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BARRINGTON'S BRIGADE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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Thank you for participating in the Winter Reading Bundle Giveaway. I'm delighted to share this exclusive first-chapter sneak peek from my upcoming novel, *A Reckoning for the Earl*, releasing January 20, 2026.

This excerpt introduces Alexander Weld and Lady Georgina Ravenstock—two lives shaped by duty, loss, and the sharp winds of change in Sommer-by-the-Sea. I hope you enjoy stepping into their world.

Warm regards,

Ruth A. Casie



Exclusive Sneak Peek

A Reckoning for the Earl

Chapter One

Lady Georgina Ravenstock promised herself that this would be her last visit. One year and one day ago, she buried her husband, and still the silence lingered. Not grief, precisely, but the burden of things unfinished, unsaid, unmourned.

She waited as her coachman climbed back onto the box after opening the iron gate. The autumn breeze sent leaves scurrying down the path, whipping them in circles against the stones. The coach wheels had scarcely come to a halt before she stepped down, already certain of her path.

The last time she stood here, she had scattered earth upon her husband's grave and vowed it would be the final farewell. Now, after a deep breath, she made her way down the path, passing the final resting places of familiar names. Her late husband, Rowland, Baron Ravenstock, had been ten years her senior, a serious man, consumed by the responsibilities of his title and the coal mine that sustained it.

He had spent much of his time in Sommer-by-the-Sea, working alongside his men underground, while she remained in their London townhouse, managing the rest of their world. It was not distance born of disregard but of duty, carved out by expectation and necessity. A year ago, an urgent summons called her back to Sommer-by-the-Sea. There had been a terrible collapse in the mine, one that had taken Rowland's life.

Now, she approached his grave and stood solemnly, gazing at the fine inscription. Try as she may, his features were fading from her memory. Rowland had always been a man of quiet strength, marked more by soot-stained hands than by society's polish. She smiled, remembering the dust smudged at the corner of his brow, more than the fine lines around his face.

She had done all that was expected. The silks, the silence, the seclusion. But expectation made poor company. And with the mourning veil still clinging to her like a shadow, she was no longer certain who she was meant to be.

Georgina drew a deep breath, then slowly exhaled. “Sleep well, my lord,” she whispered, her gloved hand brushing the top of the headstone.

Tomorrow, she had an appointment with her solicitor and planned to settle all the accounts. This would be her final goodbye. Beyond that, she did not yet know where her path would lead, only that her path would be of her own choosing.

She lifted her chin, her gaze settling on the great oak at the edge of the cemetery. The wind stirred its amber leaves, revealing the figure of another mourner beneath its branches. She stilled. Although at this distance, his features were hidden, the gentleman was tall with a familiar bearing. There was no mistaking the broad set of his shoulders, or the way he stood with a soldier’s stillness, braced against the wind, weathering the next military charge. For the briefest moment, their eyes might have met, or perhaps it was only her imagination.

She drew her shawl closer about her shoulders and turned away, casting her thoughts back to the matter at hand. She had returned for Rowland. To mark the year gone by and to close this chapter properly.

She turned and made her way back along the path toward the gates. The breeze shifted once more. She glanced up, and there was the shadow from beneath the branches. Closer now, he was unmistakably Alexander Weld.

Time had carved new lines at the corners of his eyes. There was a gravity to him now of a man who had seen too much and carried it quietly. But it was him, unmistakably him.

His gaze caught hers, sharp with recognition, and held. No words passed between them, but a flicker of something—surprise, perhaps, or memory—sparked in his eyes.

Her heart did not quicken. Absolutely not. It merely... remembered. A warmth, a shape, the ease of being seen without explanation. Nothing more. Of course, it was him. Broad-shouldered stubbornness wrapped in a greatcoat. Only Alexander Weld could turn grief into a posture.

And yet... something tugged at the edges of her composure. Surprise, perhaps, or an echo of the ease they’d once shared. There had been comfort in his presence, laughter once so effortless it had stitched itself into her memory. She had expected familiarity.

She had not expected a flicker of warmth. Not after all these years. Not after Rowland.

With a practiced nod, she acknowledged him and continued on her way, leaving the autumn wind to scatter the leaves in her wake.



The sea mist clung to Alexander Weld’s greatcoat like a widow’s breath. He did not shake it off. He stood at the crest of Hawkesbury Hill. Earlier, he had followed the black-plumed hearse down the winding path toward the family vault. Below, the waves clawed at the cliffs with restless hunger, as though they too mourned his father’s passing, their fury pounding against unyielding stone.

Five years ago, he'd walked away from this land, a broken man with blood on his boots and grief carved deep into his chest. He had left behind the mine, the manor, the title, and every expectation that came with them. Now, it all came rushing back.

"Welcome home, my lord," murmured Mr. Bexley, the estate steward, stepping beside him. "The tenants will be waiting in the hall. There's much to be settled."

Weld didn't reply immediately. His eyes traced the jagged skyline of Sommer-by-the-Sea, its crooked chimneys, coal smoke, and glints of steel and soot. It was a town advancing into industry, growing hungrier by the day.

For a moment, his thoughts drifted from industry and death to the woman at the cemetery. Lady Georgina Ravenstock. Even from a distance, she had seemed unchanged, poised and composed, yet there was a tightness to her expression, as if the wind carried not a chill but rather a burden. Her gaze had met his across the graveyard, steady and unflinching. A faint memory drifted to the surface. Summer sunlight on the water, and her quiet laugh came to mind. He pushed it aside. There was no room for memory now.

"I received a report this morning," Bexley added. "Another accident in the lower shaft. One dead, two injured. Same cause as before. Equipment failure, but no explanation."

Of course. The mine wouldn't wait. Death did not pause for mourning.

Weld turned, his expression unreadable. "Send a message to Sommer Chase. To Lord Barrington himself."

Bexley blinked. "Barrington? The same man from—?"

"Yes." Weld reached into his coat and drew a small object from an inner pocket, a gold medallion etched with the double B for Barrington's Brigade. A calling card. A reckoning. "Bring him this. He'll know what to do."

Bexley paled slightly but nodded. "At once."

Rowland's father had given his life to the mine, as had generations before him. And now, it demanded more still. Weld turned back to the cliffs. His military life waited for him in London, his father lay in the earth, and the mine, his mine, was killing men in his name. He let out a breath. Enough.

The wind howled across the hills, and the new Earl Hawkesbury did not flinch.



The wind chased Georgina up the front steps, tugging at her skirts like a child reluctant to let her go. She let herself inside, closing the door against its grasp.

"There you are," Eliza Langford, Georgina's close friend, said as Georgina removed her gloves. "I feared the cemetery might have swallowed you whole. We nearly lost two vicars that way. One to melancholia, the other to scandal. But that's another story."

Georgina managed a faint smile as she unpinned her hat. "It did try, but I managed to escape its clutches."

“What news, or should I say gossip, do you have to share?” Georgina asked as Mrs. Hemsley, the Ravenstock housekeeper, set down the tea tray.

The parlor at Ravenstock Manor bore the marks of years spent in quiet respectability. The upholstery had faded to soft hues of moss and cream, the once-vibrant curtains now gentled by the sun. A scattering of porcelain figurines perched along the mantel, relics of an earlier age, their glossy surfaces dulled. A stack of correspondence waited on a small table near the hearth, neatly bound with twine, the tidy habits of a woman determined to keep her affairs in order.

The fire crackled low, its warmth just enough to ward off the autumn chill, and the scent of beeswax polish lingered in the air. Mrs. Hemsley had, as always, prepared the room to welcome a guest, but it was Georgina’s quiet presence that filled the space, lending it a sense of dignity the furnishings alone could not provide.

“The town grows restless,” Eliza added more soberly. “There’s talk of shortages. The bread from Thwaite’s had nearly doubled in cost since Michaelmas. With several of the mines idle and wages unpaid, the women queued at dawn for half-loaves and onions. They’ve been trading eggs when coin ran thin. And for those who are fortunate enough to be working, there’s been no improvement in wages.”

“No improvement, and no end to accidents, I imagine.” Georgina tucked her gloves into her hat, passed them to Mrs. Hemsley, settled into a seat across from Eliza, and began pouring tea.

“Lord Hawkesbury is the latest victim. His funeral was this morning.” Eliza smoothed out her skirt.

Georgina froze as she was about to hand Eliza her tea. “Lord Hawkesbury? I thought I had seen Alexander Weld.”

Eliza removed the tea from Georgina’s grip. “Where did you see him? You only arrived yesterday.”

“I had no idea.” Georgina’s voice was barely a whisper. She and Alex had known each other in Sommer-by-the-Sea as well as in London. He had gone off to war the year before she married Rowland.

“Where did you see him, Georgina?” Eliza leaned in to catch her friend’s attention.

Georgina glanced at her and took a breath. “He was at the cemetery.”

“The cemetery?” Eliza teased. “How perfectly dramatic. If only we had a storm to complete the picture.”

“There is some exciting news.” Eliza changed the subject. “Honorina Bainbridge is making a decision on her wedding gown. She is on the verge of pulling her hair out over the guest list. She received a message from Barrington’s brother, Lord Edward, instructing her, not asking, mind you, that she include Michael Dane, the Viscount Albury.” Eliza folded her arms. “She had no idea why the Chief Liaison to the East India Company needed an invitation.”

“Has Lord Barrington come about, or did Honorina finally give him an ultimatum? It must be almost fifteen years since they became an item. I should give her kudos for remaining independent.”

“Apparently, half the village wishes to attend, and the other half insists they’ve been scandalously overlooked, even though no invitations have been sent. And that’s not even mentioning those from London. I still think it’s wonderful. Those two make a wonderful pair. Everyone should be as fortunate.”

Georgina didn’t say a word.

“Oh, forgive me.” Eliza placed her hand gently on Georgina’s arm. “How unfeeling of me.”

Georgina patted Eliza’s hand. “There is no need for an apology. My marriage was one of practicality and friendship. Rowland was a wonderful man in many ways. He gave his life to his miners.”

She stood and crossed to the window, gazing out over the rooftops of Sommer-by-the-Sea. A breeze stirred the gold-edged leaves beyond the glass. “Even the air feels different,” she murmured. “Autumn always brings change.”

“It always does,” Eliza replied, joining her side.



Outside, the wind shifted again, stirring the autumn leaves and carrying whispers from the coast, soft as memory, and just as impossible to hold.

At Hawkesbury Hall, a fire crackled low in the hearth, holding back the chill as Weld turned toward the sound of approaching footsteps.

“You wasted no time,” he remarked as Barrington entered the study.

“Neither did your steward,” Barrington replied, returning the medallion to Weld’s palm. “When a man sends this, it demands prompt attention. I was coming to see you today. Honoria is threatening I must sample more wedding cakes, and I thought Hawkesbury Hall would be a good place—”

“To hide.” Weld chuckled and gestured for Barrington to have a seat by the fire while he went to the sideboard.

The study at Hawkesbury Manor smelled faintly of coal dust and old paper, as though the very bones of the house remembered the industry that sustained it. Heavy oak shelves lined the walls, their contents thick with ledgers and mining records, the spines cracked from handling. Dust motes drifted lazily in the shafts of sunlight that pierced the tall windows. A scattering of maps and papers on the desk lay beneath an iron paperweight shaped like a miner’s lantern, a tribute, or perhaps a warning.

The fire in the grate had been coaxed back to life, casting flickering light across the worn carpet and drawing long shadows up the paneled walls. It was not a room of comfort, but of command. And in Weld’s presence, it felt as though the house itself had roused from its long slumber.

“Brandy?” Weld offered, though his hand was already on the decanter.

Barrington nodded. Weld poured two glasses and handed one to him. The amber liquid caught the light, but neither man seemed to notice. Weld sat in the chair next to him.

“I’ve returned and found that my father has kept a great deal from me over the last few years. Accidents aren’t uncommon, but the number my father endured…” Weld paused, swirling the brandy in his glass. “It’s suspect.” He didn’t look at Barrington right away. He wasn’t ready to hear his agreement, not yet. He took a slow sip, then turned to face him.

“After nearly every accident, there was an outlay of money, supposedly for repairs. But.” Weld shook his head. “I’m not so certain they were completed.”

Barrington’s gaze sharpened. “That’s not carelessness. I’ve seen work undone, on purpose.” He leaned forward slightly, his brandy forgotten. “Targeted disruptions. Financial siphons hidden behind false repairs. That’s the Order’s pattern.”

The words struck. Weld paused mid-motion, surprise flickering across his features before he looked away, thinking, recalculating. “I thought they stuck to trade routes and political channels.”

“They did. But we’ve choked off many of those.” Barrington’s voice was grim. “And now, in desperation, they’ll take what they can. Coal…”

“...is a gold mine waiting to be bled dry,” Weld finished.

“Then we move carefully.” Barrington drained the last of his brandy. “Care is a luxury we cannot afford. Last year, Ravenstock. This year, my father. Who will be next?”

Weld’s gaze settled on the map, its lines too neat to reflect the chaos beneath. He set down his glass, the fire catching in its depths, and rose. Side by side, they began.



Coming January 20, 2026 - *A Reckoning for the Earl*

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