

A Heart So Fierce and Broken

Brigid Kemmerer

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Continuing her inventive reimagining of *Beauty and the Beast*, Brigid Kemmerer blends magic, romance, and the growing specter of war in *A Heart So Fierce and Broken*.

With the curse broken and the enchantress Lilith defeated, Prince Rhen attempts to return Emberfall to normalcy, but whispers of a true heir threaten his position and leave him vulnerable to the ruthless Karis Luran of the neighboring Syhl Shallow. After learning he is the rightful heir, Grey—Rhen's most loyal guardsman and friend—leaves Ironrose Castle, believing his absence to be the only way to protect Rhen.

When Lia Mara, Karis Luran's daughter, arrives seeking peace, she is met with the violence that has grown typical of Rhen against his people's revolts. Grey, found and imprisoned along with newfound friends, also sees Rhen unraveling and forms a wary alliance with Lia Mara in order to escape. Alliances deepen to friendship and further as the group heads to Syhl Shallow, witnessing episodes of Rhen's cruelty along the way, but it is nothing compared to the threats that await in Karis Luran's court.

Best read as the sequel it is, the novel adds to the intricate world building of the first volume. Magical elements are expanded upon, as are returning characters, and many questions are put to rest, while intriguing jumping-off points are raised for the series finale. The focus shifting to Grey offers an opportunity to examine the double-edged sword of loyalty and love, and Lia Mara is a refreshing introduction, a headstrong heroine who refuses to sacrifice compassion for strength.

Tension builds naturally, both within relationships and the political climate. Diplomatic maneuvering and royal intrigue abound as Grey and his allies walk a tightrope over the viper's nest of Syhl Shallow, leading to a climactic choice for Lia Mara that opens up enticing possibilities.

A white-knuckle fantasy begging to be read in one sitting, *A Heart So Fierce and Broken* has a satisfying end and promises excitement to come.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (January / February 2020)

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