

# Earl of Brecken by Aubrey Wynne

## EXCERPT

*Brecken Castle, 1815*

“My final year of university is finished. Are you sure you want me to leave again so soon?” Madoc leaned against the mantel, the smoldering peat in the grate hot against his trousers. The September sun poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows and mocked the thin, dour man wrapped in heavy wool blankets.

The silence stretched. Perhaps the earl had fallen asleep. His gaze fell on his father’s bony fingers, clutching a shawl around his rounded shoulders as if it were his last defense. Madoc swallowed as his father’s gaze narrowed. The hazel eyes, passed down to his only son, sparked with anger.

“Do you think I cannot manage my own affairs because I cannot walk?” rasped the earl, batting at a limp strand of gray on his forehead. “Do you think the inability to use these feckless limbs affects my brain?”

“No, Father, but I believe it has affected your spirit.” He went down on one knee and took a cold, papery hand in his warm clasp. “Please, let me take you for a ride in the carriage, get out and see some of your tenants. Your soul is in this land.”

“I don’t need you to take me anywhere. If I wanted to leave my home, I’d do it.” The old man bellowed with surprising volume. Then his shoulders slumped, as if the admonishment had depleted what little energy he’d possessed. “Go! Enjoy your youth while you have it. Lady Fortune is a fickle, evil woman. You never know how long happiness will stay perched on your shoulder.”

Madoc was finished. What had he been thinking? His father had no idea how hard it had been to get leave right after Waterloo. Then again, his family didn’t know he was working for the Home Office. He hadn’t been at university for the last year. He’d been in Belgium. His Grand Tour would provide the perfect ruse for a spy to be abroad. He stopped at the front door, his palm on the cold handle of the door, a final glance at his home. It may be years before he was able to return. If he returned.