

# Raven

## an unfinished manuscript

Copyright 2008 D. L. Keur and/or Forrest W. Lineberry

### PROLOGUE

#### “Crossing”

The cross crackled as it burned, a solitary beacon of light in flickering darkness. Occasionally the squeal of a pitch pocket would add strange song to that crackling, the sudden flare that accompanied it lighting up a broader circle of tattered lawn. It was then that the silhouettes of his sister’s and mother’s bodies would sharpen in his wavering sight. It was then he could see the cross-shaped spikes driven through them, pinning them through the heart to earth. Then he would huddle closer to himself, strangled sobs shuddering through his small, thin body.

He had watched the attackers do that — drive those crosses through his mother and sister, them screaming and flailing against their persecutors, screaming and begging for some mercy. Their cries had, in time, become gargled, then bubbly. Their arms and legs had jerked like they

were on puppet strings. That was after the torturers finally stood up and stepped back to just watch them in the burning cross light.

He had watched them die — his mother and his sister. He had done nothing but hide.

His eyes flicked to the dark line of houses which were just shapes. The neighbors had done nothing either, yet he knew they had watched, peeking from behind drawn curtains.

Now, though, there was nothing much to see. Only the dark shapes of his mother's and sister's still bodies . . . the shapes of cars and trucks parked just beyond the circle of cross light — dark shapes backlit by the flickering of torches in the trees across the road.

They were hunting for him. They knew he existed. He had to be very quiet. He had to be very still. Forcing himself, he stopped his body's shaking, his body's sobbing. It was a strange thing to do. His mother had taught him that — how to separate himself enough that his body felt like it was one place while his mind was somewhere to the side. From there, control was so much easier. He felt his body become still, his breathing “slow and just barely” the way his mother said.

The torches were very close now.

\* \* \*

From just outside his circle of darkness, she watched, her eyes but shadows in the torch lights' flicker. He was doing it as well as anyone could expect for someone just turned six. He would survive. She knew this. But he was in danger. If every one of them were destroyed, there would be none to carry True, none to nurture Spirit's freedom.

Somehow she had to find some way to help him. Somehow. But she didn't know a way, and her mother/teacher she could not find. Her mother/teacher was not with her like she should be.

Celine wondered where her mother – his mother, too – was hiding. But she heard/felt nothing to the question's asking. Only silence.

She rubbed her heart place. It still screamed, remembering. Her spirit shuddered. She felt herself begin to splinter into ten-thousand-thousand pieces. And then she knew. With certainty. Her mother/teacher had thus splintered, her essence shattered, its pieces cast upon the waves of spiraling infinity. The pain had been too much; the Knowing shifted. Celine was alone.

She almost lost herself in that moment's realization. She almost disbecame. But the small one that she kept in Sight stopped her dissolution. His being and his need, they held her whole. She couldn't help him here, though.

Celine turned. She didn't hesitate. She just moved to join the fog that hovered all around her, her spirit calling out, though, for what, she wasn't sure.

Lights within the darkness paused near where he lay, then turned instead to follow her. She led away.

# PART I

## “The Shaman”

Luckily no-one asked too many questions. Luckily the boy was dark-eyed, dark-haired, just like a Human Being. His face even carried the look of someone Human, though Sonny knew that not one drop of Human blood flowed in his veins.

Sonny called him “Raven.” It was a good name, though the boy did not live up to his namesake’s raucous squawking. That, with the dark looks, was also a good thing. Talk too much and people start to wonder. But the boy was silent. And the boy stayed silent. In school, at meetings, at chores, at breakfast and at dinner. . . . Sonny liked that about the boy — that he was silent.

“Shoulda named you ‘Owl.’ You as quiet as one when people are a-walkin’.”

The boy's eyes looked up from his plate. He stopped chewing. Swallowed. Dogged his eyes down as if he held shame.

Sonny chuckled and shook his head. "Be okay, Raven. Quiet keep a body safe."

He'd found the boy during the red moon's coming in the first spring of white terror — a full six cycles since. The boy had been a starveling, bitten up by bugs and lunch for leeches. Why he hadn't come to be grizzly fare Sonny didn't understand. But a big black raven had stood by, defiant even as Sonny had moved in to check the small, sad body. That raven — the boy's name sake, and, in Sonny's mind, the boy's animal guardian.

It was fact that Sonny felt that bird had led him to the boy. It had come repeatedly to his cabin, waking him long before morning light. It had done that for a week, squawking and strutting around the front porch, carrying on, then flying off, always in the same direction, when Sonny had gone to get his gun. Finally, Sonny had had enough of that bird and had followed it into the deep woods, intent on sending it back to the Maker. And in the following, he had almost tripped over the little dark boy as the raven led him a merry romp through devil's club and nettle near the sacred place of Maker's creek.

The boy's body was curled up in a hollow between the roots of a giant cedar, the raven strutting back and forth and making clucking and clicking noises. Sonny had thought the body dead. But nothing had eaten on it — the eyes hadn't been pecked out, the flesh had no telling marks of teeth or claw tears. Not even the rodents had come near. And, when Sonny checked real close, the body breathed, though, in Sonny's shaman sight, no rainbow lights gave show to life in it.

He had picked the limp thing up and packed it home, then nursed it until its eyes had finally come open. And what eyes. Sonny saw that those eyes carried what no creature, Human or otherwise, should hold. He had backed away from what those eyes had seen. He wouldn't look. He'd never looked, not in all the years they'd been together.

The boy had stayed with him, though Sonny had done nothing to make him stay. They just began to live together, the boy helping carry water to the stock, stacking the wood that Sonny sawed and split for winter, though, at first, the boy slopped more water than he got poured into the stock tanks and his wood stacks leaned and swayed and creaked, threatening to topple over.

When the smell of fall came calling that first year, Sonny took the boy to the school that the government had built and made all Human children go to. He took him there after he went to see Spaen, the tribe's own lawyer, then to a young buck by name of Rodeo who made up the necessary papers the lawyer ordered up to keep the social workers and the law from asking questions. The tribe protected its own from harm. And the tribe accepted Raven as a Human. Sonny gave Raven his own "official" last name, Watcher.

"What's going up 't school," Sonny asked between bites of dinner.

Raven's mouth dropped down, one-sided.

"Hear they're putting in a chapel right next door."

Again, the mouth pulled down, this time on both sides.

"We be ones protected. They cain't make you go," Sonny mentioned.

The dark eyes rose and stuck to Sonny's. Relief showed.

“Not to worry. We be Human, and they cain’t make us be not-human. They cain’t make us eat their ways. Not no more. It ainntent like the old days.”

In fact, it wasn’t like the old days when they forced strange ways upon the tribe, scattering the children, killing off the elders with starvation. But, in many ways, nowadays was worse. Human Beings were protected, that was true. But Sonny had seen what he called “True Hearts” driven til they succumbed and swallowed the Great White Terror’s ways. That’s what he knew it as — the Great White Terror. He had seen their work. He had watched the True Hearts get worn away until they joined . . . or died. And he was glad that he and all his tribe were ancient. That made them ones protected. But the True Hearts — Human Beings who weren’t Tribe — they were fast disappearing from the Mother.

Sonny’s eyes flicked across to Raven. Raven was a True Heart. That he knew. Of True Heart kind. The spawning of True Heart from True Heart — rare and precious in that no touch at birth had seeded in the Doubt. This child was Warrior.

\* \* \*

## “The Great Abyss”

Unlike most, Celine never lost her name. Unlike most, Celine never lost her knowledge of “before.” She remembered. She had Purpose.

She wandered in the fog for what seemed never, for what seemed always. And in her was a calling, ever calling, though she knew not what she called.

Sometimes she’d see another through the fog. She would rush toward that other, but, when she got to the where of what she’d seen, there would be nothing. It was always like that with the shadow shapes — white shadow shapes in the black-gray fog that had no up or down or sideways. But it had sound; the fog had sound. It reminded Celine of the sound inside a shaft — full of ringing echoes, muffled by some dampening shroud, some sounds nearer, some farther, somewhere left or right, sometimes up or down, sometimes nowhere and everywhere at once. Far away, it often seemed as if voices spoke to one another. But not within the fog.

There were no voices in the fog — at least, not often. But there was the sound that came and went in between the silence — that odd, echoed ring and muffled clanging.

Celine had no sense of time, except that she felt urgency. She had no sense of being lost, though she knew she had not found that for which she searched. She just kept moving, never stopping to doubt her way. He needed her.

\* \* \*

He'd felt something. Rhaoth knew that the gray shaolin had felt something. The gray never lifted eyes unless he felt. He never moved unless he had good reason. And Rhaoth watched him lift eyes now. There was Something. It was coming.

The gray stood up. Rhaoth stood with him, moving to his side, just back of even. Sudin took the other side, Rhaoth's mirror guardian-of. Both palmed shirrs at once. The gray palmed nothing. He just started walking. Toward the Gateway.

Rhaoth shivered. The Gateway shimmered before them, all glistening dark fog. Rhaoth had not yet re-crossed the Gateway, and he was frightened. This would be his first time Going Back. This would be Rhaoth's first conscious stepping into what the gray named Abyss.

\* \* \*

## “The Guardian”

Where he'd found the cub Sonny didn't know. That it was full-blooded wolf was not to doubt. A gray ball of scampering fur that grew swiftly to become a hard, lanky, silent prowler with yellow eyes that saw right through you to your Truest Nature. . . .

Sonny hadn't said anything when Raven came in one day from one of his long-gone walkings, the cub trailing his each and every step. Sonny hadn't been surprised. Raven was Warrior. Nature recognized and would provide. That she provided such a guardian for Raven — a wolf with the nature of a loyal companion dog — could not be challenged. At least, Sonny would not challenge it. But the wolf would have to stay at home when Raven went to school, and that, Sonny knew, would be a problem.

School — that place to Raven was most vile. He did well enough. But he didn't get along with many. Only other young bucks like himself — those of strange and silent Nature. And the teachers hated those kind. Sonny was constantly being sent messages that he would

have to take to Spaen for reading. But it usually proved many words about nothing: Raven was caught smoking; Raven left school at lunch without a pass; Raven wouldn't answer questions; Raven wasn't socializing; Raven wouldn't talk. That one was the one most often sent — Raven wouldn't talk. Was he retarded they asked? Did he need to see a doctor? Well, Sonny was the Tribal doctor — the real doctor. But the school made Raven go to the “official” doctor — the not-human doctor — and the lawyer said to let them do it, so Sonny did. And the “official” doctor found nothing wrong with Raven — not with his mind, not with his body — and sent back a note that told the teachers that Raven just didn't like to talk, so he didn't.

Sonny had listened to the lawyer Spaen read the note the “official” doctor had sent back. It said that Raven *had* talked, which had surprised Sonny and Spaen. “Spoken very intelligently” the “official” doctor's note had said. And the lawyer Spaen had smiled. “Watcher,” Spaen had said, his voice soft and so respectful, “This one is as foretold by our elders so long ago, isn't he?”

Sonny had said nothing, but Spaen knew. Spaen was Human. Though trained by Them, he still held his Human ways. Spaen's dark eyes had watched, and he had seen Sonny's silent answer.

Now the wolf cub started causing problems, though. It would sneak away to follow Raven's trail through the woods, then down into the town where the school stood. The tribal police knew about the cub — they had been to Sonny's circles and had seen the creature at Raven's side — and would not shoot it as the teachers wanted. But when the cub had managed to get inside and find his way to Raven's side in some room at some desk, then everyone got real upset.

They sent Raven home the first day it happened, and that had made Raven happy. So instead of telling the wolf not to, Raven didn't tell the wolf anything, and the wolf began to do it anytime that Sonny wasn't watching. Raven failed his sophomore year of high school when he missed too many days because of the wolf's appearance at his side in school.

The summer between Raven's first sophomore year at school and his second sophomore year at school was the year the wolf showed that he was the Mother's gift of guardian to Raven. That was the year that many of the Terror began to venture deep into Human territory.

Human territory was protected by World Law. But that didn't stop the Terror. And complaining to the government didn't make the Terror stop their violation.

That Raven liked to walk the deep woods and climb the high places that touched sky, all Humans knew. Eyes could not see him when he was in the deep woods, but often, if you looked with Eagle sight, you could see him when he walked high up along the cliff walls where the wind sang stone songs, a tiny figure preceded by a trotting wolf.

Raven began to gain reputation among the People — Walker they would call him — and that reputation spread into the places where it shouldn't have, young bucks talking loud in Terror towns when liquor loosed their lips. And the Terror began to hunt this "Walker." Somehow they saw him as some threat.

With the repeated violations of the Terror into Human lands, it was bound to happen sometime. Sonny knew this, but he could do nothing to prevent it, save beg protections from the Mother and her Spirits. But the Terror had its own helpers. And, one day, the Terrors came upon "The Walker."

There had been eight of them in three big, old pickup trucks. All eight lay bloody on the mountain top. Raven stood, his shirt and pants ripped, blood running from a head cut and a chest wound as well as from where a cross-shaped, hand-hewn iron spike was stuck all the way through his arm. And the wolf stood by him, its ribs heaving, its body quivering from loss of blood as its life leaked out from huge punctures and slashes along its side and flanks.

“Their throats have been ripped out,” the head of the Tribal police said. “They are going to want to kill the wolf.”

“No.”

Everyone turned around to look. It was the first word anyone there, save Sonny, had ever heard Raven say.

“You’ll have to testify in a court of law,” the police chief said, nodding once toward Raven.

Raven nodded back. He said nothing more.

The police chief turned to Sonny. “Get a very good lawyer.” And Sonny did. But first he got a very good veterinarian. The gift of the Mother could not be forsaken.

\* \* \*

## “The Change”

Raven’s eyes changed with the attack of the White Terror. He testified, speaking more words in one breath than Sonny had heard him speak in a season, speaking more words all together than ever Sonny had ever heard him speak in all their life together. And the wolf sat by him, leashed, as he sat inside the box next to the high table of the Judgement Court. They could not make him give up the wolf. He would not let them.

Raven told of walking. Raven told of the trucks chasing him — that he hadn’t been able to run fast enough, that he couldn’t reach the woods, that instead he had headed to the cliff edge where he knew there was a slim pathway down. But the trucks had caught him before he could find that path down the cliff face, all eight of the young male occupants exploding from the vehicles to launch themselves at him. And the wolf had attacked. And Raven had gone in to stop the wolf. But, instead, Raven had been slammed down, a metal cross-shaped stake slashing down at him. He remembered throwing up his arms. He remembered the burn of something in his arm. Then he remembered only growling and screaming until, finally, the screaming stopped. Then a shadow rose to come over him, and he smelled the smell of death.

“I smelled the smell of death,” Raven said. “And the shadow of my friend came to stand beside me, his breath hot . . . heavy, his tongue licking me as he whined and nudged me, trying to get me to rise and stand.”

The courtroom had been silent. Raven’s testimony was reinforced by the pictures the tribal police had taken at the scene. It was reinforced by the veterinarian’s testimony. It was reinforced by the images they had retrieved under drugs from Raven’s brain and from the brains of the dead men.

The wolf was allowed to live. But there was a price. Raven changed. No longer was he “boy.”

\* \* \*

## “The Coming of the Gray”

Rhaoth stepped through, following. The Gateway shimmered; the fog closed in around him. He felt nothing but his fear.

The gray moved on him, touching mind to open up the fear that Rhaoth harbored. He opened it and let it spring unbound for Rhaoth to see and feel and face. “Accept your fear. Embrace it. It is real.”

Rhaoth did as bid. He felt full terror rise and, as he had been taught, he let himself go within it. And then the fear was not. Rhaoth’s soul could breathe again. Rhaoth could be again. “Thank you,” he thought unto the gray.

They moved through, the gauzy, black-gray fog of the Abyss aswirl around them. Rhaoth knew not where or how they moved, but it didn’t matter. He just knew that it was so. Beside him, Sudin hummed a sound — an ancient song that Rhaoth recognized but couldn’t name. But he knew it meant they went to war.

\* \* \*

Celine felt them before she saw them — a strange force coming toward that seemed to hold direction. And she was the direction. When she saw them, they were as shapeless, but she

recognized that shapelessness. Somewhere deep inside her was a welcoming. With it also came a shiver. Here was power.

They came before her, but didn't stop. Instead, they moved into, through her, the leader pulling her around to join him, not by any touch, but as if by will. Celine obeyed that will. And she found herself giving up to him the images and knowledge that she had held so long.

That brought fear to her — that, in releasing, she would forget. But the fear passed with the passing of the images and knowledge. And when the passing had been done, Celine still owned her name and knowing. And now she held new knowing — that she belonged. With them. In this that they were doing. She, the catalyst; they, the answering. There would be movement. There would be war. She welcomed it, for she was angry, now.

\* \* \*