

Shamberg

Ravencroft Book II

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Dedicated to Heather.
Because you have always liked this story

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Shambergg

Prologue

Ravencroft Castle, Angevin England, March 1234 A. D.

Larken Draven sat at on the raised dais with his father and brothers as he watched through sleep-deprived, red-rimmed eyes. It felt like he had been sitting in that spot for days—years, even. Perhaps it was his imagination. *Women bear children every day*, he told himself, clenching and unclenching his fist by turns. *Soon, soon . . .*

Lili, his sister-in-law, and Carola, his stepmother, slogged down the stairs to the hall, where they had been waiting anxiously for some word that would end his torment of the last few hours.

Falcon Draven, Larken's elder brother as well as master of Ravencroft

Castle and all it entailed, stood, cautiously waiting as his wife approached them, rubbing her reddened eyes with slightly shaking hands. He patted Larken's shoulder then stepped quickly over to intercept the women, leaving behind his father, who held tight to Larken's shoulders, effectively staying the younger man.

"Lili?" Falcon asked, grasping his wife's upper arms gently. "Is there aught amiss?" Something in the pit of his stomach was telling him it was bad tidings. Lili looked so exhausted—and so very sad . . .

Lili lifted her face slowly, meeting Falcon's darkened blue eyes, standing on tiptoe for a moment. Staring over her spouse's shoulder at Larken, her gaze misted over with unshed tears.

"She is dead, Falcon. 'Twas naught we could do for her. We tried, but we could not save her . . . She just. . . and we . . . I do not know what to tell him," she said, her voice cracking, faltering. She spared Falcon another pleading glance before looking back at Larken.

"The babe?" Falcon asked, fighting to keep his voice low enough that Larken would not hear, fighting to control his grief over the situation at hand. "What of the babe?"

Lili shook her head slowly, her shoulders shaking with silent sobs. "Nay, the babe . . . He will die soon, as well . . . He came too small, and he came too soon . . ."

Falcon let go of Lili's arms and drew her close instead, into a stifling, yet comforting embrace. "I will tell him, love. Go to Moira and Anthony."

Lili pulled away, nodding as she wiped her eyes. Wordlessly, she turned back to the stairs, making her way to their children's chamber to hold them close and mourn Larken's loss with them.

With a heavy sigh, Falcon turned back, rubbing a tired hand over his face as he searched for a way to tell Larken that his wife was dead, and his newborn

