

An Excerpt from the Novel

Broken Crowns

By Holly Fergason

Kymil rounded the corner and entered refuge. As he moved around the small room, he gathered his possessions into a satchel. The papers, the book and blade. His fingers stopped as he saw what he had been avoiding. The blue feather of a mountain bird. *Chuvinya*. She had found the feather, plucking it from the earth and twirled it between her fingers. She tucked it behind her ear and she laughed. Not in spite, but joy, her dark lashes closed, face turned to the sun. Oh gods, if he could've saved that sound he would have. It felt like the north, like ice and storms and the song of the mountains.

His memories were raw, not yet scabbed with time. He could still feel her blood on his fingers. Her life in his hands. He stuffed the feather into his satchel and kept searching. When he was finally done, he moved back outside, to the dark stones of a fire pit he had made the day before. He gathered kindling, and when he finally struck the match, the fire sprang greedily to the branches. The power in his blood, the fire that leapt to his command was gone now, though the reminder of scars still marked his arms and wrists. Sometimes he thought that the straight white cuts still burned in half remembered memory. He reached for his satchel, before dumping the contents beside the fire. And there he sat, watching as each of his possessions, the only things he had, went up in flames until only the feather and the book were left. He was done with this place. With this life. With her.

Kymil looked back to the Citadel that he had left. He would burn the world down. Set the entire thing aflame until only he was left. And only then, could he rest. Only then could he be free. He tossed the book into the fire, and as the pages curled, the sign on his arm burned as well. He watched as the pages curled and shriveled. Blackening. Yes, he would burn the world down. Reduce the whole thing to ashes. For how could they continue on living. He did not let himself cry as he placed the feather on top of the blaze. As the blue fibers turned black as her hair had been. He whispered her name. They would remember her, he would make them sing her name if he asked them to. Kymil turned away from the fire, eyes were dark. The whole world would know his sorrow. And where he walked, he would leave nothing but ashes.