

THE SEVEN KINGDOMS OF K'THARI

BOOK ONE: BLOOD OF THE SEVEN



◆ A NOVEL BY NJINTIEUH SIENI ◆

FREE SAMPLE

THE SEVEN KINGDOMS OF K'THARI

Book I · Blood of the Seven

Front matter, map & Chapters 1–4

NJINTIEUH SIENI

THE SEVEN KINGDOMS OF
K'THARI
BOOK I · BLOOD OF THE SEVEN

The oracle dies as a forbidden child is born.

The seals begin to weaken.



Copyright © Njintieuh Sieni

All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination.

First Edition

DEDICATION



To the ancestors who remembered,
To the children who will inherit,
And to the stories Africa was always meant to tell.



To my Father & Son:
Tchameu Joseph Sieni



AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Seven Kingdoms of K'Thari is an epic fantasy inspired by African cosmology, oral tradition, and mythic imagination. It is written in the spirit of ancestral storytelling while building a modern epic world designed to live across page, screen, and memory.

This story is not history — but it is born from it.

A NOTE ON THE WORLD OF K'THARI

Maps of K'Thari are intentionally incomplete.

Borders shift.

Kingdoms rise and fall.

Power is never still.

What is drawn today may not exist tomorrow.

COSMOLOGY OF K'THARI

Seven kingdoms stand bound by ancient seals, each aligned to an animal spirit and a philosophy of power.

When those seals weaken, kingdoms do not fall equally.

Some fracture.

Some wait.

And some remember.

THE KINGDOMS OF K'THARI

Summarised reference. Full histories unfold within the narrative.

I. ŪSÁNGÀ WÀ KOFÁRI

The Lion Kingdom — “Kingdom of the Sun”

Sun • Law • Conquest • Rule

Where authority is sacred, and crowns are heavy.

The Lion Kingdom is the seat of imperial unity. Kings are not chosen to be loved, but to carry the burden of rule. Justice is public. Power is visible. Failure is remembered.

II. NÀYÁMBÉ-TÁRÀ

The Elephant Kingdom — “The Land That Remembers”

Memory • Endurance • Ancestral Law

Where history is alive.

Elephant elders carry the living memory of K'Thari. Their rulings are slow, deliberate, and almost never wrong. The past is not past here. It is law.

III. MÁKÒNDARÉ

The Crocodile Kingdom — “The Waiting Waters”

Rivers • Patience • Death • Stillness

Where nothing moves without purpose.

The Crocodile Kingdom rules the great waterways and hidden deltas. Their power is not speed, but inevitability. What enters their domain is already being judged.

IV. SÉNYÀ-NÓRÙ

The Leopard Kingdom — “The Hidden Crown”

Stealth • Intelligence • Precision

Where unseen power decides everything.

The Leopard Kingdom does not march armies — it moves individuals. Assassins. Scouts. Tacticians. Infiltrators. They are the invisible hand of K’Thari.

V. MBÁRÛ-KÉNTÀ

The Gorilla Kingdom — “The Unbroken Heights”

Strength • Discipline • Spiritual Restraint

Where power is mastered, not displayed.

The Gorilla Kingdom believes true strength is control. Warriors train in silence. Kings rule through restraint. Their mountains produce soldiers who do not break.

VI. BÁKUNGÀ

The Serpent Kingdom — “The Coiled Dominion”

Secrets • Manipulation • Silent Power

Where truth is a weapon.

The Serpent Kingdom does not rule land — it rules information. Spies, whispers, contracts, poisons, betrayals. They rarely fight wars. They end them before they begin.

VII. ZÁKHÀRÀ-VÉ

The Hyena Kingdom — “The Devouring Lands”

Hunger • Corruption • War

Where survival has rotted into cruelty.

The Hyena territories are what remain when desperation becomes culture. They raid. They scavenge. They conquer because they must. They are not evil. They are starving.

VIII. K’THARI-ÚMBRÀ (NOT A KINGDOM)

The Secret Lands— “That Which Belongs to All”

Balance • Prophecy • Ancient Law • Symbol: The Owl

It has no throne. No army. No borders.

This is not a kingdom. It is the spiritual and mythic heart of the continent. The Owl does not rule. It watches.

MAP OF K'THARI



At the height of King Kofári's reign, the Seven Kingdoms of K'Thari stood united beneath the Sun Throne. Each kingdom possessed its own traditions, beasts, and rulers, yet all were bound by the authority of the Lion Crown. The death of the Unifier would test whether that unity was strength — or merely silence before fracture.

THE AGE OF UNIFICATION

The pages that follow are not history. They are testimony.

Long before the kingdoms were carved from the earth, the land of K'Thari was wild and unruled. Men hunted the plains. Beasts ruled the forests. Neither trusted the other.

It is said that in those early days the sky burned with seven wandering stars, and the elders believed the stars were watching, waiting to see which creatures of the world would learn wisdom first.

But neither did. Men fought men. Beasts hunted everything that moved. And the land grew quiet.

Then one night, when the seven stars stood directly above the plains, a child of the Lion people walked alone into the darkness. The lions found him, and they did not kill him. The elders say the child did not run. Instead he placed his hand upon the mane of the largest lion and spoke words no one else could hear.

By morning the child returned to his village, and the lion walked beside him.

From that day forward, the first kings of K'Thari did not rule beasts. They walked beside them.

And the seven stars moved again. The elders say the stars still watch — because one day the bond between crown and beast will break, and when it does, K'Thari will learn whether men remembered the lesson of the first king.

In the Age of Lions, the world of K'Thari bowed to a single crown. Before the death of King Kofári, that unity held — seven kingdoms, one throne, and a peace the world mistook for permanence. Lions guarded the crown, elephants carried the memory of ages, and the great rivers bent to the will of queens. Yet unity forged by strength does not always survive the passing of the strong.

Long before crowns were cast in gold, the beasts of the land chose which humans were worthy to walk beside them. For generations that sacred bond

*held the kingdoms together — stronger than armies, older than law.
But on the day the Unifier died, the lions did not roar.
And the empire remembered how easily brothers can become enemies.*



PART I



THE DYING CROWN

The Oracle dies. The Unifier falls. The Age of One Crown ends.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORACLE'S LAST BREATH



“When truth is spoken too late, it becomes prophecy.” — Inscription beneath the Star Temple

The Oracle did not die quietly. She died screaming — not from pain, but from knowing.

Lightning split the sky above the Star Temple of K’Thari-Úmbrà, where prophecy was not spoken but survived. Thunder rolled across the obsidian spires, rattling bone chimes and shuddering through stone that had not trembled in centuries. Below the temple, the capital went still — merchants abandoning half-counted coins, servants pausing mid-step in palace corridors, even the lions along the royal terraces going quiet, golden eyes turned toward the distant mountain. No order was given. The city held its breath anyway.

At the center of the circular chamber, the Oracle convulsed upon the altar. Her body was ancient — older than living memory — skin drawn thin across bone, hair white as salt, eyes long clouded by visions too heavy for a mortal vessel. She had not stood in years. She had not spoken without trembling. She had not screamed since the first crown was forged.

Until now.

Her spine arched as if pulled by invisible hooks. Breath tore from her lungs in ragged bursts, and blood welled at the corner of her mouth, dark

against pale skin, streaking across stone carved with the sigils of the Seven Kingdoms. Around her the priests of the Secret Lands fell to their knees — some weeping, some praying, some pressing their palms flat to the floor as though they could hold the earth still by force. Others shifted backward without meaning to, shoulders finding the walls, because the air had changed the way air changes when a great predator enters a room — quietly, and all at once.

The chamber thickened. Overhead, the carved constellations began to glow — then flicker. The Oracle's eyes snapped open, no longer clouded but burning: not with flame, but with reflection. Futures collided behind them — crowns falling, rivers reversing their course, beasts marching beneath banners soaked in ash, children screaming without sound, queens kneeling in blood they had sworn never to spill.

Then her voice tore free.

“Seven crowns...” she gasped, nails biting into the altar stone. “... bound by blood...”

Lightning struck the temple peak.

“Undone by blood.”

Far beneath the temple, in caverns cut long before K'Thari bore a name, iron groaned. A chain thick as a tree trunk and blackened by age shivered against stone, and a thin line traced itself across a seal engraved with symbols older than the Seven. No priest heard it. Something else did.

The temperature dropped. Breath misted. Torches bent inward as though an unseen mouth had exhaled across them, and shadows stretched where no body stood to cast them.

The Oracle convulsed again. One of the younger priests, barely initiated, tried to rise and failed. He did not understand the words, but he understood this much: something in the world had just gone wrong.

“When the child of no throne draws breath,” she cried, her voice breaking into something raw and terrible, “the beasts will march—”

The priests covered their ears — not from the sound, but from what the sound carried.

“—the queens will bleed—”

Stone cracked beneath the altar.

“—and cities will burn where crowns once stood—”

A tremor rolled through the chamber, and dust sifted from the ceiling like the first ash of a distant fire.

“—and the world will remember—”

Her voice fell to a whisper so soft it seemed to rise from inside the bones of every soul present.

“—what it tried to forget.”

Far from the mountain, in a river village wrapped in mist and reeds, a woman screamed. Not prophecy. Labor. Two cries — one ancient, one new — split the same breath of night.

Then the Oracle went still. The light left her eyes, and the chamber fell into absolute silence. For one suspended heartbeat, even the storm paused. Then her head slumped to the side.

The child was born in silence. No cry pierced the river air. The midwife froze, hands slick with blood and water, her heart hammering hard enough to bruise. The baby did not breathe.

Outside, the village lay beneath a pale moon, reeds whispering, crocodiles drifting half-submerged along the banks, their eyes catching the starlight like dying embers. But the stillness was wrong. It pressed against the skin and flattened sound. Inside, the women fell quiet — not because anyone told them to, but because every body in the room understood the same thing at once: *do not move quickly when the river is watching*. Across the marsh no bird took flight. Even the insects held. The water went flat.

“Move,” someone whispered.

The midwife pressed trembling fingers to the child’s chest. Nothing. No breath, no pulse. Fear moved through the hut in shallow murmurs, and outside a crocodile’s tail swept slowly through the shallows — not hunting. Positioning.

Then the river changed. Not flowing now — listening. The surface shivered, rings spreading outward as though something beneath it had drawn breath for the first time in a very long while, and the crocodiles glided closer, their bodies closing into a loose ring around the hut.

The midwife swallowed. She had delivered children in storm and famine, in war and in mourning — never once while the river’s oldest beasts gathered like witnesses.

The child inhaled.

Every woman in the hut knew, without knowing how, that this was not relief. Water surged. A sharp, tearing gasp broke from tiny lungs; river mist curled through the doorway like a living breath; and thin markings bloomed beneath the infant’s skin — luminous blue-green lines, faint as moonlight seen through deep water. The women recoiled. A bowl slipped from someone’s fingers and shattered on the packed earth.

“By the Waiting Waters...” the midwife whispered.

The child did not cry. He opened his eyes. And the river answered.

For one impossible moment the waterline rose without spilling. It bowed — not to the hut, but to the child. Outside, the crocodiles did not lunge and did not snap. They held, close and still, like guardians who owed allegiance to no throne.

And somewhere in the dark of the village, hours yet from any dawn, a rooster crowed.

It was the wrong hour for it. The old woman who had come to help with the birth heard it, went still, and touched the amulet at her throat. The red bird, she had been taught when she was still young enough to be taught such things, does not crow for the sun. It crows for what stirs in the dark — and it never crows twice for the same thing. No one else in the hut marked it; they were looking at the child. She was the only one old enough to be listening to the world instead.

She was the nearest thing the river village had to a sage — no temple, no title, only forty years of births and burials and the old knowledge of which signs to fear. She feared this one.

Back in the Star Temple, the Oracle’s blood crept through the carved sigils, filling grooves worn smooth by centuries of prophecy. Above, the carved stars dimmed one by one. And deep beneath the earth, the ancient bindings groaned, and the first seal gave — not shattered, not freed; only looser than it had held since before the Seven had names.

And what had been contained for generations felt the shift. Across K'Thari, animals lifted their heads as one — not in curiosity, but in recognition. Somewhere in the dark, a hyena laughed, and this time it did not sound like an animal. It sounded like something that had waited a very long time for permission.

Across distant villages, sleepers woke without knowing why. Dogs crawled beneath beds. Goats pressed together in trembling corners. Even seasoned warriors sat up with racing hearts. The laugh had not reached their ears. It reached memory.

Beneath the mountain, the chained thing strained against iron and did not move it.

That was not what had laughed.

The thing that laughed was not chained. It never had been. It had no use for permission from stone, and it had waited this long only because waiting had cost it nothing at all.

As the Oracle's body cooled, a presence lingered. One priest would later swear he saw a blind woman standing at the hall's threshold — swear the guards stepped aside without thinking when she came, the way men step aside for something older than rank. She did not touch the body. She did not bow. She only lifted her face a little, as though listening to something deeper than sound, and for one breath — no longer — the carved sigils along the floor glowed faintly beneath her bare feet. Then dimmed. When the torches steadied and the storm began to pass, she was gone, and no one remembered opening the doors.

High on the obsidian spire, something small had settled where nothing had been before the lightning. By morning it was not there.

Far below, the iron stilled. The chain had not broken. It only no longer sat as tight.



CHAPTER 2

THE KING WHO ATE ALONE



“Power is loud in battle and silent at the table.” — Lion Court Proverb
King Kofári ate alone by design.

The smallest table in the Great Sun Hall stood upon a raised dais carved from a single slab of sunstone veined with gold, and the stone caught the torchlight and returned it in warm, quiet reflections that made the dais appear almost alive beneath him. It was not placed there for solitude, nor for ceremony. It existed for distance — because distance preserved authority, preserved myth, and reminded every soul in the chamber that unity had not erased hierarchy.

Below him stretched two longer tables arranged with exacting symmetry. At the first sat his queens: seven women, seven crowns, seven histories that had once raised armies against him. They were bound to Kofári not by affection but by treaty — by the quiet, unbreakable logic of survival — and each wore the regalia of her homeland: ivory and stone, scale and silk, fur and bronze. They spoke rarely in public. Kofári had learned long ago that power did not require noise. A raised brow could fracture alliances. Silence could command armies.

Queen Rékira’s fingers rested lightly on her cup, rings shaped like river eddies glinting in the torchlight. She did not watch Kofári; she watched the other queens. The Elephant Queen sat upright, unmoving as carved

memory, her gaze fixed ahead — absorbing, recording, never reacting too quickly. The Leopard Queen appeared relaxed. She never was.

At the largest table sat the royal children: Prince Kofáni, firstborn and heir; the twins Koránu and Amani, born in the same hour and alike in nothing since — Koránu sharp-tongued and restless, Amani watchful and unclaimed by courtly expectation; and little Prince Razi, still small enough to swing his feet beneath the bench.

King Kofári did not unite the Seven Kingdoms by conquest alone. He bound them by blood. And he watched them all.

Long tables of nobles, generals, envoys, and advisors stretched across the hall like tributaries feeding a single river. Voices rose and fell in measured conversation, but none reached the king without passing first through the silence that surrounded him. The design was deliberate. A ruler who stood too close became a man; a ruler set apart became something else — and in an empire held together by fragile agreements and older rivalries, the difference between a man and a king mattered.

He did not eat quickly. He never had. Each cut of the blade, each measured bite, followed a ritual older than peace. The act was not nourishment but reminder: a king who rushed his meal rushed his judgment.

At the heirs' table, the empire was not going well.

Razi had built something out of bread and a folded napkin — a fort, or a wagon; he had not decided — and was defending it in a whisper until Koránu reached over without looking and ate part of it.

"That was the east wall, Ránu," Razi hissed.

"Then the east wall is gone," Koránu said. "Sit up. Father's watching."

Father was not watching. Father had not looked down from the dais once. Razi sat up anyway.

Razi appealed down the table. "Fani. Tell him it was the east wall."

"It was the east wall," Kofáni said, without looking up.

"Thank you," said Razi.

Amani leaned in, her eyes never leaving the hall, and said it so quietly that only the three of them could hear: "Do you remember the lizard?"

Koránu's jaw set. "We do not talk about the lizard."

"I only asked if you remembered it."

"I remember," said Razi, delighted, "that you ran past the kitchen twice."

"I did not run past the kitchen twice."

"You screamed," Amani said, to her plate, in the flat unbothered voice the Elephant Queen used to end wars.

Koránu opened his mouth, and closed it, because there was no version of the next sentence that did not make things worse. Across the table Kofári — who had said nothing — very nearly smiled. The corner of his mouth moved. Then he caught it, the way he caught most things, and went back to his plate. Someone at that table had to look like their father, and he had decided a while ago that it would have to be him.

A servant passed the smallest table. For a heartbeat his eyes glimmered beneath the torchlight — something sharp, something assessing — then dulled again. No one noticed.

Except the lions.

Along the upper terraces of the hall, where banners hung heavy and the stone was carved with lion sigils worn smooth by time, the palace lions shifted. Not loudly, not dramatically — just a slow repositioning of weight, and a long exhale that carried warm breath down into the chamber like a warning too old to be called a threat.

The reaction was immediate and unspoken. A servant paused mid-step. A guard's grip tightened on his spear. Laughter thinned at the heirs' table. Even Razi's swinging feet slowed. Bodies remembered what minds dismissed.

Kofári's gaze lifted briefly toward the terraces, then returned to his plate. Kings did not chase tremors in the air. They noted them, and waited.

A cup cracked at the far end of the table. No one turned. But no one drank from it again.

Near the far wall sat an old man eating nothing. No guard remembered seating him; no servant recalled his arrival. He wore tattered

cloth the color of dust and sun-bleached bone, and his bowl sat untouched before him. When others passed, their gazes slid past him as though he were part of the stone itself.

The torchlight did not reach him properly. It fell across the bench, and across the men on either side of him, and where it should have fallen on the old man it arrived a moment late — the way light arrives at the edge of deep water.

Nobody looked long enough to notice. The lions on the terrace had been looking for some time.

Only the heirs noticed.

“Who is that?” Razi whispered — too loud for a whisper.

Koránu’s eyes flicked toward the wall. Koránu rarely missed a threat. “Don’t point,” he muttered, though he did not look away.

Amani leaned slightly, studying the stranger’s stillness. “He wasn’t here before.”

Razi swallowed. “Why isn’t he eating?”

The old man lifted his head, and his gaze met Amani’s — not threatening, not kind. Measuring. For a moment the hall seemed to tilt, as though its balance had shifted. Above, the lions stilled — not as they did for prey, but as they did when something entered their awareness that did not belong to hunger.

Koránu’s hand drifted closer to the knife at his place setting. Not to use it, not truly, but because courage sometimes needed a piece of metal to hold onto.

The old man inclined his head once. Slow. Deliberate. Acknowledgment — and in that motion there was no deference, only understanding, as though the stranger had found what he came to weigh.

Amani’s breath caught.

When the meal ended, the seat was empty. No one remembered escorting him out. No one remembered him standing. Kofári realized, distantly, that he had met the man’s eyes only once, and that the encounter had left him with the faint, uncomfortable sensation of having been measured. Not judged. Weighed.

A subtle tremor passed through the hall — not from the ground, but from the air. Torches bent inward for a single breath, flames leaning closer as though listening. Cutlery stilled. Conversation thinned. The vast hall hovered in uneasy quiet.

Again the lions reacted, not with noise but with presence: a low sound rolling through their chests, too deep to be called a growl, too controlled to be called rage. The hall felt it anyway.

Kofári lowered his blade and studied the sun sigil carved into the stone before him — the mark of unity forged to bind crowns that had once known only war. For the first time since unification, uncertainty brushed the edge of his thoughts. Not fear. Memory.

Mercy gave enemies time. Time gave ambition room. Room gave shadows places to gather.

Kofári set his blade down. The tremor passed. The torches steadied. The hall exhaled. No one spoke of it — kings did not announce unease, they carried it.

And as the sun dipped lower beyond the palace walls, King Kofári wondered, quietly and privately, whether mercy had been his greatest triumph, or the first fracture in something that had only ever appeared whole.



CHAPTER 3

THE QUEEN OF DEEP WATERS



“The river never argues. It simply remembers.” — River Mothers of Mákòndaré

Queen Rékira arrived bearing a warning carried by the river.

It reached the Lion Kingdom at dusk, riding a wind that smelled of wet stone and hidden things. Guards at the outer gates felt it first — the chill along their skin, the way torch flames bent inward as though listening rather than burning. Birds fell silent in the acacia trees. No horns were sounded. No banners were raised. By the time the caravan appeared at the edge of the savanna road, silence had already taken hold.

Queen Rékira of Mákòndaré, the Crocodile Kingdom, rode at the center, barefoot upon a raised platform of dark wood bound with reed cord. She did not sway with the movement of the carriers beneath her; she flowed, balanced as water itself. Her robes fell in layered greens and deep river-blues, fabric woven to mimic depth and current, catching the dying light like ripples at dusk.

The river arrived before its queen.

Bronze circlets hugged her wrists and throat, dulled by ritual rather than time. Her crown did not shine. It rested — dark, unadorned. Behind her came no musicians, no dancers, no offering chests of gold or ivory. Only a single sealed vessel borne by silent attendants, its clay surface

marked with sigils older than the Lion Kingdom — symbols etched not for trade but for remembrance. Black wax bound its mouth, unbroken and unmarked save for one impression: a weeping eye, its pupil replaced by a jagged vertical slit.

The mark of the Silent Watcher. A sigil not used in K'Thari for three generations.

The gates opened without command. No guard gave the order; no captain spoke the words. The body understood before the mind could argue. Law stepped aside for something older.

At the river's bend outside the city, the water briefly reversed its current — only for a breath, only enough for those watching to question their memory.

King Kofári waited in the Great Sun Hall. He stood rather than sat, sunstone plates catching the last light through the high openings above. As the river-mist rolled in, the gold-veined stones upon his chest — forged to radiate the warmth of the Lion's hearth — dimmed. They did not grow cold, but they pulsed with a low, defensive amber light, as if trying to push back the damp weight of the Crocodile Queen's presence.

Rékira stepped forward.

"You come without announcement," Kofári said, his voice even, though the air seemed to thicken between them.

"The river does not announce itself," Rékira replied. "It arrives when it must."

She gestured once, and a sealed vessel was placed at the foot of the dais. As it touched the stone floor a faint sound echoed through the hall — not a crack, not a spill, but something closer to a distant tide drawing breath.

High in the Star Temple, where the Oracle's blood had dried in carved grooves, a second hairline fracture traced itself across stone. No one saw it. But something listening did.

"The Oracle of the Seven is dead," Rékira said, her voice never rising. "The river felt her heart stop."

The words moved through the hall like a ripple.

Kofári's jaw set. "The Oracle of the Secret Land does not rule my land. Her death is not my concern."

"No," Rékira agreed without hesitation. "But what she guarded binds us all."

She knelt — not in submission, but in acknowledgment — and pressed her palm briefly against the stone. When she rose, a single drop of water slid down the vessel's side. It should not have been there.

Behind Kofári, one of the palace lions exhaled, slow and deep. Not warning. Awareness.

"What does the river carry now?" Kofári asked.

Rékira met his eyes without reverence and without challenge. "Memory," she said. "And warning." Then, more quietly: "The chains beneath the world do not fail loudly. They loosen."

"I have drawn a second vessel," she added. "It stays in the delta. If it ever reaches you, do not wait for the words to follow."

For a moment the water within the sealed vessel stirred. No one touched it. The hall felt the movement before it saw it. Outside, water beaded upward along the palace fountain's edge, defying gravity for a single breath — then fell still.

That night, crocodiles surfaced in the sacred waters of the Lion Kingdom. They did not thrash. They did not hunt. They remained — slow, watchful, unmoving. Villagers stood at a distance with lanterns held low, whispering like people gathered near a grave. Children dreamed of rivers flowing backward and crowns sinking beneath dark water.



CHAPTER 4

THE WHISPERS BENEATH THE CROWN



“A crown does not grow heavy with gold, but with what it refuses to release.” — Makena of the Inner Chamber

The crown felt heavier at night.

Queen Makena sat alone in the inner chamber long after the palace corridors had dimmed. The room had been carved generations earlier for silence — thick stone walls, narrow openings, no banners to stir the air — and a single brazier breathed warmth into the space.

She had come here every night since the river. She had told no one. A queen who needs a quiet room is a queen with something to be quiet about.

The crown rested before her: gold and sunstone, forged not for beauty but for endurance, its surface bearing faint scratches from past reigns, marks left by hands that had worn it in war, in compromise, in survival.

She knew every scratch. She had cleaned this crown for twenty-three years. The night they set it on Kofári. The night they buried his first son. A hundred ordinary nights between.

In twenty-three years it had only ever been metal.

Makena had cleaned it earlier that evening. Though no stain had shown, her cloth had come away damp — not with water, but with

something colder.

It had beaded on the gold. It had not wiped away. Her fingertips had gone numb where they touched it.

Her fingers hovered above the crown. She did not touch it.

Thirty years had taught her the difference between a thing that wants holding and a thing that wants watching.

Beyond the chamber doors, the palace rested carefully. Since the river's warning, stillness had become deliberate: footsteps softened, guards lingered longer at their posts.

The cooks had begun leaving the night-lamps burning. Nobody had ordered it. That was how fear moved in an old empire. Not shouting. Small courtesies. People being kinder than usual, as if apologizing in advance.

Makena closed her eyes. She had not dreamed clearly since the day Kofári granted mercy; only fragments came now. Heat without fire. Water without movement. A voice that never finished its warning.

They came every night. She woke each morning braced for a sentence she had not been allowed to hear.

Tonight the fragments pressed closer, and a memory surfaced — the warlord kneeling before Kofári, bloodied, unbowed. Not defeated. Waiting. The words entered her mind like cold iron.

You will regret this.

She had said nothing that day. It was not a queen's place to argue mercy in open court.

She had regretted the silence every night since.

Makena opened her eyes sharply. The brazier flared once, then steadied.

She reached for the crown. The moment her fingers closed around it, the chamber shifted — the walls did not move, yet distance stretched between them, and silence deepened until it pressed against her ears. For a heartbeat she heard it: iron, far below, grinding.

A thought surfaced. *What was bound was not destroyed.*

It was not her thought. She was certain of that, and did not examine why.

Her breath tightened. And beneath that thought, another — hers, the healer's, the one that had never once been wrong about a wound: *This wound is not of flesh alone.*

She crossed to the narrow stone shutter overlooking the inner courtyard. Moonlight spilled across the floor. Below, the fountain lay still — and at its edge stood a woman. Blind. Barefoot upon cold stone. No crown, no sigil of rank, pale markings tracing faintly along her temples, luminous in the moonlight.

Makena did not call out. She did not need to.

Somewhere in her, the recognition was already finished, and older than this life.

“What stirs does not ask permission,” the woman said softly.

The voice did not carry. It arrived. The way the cold had arrived on the crown.

Makena's throat tightened. “You should not be here.”

The woman smiled faintly. “Some weights were never meant to be worn this long.” She lifted her face slightly, as if listening to something far beneath the palace. “When the Lion falls,” she said quietly, “the children will not stand as one.”

Makena's hand closed until sunstone bit her palm.

Which child. When. Whether knowing could prevent it.

She had buried enough people to know the answer to the last one. She did not ask the first two. The asking would have cost her the sleep she had left.

“Finish it,” she said instead. “For once, let one of you finish the warning.”

The blind woman only smiled — the way the old smile at the young.

The fountain rippled once. Then stilled.

Makena blinked. The courtyard was empty. No footprints marked the stone. No water clung to the fountain's edge. Only moonlight remained.

Makena closed the shutter.

She stood a moment with her forehead against the cold stone and let herself be afraid. Fully. Privately. For the length of ten breaths, because that was all she would allow it and all she could afford.

Then she straightened, and put the fear where a queen keeps such things.

She returned to the brazier and set the crown down carefully, as though it might bruise.

Tomorrow she would say nothing of this. Tomorrow she would change his poultices, and sit at council, and be the still point the court required.

She would carry the sentence the way she carried everything. Where no one could see it. Where no one could lift it from her.

Far away, in a river hut, a child marked in water opened his eyes to the dark. And did not cry.





THE SEALS HAVE BEGUN TO WEAKEN.

You have reached the end of the free sample of
The Seven Kingdoms of K'Thari: Blood of the Seven.

Fifty-two chapters remain — and the Age of One Crown is only
beginning to end.

CONTINUE READING

KTHARI.COM

eBook and Illustrated Edition available direct from the author at kthari.com,
and everywhere books are sold.



Explore the kingdoms, meet the characters, and be first to hear about Book II.