



*Recompense*  
*Ravencraft: Book 4*

*Susan VanLue*

**D**edicated to **E**ric.  
**M**My best friend and my soulmate.  
**T**hank you for loving me and making me laugh.

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## P rologue

*London, 1798*

The child silently crept toward the edge of the small circle of light. Even when he couldn't be discerned in the gloom, the glints from his golden hair caught the skimpy light. The child clutched the tattered hand of his stuffed rabbit tightly.

It was his only toy.

His father did not see him.

Slowly, he came to the edge of the desk, resting his chin on his tiny hands, letting the toy dangle precariously as he stared at his father, Papa, who was gazing down at the ledger, his eyes reddened from the strain of reading the book in such a dim light. From time to time, his eyes would drift close. Papa would force them open again, blinking many times to clear his head.

“Papa?”

Richard Draven, seventh Duke of Harveston, started, then shook his head. His young son stood there beside him, his cherubic cheeks rosy in the glow from the oil lamp on the desk. Richard forced a smile. “You should be tucked up in your bed, youngun.”

The boy came around the desk, twisting his free hand in his

nightshirt in an inherently nervous manner. "I had a bad dream," he confessed. Even at his young age, the hint of self-disgust was there.

His father grinned then, hauling the lad onto his lap. "It was nothing more than a bad dream, Ethan. Now you be a big lad and run off back to bed."

Ethan found himself set back on his feet, and he turned to face his father once more. "Papa?"

"Yes, Ethan?"

"What do you here?" he asked, waving his chubby hand in the direction of the desk.

Richard sighed, turning his attention back to his son. "Ethan, some day you will understand all of this busywork. You will run the shipyard, and you will work just as hard as I."

"Why must you work so very hard?" the boy persisted, a deep frown marring the smoothness of his fleshy cheeks.

Richard reached out, pulling his son close again. "Someone stole everything from your grandfather, son. I've got to do this so that you won't have to do it all later."

There was no bitterness in Richard's voice. He was merely matter-of-fact about the whole ordeal.

"Papa," Ethan said, turning back after he had started for the door once more.

Richard had turned his attention back to his work again. He didn't look up at his son. "Hm?"

The timid smile that had graced Ethan's face dimmed then disappeared altogether, and his little shoulders slumped. He began away once more. "Night, Papa."

As he moved silently toward the staircase that led to his bedchamber, Ethan quickly swatted an offending tear away.

It was long minutes before Richard answered his son. "Night," he replied, glancing up from his work.

By the time Richard did, Ethan was gone.