew closer to the mountains, Jenny could just barely see the top of the moon, like a shining dome. The raven flew low, between two hills, and deeper into the mountains. The dome of the moon grew closer, until Jenny could see mountains behind the moon! As they flew closer still, the moon revealed herself, nestled in a hidden valley surrounded by mountains on all sides.

"CAW! CAW! CAW!" the raven cried again as it landed in front of the moon, which looked like a luminous ball, about the size of a large house, partly buried in the valley floor. "Here we are!" announced the raven.

Shakily, Jenny slid off the raven's back and sat on the ground, too stunned to stand up. The moon shimmered before her. It seemed to be alive, its walls were slightly throbbing, as if there were a giant heart within. She studied the moon, and noticed that its light and shadows seemed to take the shape of a face, a changeable face.

Sometimes it looked like the face of a young girl, sometimes a beautiful woman, and sometimes it darkened slightly to the face of a powerful and mysterious old woman. The moonshades swirled and vanished as she watched, trying to understand.

The bird moved beside her. His head twisted around and he groomed his feathers delicately.

"Does the moon always set here, in these mountains?" Jenny asked.

"Oh no, I've seen her set in different places all over the world, often in the Sea Herself."

"But if the moon is setting here, isn't it time for it to rise on the other side of the world?"

"Oh, the Moon is very mischievous. She often hides from Father Time."

Watching the moon, the shadows and lights changed again, and She seemed to smile at them.

Nocturnal animals and birds crept out from the woods to pay homage. A white owl flew around the moon and disappeared on the other side.

"What's on the other side, Raven?" Jenny asked.

"Why the dark side of the moon, of course!"

"Can I go see!" Jenny jumped up.

"No!" cried the raven, alarmed. "The dark side of the moon is not for your eyes - it's too dangerous."

There was a movement behind them. Jenny turned around and looked down the twisting mountain path. Around the bend came an incredibly wrinkled, old man with his long white beard hanging below his knees. His tall, lean body was dressed in a white robe and he carried a huge scythe, like the ones Jenny had seen in antique shops and knew farmers once used to mow their hay.

He passed by them without noticing the bird and the girl, and stood before the moon with his scythe raised.

In a deep sonorous voice that sounded as if it came from the depths of the ages, the old man intoned, "It's time to move on."

The shadows of the face of the moon changed again, and two eyes seemed to glare at the old man. The shimmering orb heaved a sigh, and it slowly raised itself from its bed of earth, and rolled away, across the valley, up the mountain and out of sight. The old man, using his scythe as a staff, followed the moon.

"It's time to go back, the winds of dawn are beginning to blow and we must not be caught by the Sun!" cried the raven, offering Jenny his back once again. Jenny climbed upon the giant bird, and he lifted himself into the air once more and flew over the mountains towards her home. The air sang, and the stars dimmed, and they arrived at her dormer window just as the first pink rays of the sun touched the sky.

"Farewell, Caw, Caw, Caw!" cried the raven after Jenny dismounted, and she watched it fly away, back toward the mountains.

Exhausted, Jenny stood beside her bed. "Am I still dreaming? How will I know when I wake up later?" She had an idea. She removed the pouch from under her pillow and took out the dream crystal and held it. If this were not a dream, when she woke up, she'd still be holding the crystal. Then, she crawled into bed, still clutching the stone, and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Late in the morning her mother came into the room.

"Jenny, are you all right? I want to take your temperature to make sure. It's not like you to sleep this long on a Sunday morning!"

Blearily, Jenny opened her eyes. Then she remembered last night. She opened her hand, and inside was the crystal! Granny Morgan's magic worked and she had indeed caught a dream!