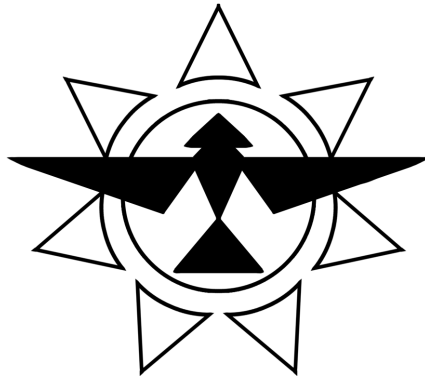


Bound By Blood

Book Two of *The Seven Wars*

E. H. Kindred



A Novel Of The Somaðarsath

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The Seven Wars Series

The Immortal

Bound By Blood

Through Death Or Through Darkness

The Mirror of Dumsaro

The Court Of The Hydra King

Time's Shadows

Storms Westward

Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? as everyone is
immortal;
I know it is wonderful, but my eyesight is equally
wonderful,
and how I was conceived in my mother's womb is equally
wonderful,
And pass'd from a babe in the creeping trance of a couple of
summers and winters to articulate and walk— all this is
equally wonderful.
And that my soul embraces you this hour, and we affect
each other
without ever seeing each other, and never perhaps to see
each other, is every bit as wonderful.

—Walt Whitman

Excerpted from “Who Learns My Lesson Complete”

Chapter One

Salazar chose to take up a post in the stable. He enjoyed being around the horses, and there were enough stablehands at work this time of day that there was always someone around. If Sorain wanted to see him, he would have to find him here, where there were plenty of people to see. Salazar hoped the presence of so many other eyes would protect him.

Not wanting to just loiter, Salazar brushed his buckskin mare, Aurn, taking his time. He worked every tangle out of her mane and tail, picked the dirt from her hooves and around the shoes, but still Sorain did not appear. The boy decided to stay a while longer, unwilling to leave the perceived safety of the stable, and so led Aurn back into her stall and tethered his father's horse out in the wide corridor among the stalls. Theramancer didn't complain (so long as Salazar brought the feed bucket with him), and stood still for the boy to brush him.

The stallion's ebony coat willingly shined under the brush and Salazar found his mind wandering as he worked. His shoulders twinged as he stretched to reach the horse's back, the bruises not quite healed from the beating Sorain had given him yesterday. That had been the final straw. When Salazar found himself cowering in the mud, looking up at his attacker from the stream behind his house, something had snapped and the boy was unwilling to take anymore. If Sorain wanted to blackmail his way back into power, he would just have to find someone else to target.

Salazar worked his way down the stallion's tall form, combing out the tangles in the long feathering at his ankles. Theramancer stamped a huge foot.

"Easy there," said the boy, patting the horse's side.

Theramancer had drawn his head out of the feed bucket and Salazar soon saw that he had not been the source of the horse's angry stomp.

Sorain had sidled into the stable, seeming at ease, and to Salazar's dismay the only stablehand left inside wandered out, leaving him alone with the captain of the guard. Sorain stalked in closer, looking at the stallion's proud head.

"Such a magnificent animal," he remarked, extending a hand toward the horse's head.

Theramancer's ears flattened and he snapped his teeth at the captain's fingers, but Sorain had quick enough reflexes to avoid being nipped. He gave the horse an indignant look, but continued around him toward Salazar.

“What’s the matter?” asked the boy. “Too afraid to hit *him* if he doesn’t cooperate?”

“You wouldn’t be getting rebellious with me, would you, boy?” asked Sorain, getting between Salazar and the horse.

“Call it what you like, but I’ve had enough,” he replied. “If you think hurting and threatening me is going to be enough to manipulate my father into giving up his place here, then you are a fool.”

Sorain loomed over him, pushing him back toward the opposite wall.

“Do I need to remind you what is at stake here?” Sorain growled. “I know where to find your kind and I know how to kill you. Perhaps I should send a note to your father to tell him so, after I’ve taken you there and have my knife poised at your throat. Something tells me he’d be quick get his nose out of my family’s business then.”

“Try it,” Salazar snapped back, “Just see if you can get me out of this castle. See if you can even get me out of this stable—”

He saw light explode in his vision as Sorain backhanded him. Theramancer let out a shrill nicker. The boy staggered, feeling around behind him for anything he could use. He could hear Sorain’s heavy footfalls closing in and the sound of his own panicked heart fluttering in his ears. His hand closed around the shaft of something and just as Sorain was lunging after him, Salazar spun, whipping the shovel up.

There was a sickening crack and Sorain’s charge was brought to an abrupt halt. The captain crumpled to the dusty floor, face down, and Salazar looked down in shock and horror as the dark pool of blood grew around his head. There was a shout from the entrance of the stable and Salazar realized how it would look; he stood over the fallen, bloody body of Sorain, still clutching the shovel, the blade of which was now smeared with blood and a few pieces of hair. The boy flung the shovel away, horrified.

Salazar felt a rough pair of hands grab him by the shoulders, twisting his arms back behind him. The other stablehand had knelt beside the fallen captain, and pulled him over onto his back.

“Dead,” the man growled.

Salazar felt his stomach clench as if someone had kicked him. Suddenly, his mouth was dry and his tongue felt too swollen to form a word to defend himself. He felt one of the men give him a shove and he was marched out of the stable and into the castle keep. For a moment, the boy thought they were headed for his father’s study, but the men pushed him on past the door. Salazar wanted to scream, make any kind of sound to draw his father’s attention, but it was as if his voice had died on the floor with Sorain. The men stopped before another door, where two guards stood.

“Tell Prince Katillis,” said one of the stablehands, “This boy has killed Captain Sorain, struck him down with a shovel.”

One of the soldiers stepped inside and a moment later opened the door, allowing Salazar to be shoved through to stand in the wide room in front of the desk there.

Prince Katillis was not an unkind man. For several years, he had been acting with the king’s

power as King Tephanis was growing old and no longer had the energy to run the castle. Salazar remembered Katillis as a warm young man, who had always smiled when they met each other in the castle, but now the prince looked like a stranger, so furrowed was his brow, so outraged were his eyes.

“Well, boy?” he asked. “Have you killed my captain of the guard?”

Salazar stood there, feeling as though he were naked. He was aware of the coldness of the stone under his feet, permeating up through his shoes, of four pairs of eyes that pierced into him, looking down at him. He felt small and helpless and suddenly wished he had never tried to handle Sorain on his own. If only he had told his mother when she’d asked him what was wrong. If only he had told his father the truth. He was aware of how alone he was in that moment, standing trapped in the room before his judge, not a soul in the world there to protect him, and it was all his fault.

“Well?” demanded the prince.

“It’s true,” Salazar whispered, finding a small scrap of his voice.

Katillis’s face darkened even further and he turned his eyes away from the boy, a simple flick of the gaze that was laden with disappointment and disgust.

“Take him to the dungeon,” he said to the guards.

Salazar felt another pair of hands fasten onto his shoulders and haul him out of the room, shoving him back down the hallway. Salazar steadied his breath enough to summon his voice back as they passed the familiar door on the right.

“Adar,” he choked. Then at last, his voice freed itself into a desperate cry of, “ADAR!”

“Quiet, you!” snapped one of the guards, shoving him along the hall and down the steps.

Salazar heard the sound of a door open and Lask appeared at the balustrade, leaning over the rail. He caught sight of the guards descending the stairs below.

“What is the meaning of this?” he demanded, his snowy white face drawing into a fierce scowl at the sight.

Salazar looked up at him, and Lask was shocked at the terrified desperation in his son’s face. He had never seen the boy look so distraught.

“The prince’s orders,” said one of the guards, not slowing down, shoving Salazar around the corner and over toward the dungeon steps.

“Stand fast!” Lask snapped, sweeping down the stairs, cloak billowing behind him with the wind of his movement, like a dark thunderhead rising behind the soldiers. Before he could catch up to them, a voice from above said,

“Lask.”

He looked up to see Katillis there at the rail.

“I demand to know the meaning of this,” Lask snarled, pointing to where the guards were disappearing into the dungeon with his son.

The prince strode down the steps, far slower than Lask had, and came to stand before him

with a hardened expression, but one that cracked with remorse as he said,

“I am sorry, my friend. Your son has killed Captain Sorain.”

Lask’s rage-masked face dropped instantly into an expression of surprise. Gathering his wits, he said,

“You are certain?”

“Two of the stablehands saw it. They say the boy struck him down with a shovel.”

Lask looked toward the dark stairs of the dungeon, not knowing what to think.

“This is murder,” the prince continued, “I have no choice but to imprison him, regardless of his parentage—”

“You will not keep him there,” Lask growled.

“Justice must be served—”

“Then serve it quickly. Summon your council. This matter will be addressed first thing in the morning!”

Katillis gave him a look of subdued indignation, looking up at him with narrowed eyes, unaccustomed to being given orders. Knowing what the prince was thinking, but not caring in the least, Lask stood all the straighter above him, scarlet eyes sparking with rage, and growled,

“I abide by your laws because I am in your kingdom, but do not forget that you are not *my* king. Let your system of justice work, but do it swiftly. I will not stand for my son to be locked down there in the dark for any more than a day. I *will* be present at his trial tomorrow and I shall not allow you nor any mortal hand to do him harm.”

Katillis watched him, insulted, but found he did not have the heart to challenge the fierce immortal that loomed before him. Though not a lord of Letiana, Lask still blazed with all the commanding fire of power, a leashed inferno that would stand no disobedience.

“Very well,” the prince said. “We shall conduct his trial at the ninth hour tomorrow.”