

The Ravenstone

The Secret of Ninham Mountain



DIANE SOLOMON & MARK CAREY

The Ravenstone: The Secret of Ninham Mountain

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Dedication

*"Every child is an artist, the problem is staying
an artist when you grow up" ~ Pablo Picasso*

We dedicate this book to everyone who revels in the joy of the creative process, whether it be art, music, writing...

Don't let growing up or growing older rob you of your creativity!

Hold on to your childlike heart.

Prologue



**1892: Ninham Mountain,
near Cold Spring, New York**

"Where's the chamber?" Nora asked. "Is it much further?" She walked quietly beside her twin brother, Patrick, through the sparse woods. "We'd better not be gone long or Mom will worry." She stopped and gazed behind her. All she could see was the trail disappearing between towering pines, hemlocks, and maples, and dappled sunlight streaming across the forest floor. She could no longer see their family gathered in the big meadow for the twins' thirteenth birthday party.

Patrick got his bearings and hurried forward. "It's around here somewhere – I swear every time I come up here things have moved. But, I know this is the trail I took last time." He grabbed her hand and led her further down a slight path between the trees. He grinned. "We'll get back in time for cake... Oh, and don't tell Mother and Father about the stone chamber, all right?"

"Why not? Is it a secret?"

"Not a secret, exactly. But, somehow I don't think they'd approve." He scowled. "Father, especially, would view it a waste of my time, I'm sure."

Just then, a dark, swooping shadow overhead startled them. It was a great black bird, which appeared out of

nowhere and came to rest ten feet away on a bed of pine needles.

"Look, it's a raven!" Patrick spoke in a low tone, but his excitement was obvious. "They don't usually come so close to people."

"He's huge. And so beautiful," whispered his sister. I'd love to draw him, she thought.

The raven fluffed its feathers and tilted its head. Then it stretched high on its black feet, reached into the air with velvety wings and lifted effortlessly off the ground. Gliding down the trail, the bird was nearly out of sight before the kids could react. They raced after the raven, which led them off onto a smaller trail through a break in the bushes. This new trail, covered with a carpet of soft moss and tiny flowers, soon blossomed into a miniature meadow, at the end of which stood the open doorway of a stone chamber.

"Look!" Nora spotted the raven again. "It led us right to it!" The bird stood near the dark doorway, gazing at the opening with unblinking eyes, cocking its head from side to side. In the sunlight, she could see the black feathers gleaming with an iridescent purple hue.

Giant hewn stones supporting a huge capstone created the chamber opening and to one side of the door stood a single pointed stone pillar. Nora had the impression that, rather than having been built into the hill, the stone chamber had emerged right out of the hill, of its own accord. It looked like it had been there forever.

Nora wondered how large it was, inside. That sounded great; the heat of the sun and the exertion of the hike made the cool dark cavity within very enticing.

Nora asked, "Who made it, do you know? What's it for? And why is the raven there?"

Patrick chuckled, then shrugged. "I don't know... But come on, let's go in."

As he started for the door, the raven hopped into the chamber and vanished from view. The kids glanced at each other, then ventured slowly into the chamber after their feathered guide.

It took a minute or two for Nora's eyes to adjust to the dark inside the chamber, after the brightness of the sunshine. Slowly, she could make out the inner surfaces of the stone walls and the rough dirt floor. It was not a large space, perhaps ten or twelve feet deep, but they could stand up. The ceiling was a few feet above their heads.

It was empty. Except for the raven.

"Look!" Nora pointed to the back of the chamber where the raven was pecking and scratching at the hard dirt floor near the wall.

"What's it doing?" Patrick started toward the raven, which shied away from him and in a strange, stilted walk, returned to the chamber doorway. There in the sunlight, it stared at them with one black shiny eye, then spread its wings and lifted into the air. When Patrick turned back to the spot where the bird had been scratching, he knelt down in the dirt. "There's something here... something the raven was pecking!"

Nora said, "You're right, there's something there." She peered down at something glowing yellowish-red with streaks of black. It protruded ever so slightly out of the earth.

"It's so dark in here." Patrick felt around in the dirt with his hands. "Can you move a little, out of the light?"

As Nora shifted to one side, the sunlight streamed down onto the spot where Patrick was scrabbling and the item glowed even brighter. Reaching into his pocket, Patrick pulled out a penknife.

"This is turning out to be a great birthday present," he said. He managed to dust off the exposed portion of the object and Nora could see it was not the same rough stone as everything else in the chamber, but rather smooth and polished and rounded on the end. "It feels warm – isn't that odd? The earth around it is cool. Can you help? The ground here is as hard as stone."

Looking around, Nora found a small flat rock. Forgetting her good party dress and shoes in her excitement, she fell to her knees and began to scratch on the other side of the stone object. It was caked with dirt and the ancient floor held it tight. "It's like treasure!" Nora exclaimed.

Patrick merely grunted in response. He finally scraped enough dirt away to get his fingers all the way around the object. He leaned back, pulling hard and the artifact slipped suddenly out of the ground with a spray of dust and dirt. He fell back, victory on his face, and stared down at his prize.

Nora leaned forward to get a closer look. Made of stone, it was about eight or nine inches long and fit comfortably in her brother's hands. It was smooth, resembling the handle of a cane. There were bird's heads etched into the ends, each end the mirror image of the other

"What a lot of dirt," Nora said. "I wish we had some water. And look at it glow!"

"Come on, let's take it outside where we can see it better."

They moved into the doorway, both so intent on the object in Patrick's hands that neither noticed the raven, now perched atop the capstone directly over the entrance. A still and silent sentinel, it watched their every move.

Patrick brushed the carved stone object back and forth on his shirt and picked at the remaining bits of dirt to expose the carvings. "Look at these indents! Here, feel it... how it fits in your hand."



Nora wrapped her fingers around the smooth, warm stone. It could not have fit her hand better if it had been created just for her. "It fits so perfectly. What do you think it's for?"

"No idea," Patrick replied. "But, it's beautiful and looks very old. Kind of looks lit from within, somehow, you know what I mean?" He touched it with the tips of his fingers, feeling the grooves and carvings. "How I'd love to know where this came from... and who created it. Indians? Ancient Romans or Celts? Druids?" He paused. "Sometimes I think I was born in the wrong time."

Nora gave a small smile. "It must have been a magical time, for someone to create something so beautiful."

Patrick seemed mesmerized by the carved icon. "How I wish I were there, where this was made." As he spoke, he

slowly reached out to grasp the end that Nora was extending in his direction. His fingers slipped into the contours and wrapped around it almost as if he were reaching for Nora's hand in a handshake. Their thumbs touched.

A bolt of electricity ran through Nora and she shivered.

"What on earth?" Patrick cried out.

The sensation intensified and Nora's every sense began to tremble as if they were in a new and strange dimension. Patrick reached for her arm with his free hand and she grabbed for him at the same moment.

A huge golden arc swept up before them, incorporating everything around them into its vast space. Her ears filled with an overwhelming roaring noise. Then the cave, the doorway, and the sunlit forest all dissolved away as even the ground fell away from their feet. She felt suspended in that golden archway of light with complete utter darkness all around them. The light shimmered and pulsed and began to expand away from them in a long undulating path. She could feel it pulling, reaching for her, beckoning to her.

Patrick leaned into the light, then he stepped forward toward the brilliant shining path, drawing Nora with him. Nora sensed her brother's eagerness, but she did not share it. No, her immediate and total reaction was one of fear and panic. This couldn't be right – no, it felt completely *wrong*!

She shook, she trembled, she felt as if she'd been struck. Then she could not breathe, the air was sucked out of her lungs. In the throes of her terror, she knew, with every cell of her being, that this light held only danger and disaster, that she must run the other direction as fast and hard as she could. With a huge effort that demanded all her will, she pulled

herself back. She pulled back with all her might, hoping to save Patrick too. She fell backward, hard, onto the ground, still clutching the stone icon, but Patrick had already let go.

"Patrick!" Nora screamed, scrambling up to her feet and reaching out toward him. He was already out of reach and slipping further and further away. It seemed he was fading, as the golden light drew him further along the shimmering pathway.

As she stood clutching the icon to her chest, unaware of the tears coursing down her cheeks, the raven lifted from its perch on the capstone and flew straight into the light after Patrick.

Then it was gone. The light was gone. And her beloved twin brother was gone. There was nothing but the soft breeze, the quiet, sunlit opening in the forest, and the chamber door behind her. All was as it was before.

Except now, she was alone.



Chapter 1



June 16, 2016, Cold Spring, New York

"You feel invisible," Nadia said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yeah, that pretty much sums it up." Her twin brother Aidan kicked at a rock on the sidewalk, sending it skittering across the pavement. "The only A in the whole class for my Wappinger Tribe paper and he didn't say a single word about it."

"I know Dad has a lot on his mind right now—"

Aidan cut her off mid-sentence, "He's always had a lot on his mind, but he used to be so proud of me. Now he doesn't even seem to notice anything I do."

"I don't think it's that simple, Aidan. I know Mom is worried about something, about Dad, I think. I'm just not sure what it is yet."

Aidan muttered, "She always fusses over the genius scientist. How is this any different?" He stopped suddenly in his tracks and grabbed her arm. "Oh, no. You don't think they're getting divorced, do you?"

"No, no, that's not it, it doesn't feel like that." Nadia started walking again. "I can't quite put my finger on it... but it feels big. And not in a good way."

As they turned the corner to their own road, Nadia shook off the bad vibes and the nagging worry that had been haunting her. Beautifully tended historic homes lined both sides of this pretty village street. Nadia waved and shouted hello to Mrs. Hanley, who was in her front garden admiring the pink peonies the size of dinner plates. She loved this walk home, where she caught up with her brother's day and decompressed from school.

Her own home filled her with happiness every time she saw it. It was the only house she had ever lived in and she'd heard stories her entire life about her grandmother, who grew up in this house. Built in 1845, it seemed to hold all of her connection to the past, present and future, her memories, her life and loves. White, with black shutters on the windows, it nestled in a garden of rhododendrons and azaleas, with a wide lawn and blueberry hedge separating it from the road. A deep porch wrapped around the front and side, where Nadia loved to park herself in one of the big wicker chairs and gaze at the meadow-like lawn, with its fruit trees. If she sat very still in the spring, she often saw tiny fawns gamboling around in the wildflowers. Down near the stream separating their property from their neighbor's, she loved to catch the tiny toads she had named "micro-toads." And, her dad had built the kids an awesome tree house in the huge black walnut tree in the back yard. The twins' friends always loved to come to their house.

As the kids ran up the porch stairs, an enormous Maine Coon cat lifted his head to greet them, from his favorite wicker chair. He stretched, arched his back, then plopped his front paws down on the floor of the porch while his hindquarters remained on the chair.

"Hey Nicky, had another hard day, didn't you? Huh, kitty?" Aidan chuckled and reached out to the cat, who answered with a soft "Mmmrrraaa." Nicky wandered over and was rewarded with an ear rub from Aidan.

Nadia fished out her keys from her backpack. "Mom said she'd be back about five and asked that we get started in the attic when we got home. The 'Big Brother, Big Sister' truck is coming tomorrow and Mom said she wants to clear some of that stuff up there." Nadia sighed.

Aidan headed for the kitchen. "First things first. I'm starving. My stomach thinks my throat's been cut."

Nadia laughed. He could always make her laugh. "I'll head up – can you bring me one of those blueberry muffins? Oh, and bring some black garbage bags." She took the stairs two at a time.

The huge attic was three flights up, above the second floor, reached by a steep staircase at the end of the hallway. Her mom and dad dreamed of converting the attic into a media room, office, or playroom. But, she and Aidan liked it just fine the way it was and had played up there since they were little kids. Putting on plays was a favorite pastime and the trunks full of clothes from many generations was like having their own Hollywood wardrobe department. One wall consisted of endless shelves of books and boxes crammed full of even more books were stacked nearby. A trunk full of games and toys that no one had looked at in years sat open on one side of the vaulted space.

Then there were the odd miscellaneous items no one could manage to toss: an ancient rocking horse, a dressmaker's dummy, an ornate headboard, an old painting or

two, some tired old braided rugs. All gathering dust and awaiting their fate.

"Why don't we just rent a big dumpster?" Aidan spoke through a mouthful of peanut butter, so it came out a bit garbled.

"That kind of destroys the point of giving stuff away to people who could use it, don't you think?"

Aidan handed her a muffin and looked around. "Yeah. But, honestly, this house has been in the family for over a hundred years, why does Mom want it sorted out *today*?"

Twirling her long dark hair, Nadia clipped it up on top of her head, then dropped to her knees in front of another old trunk. "Some of my favorite books are here." She dug around. "I just found *A Wrinkle in Time*. That goes in the keep pile."

The twins sat down in the shaft of sunlight from the window. As they ate, the quiet was broken by a sudden, raspy, cawing sound.

"That's not from the window – that sounded like it came from in here! Is there a bird trapped up here?" Nadia hopped up to investigate.

"Better make sure the door is shut to the stairs, or Nicky will eat it."

They heard it again. "Graa, graa."

Nadia followed the sound, which took her to the far corner of the attic, where an antique cheval mirror stood. Its glass was smoky with dust and the silver backing so oxidized that her reflection always looked like an old tintype photograph. She looked around for the bird, but a subtle movement in the mirror caught her eye. Was Aidan behind her? No, he was still sitting by the window licking the last of

his sandwich off his fingers. She whirled back to the mirror. Just as she began to wipe the dust off the glass with her hand, she jerked back and gasped.

"Uh... Aidan. *Aidan*, get over here... *quick*."

The tone of her voice had him up in a flash and hurrying to join her.

"What is it? What's going on?" He focused on the mirror.

Nadia's eyes were huge as she gaped at the old mirror. There, in the glass, was the shimmering image of what appeared to be a very old man. Wizard-like, he was tall and lean with a long, gray beard. A spark of light reflected from his eyes but she could not make out his features. A deep hood, topping the long brown robe he wore tied at the waist, cast a shadow across his face. He held a gnarled wooden staff in one hand and a large black bird was perched on his shoulder. Suddenly the old man moved! He raised one hand, palm outward and reached slowly toward them.

The kids tripped over each other as they pulled back away from the incredible sight.

"Geez, Aidan, what on earth? Who... what is that? Is this a trick? Is there a camera in here?"

In the mirror, the old man and the raven shimmered in and out of focus like a rippling reflection in a pond, and then they both vanished. Aidan and Nadia were frozen, staring and blinking in disbelief at the dusty old mirror.

Then, they heard the back door slam and their heads snapped in the direction of the sound.

"Hey, Aidan, Nadia, I'm home. Where are you?"

It was their mother's voice and she was heading up the stairs.

They looked quickly back at the mirror but all they saw were their own reflections. But, in front of the mirror, a single black feather appeared before their eyes. For an instant, it hung suspended in the air, then floated gently down to rest on the dusty wooden floorboards at their feet.



Chapter 2



"Up here, Mom." It came out as something of a croak, so Aidan cleared his throat and tried again. "We're in the attic."

Genevieve Shaw appeared halfway up the attic stairs. She stopped and peered through the railings.

"Hey, guys. How are you getting on up here? Huh, you both look like the cat that ate the canary. What are you two up to?"

"Uh, nothin', Mom." Nadia gave a bright smile. "We've been sorting through books."

"Good, that's great. But, can you come down and help get dinner going? Heather's making a salad; I need you to set the table. I had a client run late... Dear me, what a list of health problems she has. Oh, and your dad will be home early tonight." She turned back down the stairs.

"Ok, be right there." Then Aidan added, under his breath, "Dad home early? That's a first." He turned back to see Nadia still staring at the mirror. "Good save, Nadia, fast thinking."

She still looked stunned. "Aidan, what on earth was that? Please tell me I'm not crazy... that I didn't imagine that. You saw it too... right? Aidan?" She turned to see if he was paying attention. She hated it when he didn't answer her. "You saw the old man in the robe and the big bird, *right?*"

Aidan nodded, his face serious. Nadia knew he was more intrigued than scared. In his usual analytical way, he was thinking, hard. She watched as he studied the front and back of the mirror and all around it on the unfinished walls and rafters. "I don't see anything anywhere up here that could have created that image. And it couldn't have been a hologram, anyway..."

"Because a hologram doesn't move like that?"

"Because a hologram doesn't drop real feathers. And there is no projector – we'd have seen the beam of light." Aidan reached up to feel all around the top of the mirror and down its sides. "Plus, this is a mirror, not a screen... you can't project an image *into* a mirror."

"What are you looking for?"

He stepped back from the mirror and shrugged. "No idea... I just can't figure it out and it's going to bug me. Why would someone go through this trouble just to mess with us?" He looked around at the rough walls of the unfinished attic, then called out, "Hey, whoever is videoing us, you better not post it online anywhere!"

Nadia slowly shook her head. "What if it's real, Aidan? What if there is an old wizard trying to tell us something? Wouldn't that be the coolest thing?"

Aidan rolled his eyes and shot her a you've-got-to-be-kidding look.

They stood quietly, mystified.

"I wonder if it will happen again..." Aidan gave her a devilish grin.

"Aidan, Nadia!" Their mom's voice held that dreaded I'm-not-going-to-say-it-again tone. The kids hurried down the stairs.

In the kitchen, their older sister Heather was chopping up Romaine lettuce and the twins grabbed silverware and set the table. The kitchen was full of soft early-evening light and good smells emanated from the big sauté pan where onions sizzled gently in olive oil. Nadia's mouth began to water.

The mudroom door opened and their dad, Dr. Michael Shaw, came in, lugging his bulging briefcase in one hand and a big bag of files in the other, which thumped against the doorframe as he entered the kitchen.

"Hi Gen, hi kids." His voice sounded tired. He disappeared into his study, a big butler's pantry that had been co-opted and transformed into a compact but comfortable home office. They heard him sigh and the bag of files hit the floor.

She might not admit this to her girlfriends, but Nadia actually loved the ritual of their family dinner, with everyone around the table once a day. Normally, Nadia would regale them with tales of happenings at school or after school events. Even something as ordinary as a trip to the mall was an excuse to entertain and she knew how, instinctively, to recount it all in great detail and with considerable animation. She loved that she could get everyone laughing.

Tonight dinner was less lively than usual. This was often a time when everyone talked at once, but tonight Heather did most of the talking, seemingly oblivious of the undercurrent of preoccupation at the table. Her best friend Judith (although

she insisted on being called "Judessa") had dyed her hair... yet again.

"I wonder if it will all fall out this time." Heather laughed.

Even Nicky was there, lurking quietly under Aidan's chair, hoping for a covert handout. For a cat, he wasn't picky; he even ate cheese. But, Nicky was out of luck tonight. Aidan was clearly distracted and Nadia knew he was still trying to think of a logical explanation for what happened in the attic.

She wondered why her mom was quieter than usual. And her father was in what had become his new default mood: distant and preoccupied.

Heather got up and grabbed her favorite creamy ranch salad dressing from the fridge. "Dad, you want some?" Her father did not even look up. "Hey, Dad, you OK?"

"Not really, sweetheart." Michael spoke for the first time since he walked in the door, except for "Thanks," and "Pass the salt." "I've been waiting for weeks for the final results from the latest compound we've been working on. They finally came through today and they're no better than any of the dead ends we've worked on for the last year. It just seems like there isn't anything new out there anymore. Wondering what this means for the Project."

"What do you mean?" Nadia chimed in between mouthfuls of her favorite garlic mashed potatoes. "I thought people sent you dirt and bits of plants from all over the world."

Her dad's smile brought his tired face to life. "They still do, honey, but it's not like the old days. We used to open those packages feeling pretty confident that we'd find

something in them we've never seen before, something with potential. But, I honestly can't remember the last time we cultured anything that we haven't seen 100 times before."

"You mean there's no diversity in plant life anymore?" It was Aidan's turn. "Or less, anyway. We learned about that this year in biology. Hundreds of species are going extinct every year."

"That's right, Aidan." Michael had shifted to soapbox mode. "The planet has become a very small place. There's hardly a square foot of it that someone hasn't stepped on."

Their father had been so distant lately it was good to hear him talk about the Project again, with a bit of passion. "The Project," as their dad always called it, had run like background music for their entire lives. It was practically part of the family. From the moment Nadia was old enough to understand, she'd heard the stories about Grandma Catherine, how she had died of some mysterious disease no one had ever seen before. She knew how important this was to her dad, that he had built a career focused on a cure for this deadly bug.

"We don't seem to have learned any lessons from the mistakes of our past. We dump garbage in the ocean with little or no concern for the creatures that have to live there." Michael was on a roll. "We pump pollution into the air, we cut down incredibly lush diverse rain forests to plant corn to feed cattle."

Michael realized that he had launched into his favorite rant. He smiled at his family and put the fork he'd been driving his points home with down on his plate.

Gen started clearing the table. "You guys are finished with exams, right?"

Aidan grinned and sang out, "Yup, Free-du-um!"

Heather shook her head. "Geez. Lucky you. I still have a humongous physics final. Why on earth did I take *physics*?" Her mom started to speak, but Heather cut her off. "I know, I know, the whole become-a-doctor thing."

Her mom chuckled. "Yes, there is that."

Heather turned toward the door. "Ok, gang, I am off to Carrie's – she and Judith and I are cramming. Bye, all." She gave a wave and headed out.

Her mom gave a little wave to her daughter's retreating back. "See you later honey, don't be too late." As Heather took off, she turned to the twins. "What about you, Nadia? What's left for you – exams and all that?"

"A PILE," Nadia said with a groan. "Does that get me out of dishes?"

Her mom put her hands on her hips in mock outrage.

"Ok, I lied," Nadia admitted. "I'm done. That biology exam today was the last. Phew. I think I did well."

"Honey, you've been applying yourself much better this year. Well done. We're proud of you." Gen turned back to the sink and leaned down for the dish detergent. She suddenly turned back to the twins. "Oh, I nearly forgot. There's a book reading and signing at the bookstore Saturday afternoon – Grandma Liz thought you guys might want to be there. You know, that woman who wrote *The Power of Twins*."

"Sounds good." Aidan juggled a pile of plates and silverware over to the counter. "Uh, Mom, I think I'll work some more on those books in the attic tonight... Want to help, Nadia?"

"Sure!" Nadia popped the last plates in the dishwasher.

Their mom said, "That's great, you two. Thank you." She gave them a skeptical look. "Never thought it would be that much fun working in the attic... "

The kids just grinned at her and headed up the stairs.

Up in the attic, Nadia was drawn, as if by a magnet, to the old mirror. Aidan, hard on her heels, first checked that no one was following them, then closed the attic door at the bottom of the stairs. Joining his sister near the cheval mirror, he reached into an old trunk and yanked out an old torn T-shirt long since relegated to rag duty. He started wiping the mirror. Decades-old dust swept away easily, but his reflection was little improved. The silvering on the back of the glass was tarnished and flaking and was, after all, the reason the mirror was in the attic and not downstairs in use.

Nadia said, "Hmmm. Poor old mirror has certainly seen better days, hasn't it?"

"Yeah, it's a real mess. This helps a bit, though, look at that. I just took it from piece of junk to plenty good enough. Just wanted to get a better look at it."

Nadia caught herself gnawing on her thumbnail and yanked it out of her mouth. She'd been working hard to stop the nervous chewing of her nails and cuticles and was hard on herself when she caught herself backsliding.

Aidan was still studying the old mirror. "You know, there's no way someone could have rigged this mirror without disturbing all that dust."

The twins stared at each other for a moment, then back at the dingy glass.

Nadia shrugged. "Well, I just can't believe it happened. Did we take a nap up here or something and dream it?"

Suddenly, they both drew in a sharp breath. The image in the mirror was distorting and flexing. It looked like the ripples from a pebble tossed in a pond, but in reverse. Concentric rings converged in the center and the ripples got smaller and smaller until an image slowly came into focus. It was the same old man, who seemed suspended in a dusky gray cloud, like smoke, which billowed all around him.

"Oh, *Aidan*." Nadia gasped and stepped closer to her brother. "It's happening again..."

As she grabbed her brother's hand, the image intensified and sharpened into focus. The old man raised his hand and pointed toward them with his index finger. Then he began to slowly move his finger in little swirling motions as if he were writing in the air. The kids were rooted to the spot, hardly breathing. Through the smoky mist, they could see writing, of some sort, appear in front of the old man. It seemed to drift through a cloud and settle on the inner surface of the mirror's glass, where it slowly came into focus.

"What does it say?" Nadia asked. "It doesn't mean a thing to me... it doesn't even look like our alphabet."

When the old man lowered his arm, the writing continued to appear for a few moments, as if it had a very long way to travel. He stood still, as if waiting. Watching them.

Nadia dropped her brother's hand, looking quickly around. "We need something to write with. Quick – I know you have a photographic memory, but we have to write that down, somehow!"

The image of the old man began to dissolve, leaving only the cryptic message behind. Then it, too, slowly started to

wane, in the undulating smoke, threatening to become nothing but a memory.

Quick as a flash, Aidan reached into his pocket for his cell phone and grabbed a couple of shots of the mirror with its strange, unintelligible writing.



"Wait, sir, please come back. Tell us what this means. We can't read it!" But, Nadia's pleas hung in the still attic air. The old man and the writing were gone. What was, an instant ago, a window to another world was again just a shabby old mirror.

As the twins stood staring at their own shocked reflections, they could ever so slightly detect the faint smell of smoke.



Chapter 3



"Where's my backpack? Hang on... forgot something." Aidan ran back up the porch steps into the house. When he reappeared, he was folding an 8 x 10 piece of white paper in half, then quarters, and jamming it into his jean's pocket.

The kids headed off in the direction of town.

"I know we agreed that we can't even tell Grandma Liz," said Aidan. "But, I thought about it all day. I know she might be able to help, somehow. I want to ask her about the weird writing, but I don't want the rest of the world to see it."

Nadia stopped up short. "You didn't print out the picture did you? We can't show her that!"

"I know, I'm not an idiot. I traced it." Aidan had not stopped when she had and now she hurried to catch up.

"How'd you do that?"

"I printed out the jpg, large, and then traced it onto a piece of printer paper."

"Wow, cool," Nadia said and grinned. Her brother always impressed her. She often said, "Aidan knows a lot of stuff about a lot of stuff." And she wondered how he did.

The twins continued the half-mile or so to Corvid Books. Their Grandmother's bookstore stood proudly on historic Main Street in the village of Cold Spring, New York, a small

community on the Hudson River, about an hour north of New York City. Famous in the 19th century for West Point Foundry and arms manufacturing, it was now a quaint little town full of antique shops, galleries, ice cream parlors and cafes. Although the town was often heaving with tourists in the summer, that night, at 5 o'clock on a Friday in June, the street was peaceful.

As they neared the front door of the bookstore, Aidan was still musing. "We can't let anyone else know about this. It has to be our secret."

"Absolutely," Nadia agreed. "Because if it is *real*—"

Aidan tried to jump in. "But—"

"Hang on, hang on," Nadia said. "If it *is* real, the grown-ups will take over and they'll cut us out of it completely. They'll probably even take the mirror away."

Aidan gave a nod of agreement. "And if it's *not* real and someone is jerking us around – which seems pretty likely at this point – we'll end up looking like fools."

He pushed open the heavy wooden door to the bookstore and the old brass bell attached to the top announced their arrival. Nadia waited while he held the door open for two women, laden with shopping bags, as they left the shop. She glanced up at the big sign over the door, with the carved black bird under the title, Corvid Books.

"Look, it's a crow's head. I never really noticed before."

"That's a raven," Aidan said. "All the birds that are similar to ravens like crows and jays are called Corvids, but the raven is the biggest of them all. They're very smart, kind of the King of the Corvids."

Once again, not surprised that Aidan knew weird stuff, Nadia just raised an eyebrow.

Aidan continued, "Grandma Liz told me she named the store "Corvid Books" after the raven. She said the raven, in Celtic mythology, was the shape-shifter, and a guide in supernatural events. When I looked it up online it said, 'Expect magic.'"

Nadia stepped closer to Aidan and asked, softly, "And the bird we saw in the mirror?"

"That was a raven, too."

"So cool," she breathed.

Crossing the threshold of Corvid Books, it always felt to Nadia that she was stepping back in time. As if you might see Washington Irving himself, reading to kids from *Rip Van Winkle*, in a big overstuffed chair under a window. The creaky pine floorboards had gaps between them and the building itself smelled a little of dust and mildew and old paper. All the previous owners of this shop had resisted updating it for at least the last hundred years. Hardwood bookcases lined the walls. Their arched tops and frieze moldings lent an old-world look and feel and the shelves were so ancient they were worn smooth in the middle. The bookstore was a maze of different levels and spaces; turning a corner, through an arched doorway, yet another nook appeared. Up a step here, down a ramp there, every trip to Corvid Books was an adventure.

She spotted her grandmother, talking with a woman in the Yoga and Meditation section and started toward her. It was hard to miss Grandma Liz, she always stood out, in her vibrant clothes and jewelry. Today, she was all in turquoise and black, with huge silver and turquoise jewelry, in the

southwest American Indian style. With her long skirts and piles of silver arm bangles, she managed to look glamorous and yet like an aging hippy at the same time, Nadia thought. A glamorous hippy. Perfect! But, it was more than her clothes and jewelry. Grandma Liz sort of filled the room, somehow. What her dad called a big personality. Nadia smiled to herself. She sure is that, she thought.

As the customer turned away, Liz spotted the twins approaching. "Hey! How are my favorite twins?"

Aidan grinned – this was a ritual. "I bet you say that to all the twins."

She hugged them warmly. "Not a chance, buddy. This is a nice surprise – I didn't think I was seeing you till *The Power of Twins* book-reading. You're coming, right?"

"Sure are, Aunty-Gran, sounds fun," Nadia said. "But, we came by today because we need your help with something."

"Aunty-Gran.' My, I haven't heard that in a while! OK, what can I help you with?"

Aidan hesitated. "Can we go up to your office?"

They trudged up the winding stairs, only having to stop twice while Grandma Liz talked with someone. A record, Nadia thought. The rest of the way, she chatted merrily, about the upcoming author visit.

"You guys will love the book – the author has twins in her family, too. But, I *know* she doesn't have as many twins as we do. Does anyone?" Liz chuckled.

There really were an unusual number of twins in their family tree. The Discovery Channel had even approached them for an interview about their family. They had hinted

about including them in an upcoming documentary special on twins.

In her office, their grandmother plopped down in the big leather chair behind her cluttered desk. "Ok, here we are... shoot. What's up?"

Aidan pulled the folded piece of paper, now pretty crumpled, out of his jeans pocket, and handed it to her. "Do you have any idea what language this is? We've never seen anything like it. Figured you might know..."

Liz glanced at the paper only briefly before flipping it over and spreading it smooth on the top of her desk. "It's reversed. It's a mirror image."

The kids shot each other a look.



Liz then held it up to the light for them. "See? Look at it from the back, through the paper."

"Ooh, what's it say?" Nadia peered closely at the writing and tried to read it aloud. "Breeth-noo."

breathnú

ar an

scáthán

"I think it is "Bre-ath-noo." Liz got up and strolled over to a bookcase on one wall and ran her finger along some big reference books until she found the one she wanted. "It's Irish, I'm sure of that, but don't know what 'breathnu' means." "Scathan' is 'looking glass,' or 'mirror,' as I recall."

The kids shot each other another look, which Liz caught out of the corner of her eye.

"Where did this come from?" Liz juggled the large book over to her desk and sat down to take a closer look.

Aidan's voice was nonchalant. "Oh, it's just something we found online when we were looking up Irish myths and legends."

"Ah, here we are, I found it. 'Breathnu.' It means 'observation.' Hang on, as a verb it's 'Look at.'" She thumbed through more pages. "Hmmm, and since 'scathan' is 'looking glass' or mirror, I think the whole phrase means 'Look in the mirror.'" She looked back and forth at the twins and smiled. "Does that help? Do you need it for something?"

"No not really," Aidan said quickly. "It just bugged us that we couldn't figure it out and we knew you could help. Thanks, Aunty-Gran."

Liz gave them a thoughtful look. "I wonder what you kids are up to. Now, don't try to look innocent, it doesn't fly with me." She smiled. "Sometimes I wish I could read everyone's mind, like you do, Nadia."

"Everyone's but yours, Aunty-Gran." She smiled back as she hugged her grandmother.

Liz waved them off, wrist bangles jangling. "Great to see you, but I have to get back downstairs."

"Thanks, Aunty-Gran. See you Saturday." Aidan grabbed the paper, stuffed it back in his pocket and the kids took off back down the stairs.

"Look in the mirror, seriously?" Nadia mocked. "What kind of a stupid message is that? We *were* looking in the mirror. I don't think he's a wizard, I think he's an idiot." She yanked the shop door open and headed out to the sidewalk.

"I need some time to *think*." Aidan's face was scrunched up with concentration. Nadia knew he'd drive himself crazy working on it. She didn't have as much patience – her mom told her so all the time. She sighed. Come on, Nadia, she thought, we're missing something.

The twins headed home, silent for a block or two.

"You know, I used to think I couldn't read Grandma Liz because there was nothing to read." Nadia spoke slowly, searching for how to put her thoughts into words for her brother. "You know what I mean, like she was an open book, no secrets. But... I'm starting to think I might have been wrong about that. When I try to reach her on that level,

nothing happens. It's not like I get through and I don't find anything, it's like I just can't get through. Like there is a block or a wall." She looked over at him. "Do you get anything from her? Do you ever try anymore?"

"Nah. You know I don't have your gift."

"You used to, Aidan."

"Yeah, but only with you. I never could read other people." Aidan shrugged. "It might have just been coincidence, anyway."

Nadia knew he accepted her reading people because he loved and respected her. But, he really thinks it's hokum, she thought. And Dad played it down and often joked with Aidan about it. It used to hurt her feelings, but she was used to it, now and besides, eventually they would see that she was right!

Dad said something else that was cool, she remembered. He said between Aidan and Nadia, they were one whole brain: Aidan's was the scientific side and Nadia's the intuitive side. Grandma Liz, however, explained it differently. And she was quite serious. She always said she and Aidan were synergistic, or "greater than the sum of the parts." When Aidan asked her what that meant, she replied, "You are one. Nadia is one. Together you are three."

Something about that felt right to Nadia. They were very close and understood each other, often without even speaking. Be that as it may, she and her twin brother were different in many ways. They looked different, thought differently, behaved differently. She had fine dark brown hair and deep blue eyes while he had thick wavy light brown hair and brown eyes. She was intuitive; he was rational, logical. She was

impulsive, he thought things out first. As for this whole strange event in the mirror, Nadia was ready to believe that magic had happened. She hoped it had! Not her brother; she knew it would be very hard for him to accept.

Nadia said softly, "Hmmm... Look in the mirror."

Aidan was quieter than usual for the rest of the way home. "What are we missing?" he muttered.

Nadia tossed it around in her mind. Oh, she was so disappointed. On the way to see Grandma Liz, her expectations had been so high. She had no idea what the writing meant but had hoped it would be a clue that would lead them to the next step in this mystery. Instead, what they found out seemed like no help at all. In fact, it seemed deliberately pointless.

Aidan muttered, "I hope this isn't an elaborate hoax that'll come crashing down around us." He paused, looking thoughtful. "But you know, there's something really nagging at me. The more I try to pin it down the more it is gone."

"Well, you know what Mom always says. Don't work at it, think about something else and it'll come clear."

As they climbed the porch steps to the house, Aidan said over his shoulder, "Meet me in the attic when everyone's gone to bed. We have to figure this out."



Chapter 4



The twins stood facing the old cheval mirror.

"Well, I looked up those words, myself, after we got home and Aunty-Gran is right – about what each word means, anyway. But, maybe there is more than one way to look at the whole phrase... I can't wrap my head around it yet. Could there be some other meaning?" Aidan had used translation sites online and "Breathnu ar an scathan" was definitely Irish and meant, "Look in the mirror."

Aidan and Nadia had said good night to everyone early, then hung around their rooms, waiting until the house was still. It seemed to take forever, but finally, they saw their parents' bedroom light go out and they tiptoed up to the attic. Aidan held up his cell phone for light and gently stopped Nadia from flicking on the attic light switch. She nodded and gave him a thumbs-up.

Staring into the old mirror again, Nadia whispered, "Ok, so here we are. Looking in the stupid mirror." She chewed on the cuticle of her thumb, then caught herself. She tucked her thumbs inside fists and held them down at her sides, determined not to start that again.

There was a sudden movement in the mirror and the old man began to materialize. He looked haunting and ghostlike

in the hard small light from the cell phone. The raven was again perched on his shoulder.

"We don't understand, sir. The words said, 'Look in the mirror.'" Nadia spoke directly to the figure in the glass. "But, we *are* looking in the mirror. What are you trying to tell us?"

"You are in the mirror – is that it?" Aidan asked.

The figure did not reply. As they stared, he slowly raised the long staff in his hand and the raven gently lifted off his shoulder and flew directly toward them. The twins ducked, instinctively, just as the large ebony bird penetrated the plane separating reflection from reality, passing through the mirror, right into the attic itself. It was now physically present and still coming toward them.

Aidan and Nadia tumbled back onto the floor and they could feel the breeze from the bird's wings as it passed over their heads. Aidan's phone skittered across the attic rug and its light went out. As they jumped to their feet and peered around in the darkness, they could make out the raven, standing on a pile of boxes behind them, as real as they were. His jet-black feathers gleamed in the moonlight streaming in through the attic window. Only a small patch of white on his neck broke the shiny black coloring. Nadia looked back at the mirror, but the figure had vanished. The raven, however, remained.

The twins were stunned. Aidan took a step toward Nadia as if to protect her, but Nadia did not feel afraid. She was startled and excited, to be sure, but was more in awe than frightened.

Just as she was wondering what their next move should be, the bird hopped down to the attic floor and waddled, unconcerned, between the two of them to the base of the

cheval mirror. The kids shuffled back a bit, eyes wide in wonderment, giving it some space.

The raven began to peck gently at the base of the mirror. Then he turned and looked at them for a moment, before turning once again to continue its pecking.

Aidan spoke softly, "What on earth is he doing now?"

Nadia stared at the bird. "Look how he keeps looking back at us."

She moved carefully toward the mirror, trying not to spook the raven. Aidan positioned himself between his sister and this strange bird. Then he reached for his sister's hand and as his fingers closed around hers, the old man reappeared in the glass as though stepping out of shadow. This time, he took half a step forward and, leaning on the staff with one hand, he pointed with the other down at the iridescent bird at the base of the old mirror.

Letting go of Nadia's hand, Aidan threw his arms up and asked, "What? What do you want us to do?" The figure in the mirror just receded and faded once again.

Aidan and Nadia stood frozen, eyes locked on the raven for a few moments more. It stared directly at them, head tilted to one side as though it had been waiting for them to pay attention, then pecked three measured pecks on the base of the mirror. Turning back to them, it stretched its wings and lifted off the attic floor. Nadia sucked in a breath, but together the twins held their ground. Just as the bird reached eye level, it disintegrated. It gently burst into a shower of glittery particles, evaporating as they drifted down, never reaching the attic floor. Like silent fireworks in the night sky.

Speechless, they stood still while the attic slowly returned to its normal dark dusty condition, as if nothing had ever happened. Then they heard the sound of water running in one of the bathrooms.

"Yikes," Nadia whispered. "What are we going to tell them if they find us up here in the middle of the night?"

"Shhhh. Just hold on, it's probably nothing. We don't know that they heard anything."

They stayed still, waiting for a minute or two. There was silence.

"That was close," Nadia whispered. "They must've gone back to bed."

Aidan quietly picked up his phone and pressed the on button. "Good." He sighed. "It isn't broken. Geez, Mom and Dad would kill me if they had to buy me another one."

Using it as a flashlight, he knelt down to look at the spot where the raven had been pecking. He ran his hands over the smooth wooden base.

"You've been over it and over it and not found anything. Come on, Aidan, we should get out of here." Nadia was starting to get nervous. "I'm afraid Mom and Dad are going to catch us and want to know what we're doing. Come on, tomorrow is Saturday – we can mess around up here all we want during the day. It would be a lot easier to explain."

Downstairs, Aidan flopped down at the kitchen table. However, Nadia couldn't sit. She felt restless, shaken and even though it was June, a bit chilled.

"Want some hot chocolate?" Nadia didn't wait for an answer from her brother; she knew he was miles away, but would drink whatever she put in front of him.

The clank of the saucepan on the stove roused her brother. "That raven was real," Aidan said. "He was *real*... Oh, man." He jumped up and joined Nadia in front of the stove and peered over her shoulder. "What are you doing?"

"Can you grab me the whisk?" Nadia asked, over her shoulder.

"Sure... What's a whisk and where is it?"

Nadia rolled her eyes. "Over there." She pointed toward the big white hutch near the table. "It's in the hutch."

"Oh." Aidan started for the hutch, then suddenly stopped, whirled around, hands up to his forehead, his eyes wide.

"What?" She was watching that the milk didn't boil over and trying to watch Aidan.

"In the mirror... *In* the mirror!" he said. Nadia just looked at him. He was grinning and held out his hands, palms up, as if it was perfectly obvious. "Of course, why didn't I think of that before?" He shot out of the kitchen at a near-run and headed for the stairs.

"Wait for me, where you going, what are you talking about?" Nadia flicked off the burner and raced after him. "Wait," she whispered again. "Will you please stop and talk to me? *What are you doing?*"

Pausing briefly at the top of the stairs, Aidan waved hard for her to be quiet as he listened for any activity from the rest of their sleeping family. Hearing none, he was off again and scurrying toward the attic stairs, with Nadia right behind him. As quickly and quietly as they could, the twins slipped up the last flight of stairs to the attic and stood in the beam of moonlight before the mirror.

"For crying out loud Aidan, will you please tell me what you're doing?" She was breathless and irritated.

"His words were 'Look in the mirror.' It means look *in* the mirror."

"I dare you to say it one more time." Nadia was actually clenching her fist.

"Something has been bugging me, nagging at me, and then it hit me!" Aidan shifted his focus back to the mirror. He squatted down and ran his hands over, around and finally under the wooden base, concentrating his search below the very spot the raven had been pecking.

"In the mirror," he whispered as he felt around the mirror base. "Maybe it doesn't mean looking in the mirror like you usually look in the mirror, maybe it means to look *inside* the physical mirror!"

At that moment, Aidan's searching finger found the cleverly hidden trigger. Nadia heard a soft metallic click and a small drawer, invisible a moment before, popped open about an inch. She dropped down next to her brother, who had already grabbed the front of the drawer with two fingers and was sliding it open.

"There was a button underneath," Aidan said softly. "It felt like the head of a nail but when I pushed it, it moved." He continued to pull the drawer until it was fully open. It was about a foot from side to side and front to back and four inches deep. He used the cell phone once again as a flashlight to get a better look.

The twins stared into the drawer. Inside, on a white satin pillow rested an intricately carved stone object.

"Look!" Nadia breathed.

Aidan reached in and slowly removed the object. It was made of black shiny stone and it was carved so that it looked exactly the same from either end. On each end was an intricate carving of a raven's head with one wing sweeping back.

Nadia touched it gently. "Can I hold it?" Aidan dropped it into Nadia's hand and turned back to the drawer. He removed the pillow, turned it over then back again, and squeezed it here and there to see if there was anything inside it. Then he leaned closer and looked into the drawer itself and ran his hand into the back to feel for anything else. It was empty. The only two things the drawer had contained were the satin pillow in Aidan's hand and the carved stone, in Nadia's.

Nadia was still examining the stone. "Why did he want us to find this? Where did it come from? Who hid it and why did they hide it in this mirror? Wow, it's like finding treasure!"

Aidan nodded, "You're right. This whole thing is really happening, Nadia. It's *real*. Man, this is so freaking cool!"

Nadia's eyes were still glued to the stone object. "You're right, this is so exciting! How do we figure out what it is? Should we ask mom or dad? We don't have to tell them about the mirror, just that we found this up here? Or maybe Grandma Liz knows... Grandma Catherine lived here before us; do you suppose it was hers or Grandpa Art's?"

Aidan was shaking his head slowly. "I want to keep this to ourselves for awhile, OK? It may be valuable, I know, and we might have to tell them eventually, but let's just hang on for awhile."

"Ok. And look," said Nadia, holding the stone out toward her brother, "See how your hand fits around it. Like I'm

shaking a hand. Or, like the grip on the handlebars of your bike."

Aidan grasped the stone from the other end. His fingers slid smoothly into the contours and his thumb pressed up against his sister's.

Nadia sighed. "I don't know how I'll sleep tonight."

They were silent for a few moments, each lost in thought as they stared down at the mysterious stone they held between them.

A shock of energy coursed through her and Nadia gasped.

"What the— ?" Aidan cried.

The energy grew and the next instant Nadia saw a giant golden arc appear in front of her, sweeping her into its light. A roaring sound filled her ears and everything around her shimmered and morphed. Suddenly they were sucked along a short gold path of light.

Then, just as quickly as it happened, everything settled and came back into focus. The feeling of electricity in her veins receded and Nadia took a deep breath. She quickly looked around her and was blinded by the bright sunshine streaming in the window. "Wait – what?" she exclaimed.

The twins, shocked, stared around the attic.

"What was that? What on earth's going on?" Hearing voices in the distance, Nadia slipped quietly across the attic floor, down the stairs and as quietly as possible cracked the door to the second-floor hallway. Yes, voices were coming from downstairs, from either the kitchen or family room. She felt her heart beating double time. What was going on? Something *weird*, that's for sure.

Aidan hurried down the steps and pushed in front of her, listening at the door. "Why is everyone up?" he whispered.

They crept into the hallway, then tiptoed to the head of the main stairs. Just then, Heather laughed out loud and they could hear her friend Judith's voice, as well. With Aidan leading, they continued cautiously down the stairs, remembering to walk on the outer edges of the steps so they wouldn't creak. Just as Nadia was considering simply calling out to her family, she and her brother rounded the bend in the stairs and could see down into the kitchen.

Aidan gasped and jumped back, stopping Nadia from stepping out into full view of those in the kitchen. He motioned "shh" to her with a finger to lips and pointed hard at the kitchen.

Nadia gestured, "what?" with a palm toward the ceiling and peeked around to see what had just shocked her brother.

There, sitting at the big wooden table, were Nadia and Aidan, themselves! The twins, on the stairs, were looking at *themselves* sitting at the kitchen table. This was just not possible. Nadia's hand flew up to her mouth and her heart stopped for a moment in her chest. She pulled back hard, so not to be seen. Then she peeked out again, very carefully. No, she did not imagine it; there was Aidan sitting at the table, eating Cheerios. Heather and Judessa were stirring dough in a large yellow pottery bowl and they could hear their mom's bluegrass music playing from the other room. And yes, there *she* was, real as life, eating toast and honey in the kitchen.

She blinked hard, thinking her eyes were playing tricks on her. Maybe she was looking at someone who just looked like her. No such luck – there was no denying that Aidan was

sitting right next to her. She felt as if her brain had turned to mush. She couldn't think straight. Fear tore through her and Aidan looked like he was in shock; his hand was gripping hers so tightly it hurt. What on earth was going on?

Aidan pulled Nadia back up the stairs. But, just as they reached the second-floor landing, their mother stepped out of her bedroom and stopped right in front of them.

"Hey you guys, what are you doing back in your PJs? I thought you were already dressed." Still too dumbfounded to speak, Aidan and Nadia just stared and shrugged at their mother. Before they could come up with any sort of answer, the phone in their mom's hand began to buzz.

"Hey Sis, I was just going to call you." There was a pause while she listened. "Hang on a sec, Suze." She turned to the kids. "Great news. Your Aunt Suzanne is fine with leaving Monday for New Hampshire." The twins nodded. Their mom gave them a funny, searching look.

"What's wrong with you two? You look like you've seen a ghost."



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About the Authors

Diane Solomon enjoyed a wonderfully diverse career path that included her own variety show on BBC TV in England and major tours with Glen Campbell and Kenny Rogers. Her highly successful singing career has given way to her lifelong dream of being a writer.

This is the first novel written with her husband, Mark Carey, a retired biologist, naturalist, and accomplished voice-over artist.

They live in New Hampshire, on 55 acres of woods and streams, where they spend many hours designing gardens and meadows, and watching wildlife.

Website: www.EloquentRascals.com

Resources

Books about stone chambers and other mysterious phenomenon of the northeast.:

Mysterious Stone Sites in the Hudson Valley of New York and northern New Jersey, by Linda Zimmerman

Celtic Mysteries of New England, Philip Imbrogno

The Stones of Time: Calendars, Sundials, and Stone Chambers of Ancient Ireland, by Martin Brennan

Websites:

The town of Cold Spring, New York:
www.ColdSpringLiving.com

America's Stonehenge. www.StonehengeUSA.com

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