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# Character Biography

## Aerin

By Himring

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Aerin is a character who features in the story of *The Children of Húrin*. Her character goes back to the earliest version of that story and, although in the relevant chapter of the published *Silmarillion*<sup>1</sup> her part is reduced to two brief mentions, she receives fuller treatment in *The Children of Húrin*,<sup>2</sup> which is closely based here on the relevant chapter in the *Unfinished Tales*.<sup>3</sup> Aerin's role can be interpreted both as a stereotypical female victim of male violence and as one of a number of examples of unusual female agency in Tolkien's Legendarium; she is also, at least in the fuller versions of the story, given the opportunity to express her point of view in direct speech. These things make her interesting. She is nevertheless a minor character in the story in which Morwen and Túrin are the protagonists, so the details of what we are told about her are determined by their storyline and some of her personal background can only be guessed at.

The earliest version of *The Children of Húrin*<sup>4</sup> assigns Aerin a role that is significantly different in some ways. As it is not compatible with the later revised storyline as a whole, the following discussion will be based mostly on the version found in the *Unfinished Tales* (and also in *The Children of Húrin*) and will return to the differences in the earlier version only toward the end.

Aerin was the daughter of Indor.<sup>5</sup> We don't know anything about Indor, but it is probable that both he and Aerin are intended to be of the House of Hador--at any rate Aerin is said to be Húrin's kinswoman<sup>6</sup> and, given the predominantly patrilineal take on kinship in these tales, it is less likely that she was related to him on the mother's side. If this interpretation is correct, that tells us something about the environment Aerin grew up in.

The House of Hador was the hereditary ruling family of the Third House of the Edain. The family had a personal bond with the High Kings of the Noldor (Fingolfin and, after him, Fingon) that went back to the time their ancestor Hador Lórinđol dwelled in Barad Eithel as Fingolfin's retainer. This bond was also reflected in their language; unlike most of their people, they were apparently brought up bilingually, speaking one of the Elven languages, Sindarin, at home and the precursor of Adunaic (probably to be identified with Taliska<sup>7</sup>) with the people they ruled. The House of Hador had received Fingon's own fief of Dor-lómin, the south-western part of Hithlum, in return for loyal service and had ruled it for several generations, developing a strong attachment with the land they now called their home.<sup>8</sup>

Already by the time of Aerin's youth, the House of Hador were well aware that all this came at a price. The war with Morgoth and Angband had in theory been looming over them ever since they entered Beleriand, before they settled in Dor-lómin, but it had become an ever-present actuality. Members of two generations of the men of Dor-lómin had fallen in defence of the borders of Hithlum since the onset of the Battle of Sudden Flame, alongside their lords Hador and Galdor of Dor-lómin, as is implied in the accounts of those battles. Dor-lómin was harbouring survivors of the House of Bëor, Morwen and Rían and others, a visible reminder that the First House of Edain had already been almost completely destroyed in these wars. But Dor-lómin was in the safest part of Hithlum and, although Fingon had nearly lost a battle to the north,

near the Firth of Drengist, it is likely that Aerin's homeland itself was not directly affected—that is, had not been the actual site of warfare. Moreover, it had been the current lord, Húrin, who had had an instrumental role in winning the latest phase of the war. This is likely to have boosted the confidence of the House of Hador and it is possible that Húrin's relatives shared the confidence of Húrin himself that the war against Morgoth would ultimately be won.<sup>9</sup> Aerin may have been brought up in a proud tradition of heroic service, possibly qualified by expectations associated with her female gender.

We do not know when Aerin was born. In fan fiction, she is often assumed to be significantly younger than Morwen. The main argument in favour of this seems to be that, unlike Morwen, she appears to have been unmarried at the time of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears (Nirnaeth Arnoediad), although even that conclusion is an extrapolation, based only on what we are not told. By the end of their respective lives, Aerin and Morwen are both described as visibly aged,<sup>10</sup> but there are hints that both of them aged prematurely due to their experiences, so it is not easy to base a clinching argument on this, either.

It is not clear how long before the Nirnaeth Aerin had known Morwen, Húrin's wife, or how well, although their later fates are so strongly linked. It is reasonable to assume that she must have encountered her at the wedding of Húrin and Morwen, at the latest, but Aerin is not mentioned in the narrative of Túrin's early childhood, in the account of Morwen's loss of her daughter Lalaith to the Black Breath, the plague sent by Morgoth. However, a later reference by Túrin suggests that he may have known her then (if his observation about Aerin's attitude to dogs refers to this period<sup>11</sup>) and she must have been old enough by then to experience the plague and the deaths of many young children consciously.

Aerin was almost certainly, like a typical scion of the third House of the Edain, golden-haired, probably also tall and blue-eyed.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, the only individual detail of physical description given for her dates back to the earliest version, in which she had a by-name "of the long hair" or "long-tressed."<sup>13</sup> It is not clear whether this still applied later but there seems to be no reason why it could not have.

A disastrous upheaval in Aerin's life—as for all other women of Dor-lómin at the time—was occasioned by the loss of the Battle of the Unnumbered Tears. Most men of Dor-lómin had fallen at the last stand in the Fens of Serech.<sup>14</sup> Aerin's father Indor may have fallen there as well. It is likely that from this point on Aerin's closest surviving male relatives were Húrin, imprisoned in Angband, and Túrin, a young boy in constant danger of his life.

Dor-lómin became occupied territory. The occupiers were Easterlings, survivors of Ulfang's tribe who had betrayed the Sons of Fëanor to Morgoth during the battle. It is worth noting that—treachery or no—these Easterlings were not in Dor-lómin by their own design. They had expected to be rewarded for their role with access to "the rich lands of Beleriand which they coveted."<sup>15</sup> Instead they found themselves confined by Morgoth to Dor-lómin; they were also bereft of their original leaders, because Ulfang and his sons had fallen in the battle as well. Although it arose out of the situation rather than as the result of previous planning by the Easterlings, the consequent oppression of the Edain by the Easterlings is described by Tolkien in stark terms of thralldom and slavery.

In the light of the later description of the Númenóreans during their age of empire, conquering and enslaving inhabitants of foreign lands,<sup>16</sup> it is interesting to consider that many of their ancestors themselves had been enslaved by the Easterlings in the First Age—although it is not

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clear whether Tolkien himself makes the connection. He would certainly have been aware as a scholar of Anglo-Saxon that, despite the later parole "Britons never will be slaves,"<sup>17</sup> there had been a period when Anglo-Saxon slaves were widely bought and sold in European markets. History shows clearly enough that there is no intrinsic connection between slavery and race. But Aerin escaped the fate of enslavement shared by many of her people, although she might perhaps have preferred it.

Brodda, the Easterling leader most closely involved with Morwen, Aerin, and Túrin, is described as essentially an upstart, not one of the surviving established Easterling leaders. These apparently preferred not to tackle the estate of Húrin in south Dor-lómin near Nen Lalaith where the most resistance could be expected. Brodda was ambitious enough to undertake it, despite a superstitious fear of Elves, which also entailed a fear of Morwen. He had courage of a kind: Tolkien describes him as "bold."<sup>18</sup> Also, despite Brodda's negative characteristics, he appears largely motivated by his own interests; he does not act directly as minion of Morgoth, although his fear of Elves is presumably ultimately conditioned by that allegiance.

Brodda stole Húrin's goods, enslaved Húrin's people, and took Aerin to wife by force. This last was evidently a move in his bid for rise to power in Dor-lómin—marrying a close relative of Húrin would be a way of laying claim to Húrin's estates as well as to the lordship of Dor-lómin, if Brodda could gain enough influence to back the wider claim. There are enough parallels in history and legend for such strategies. Tolkien does not quite spell it out, but that must be what is implied in "he [i.e. Brodda] hoped to make himself a lordship in that country."<sup>19</sup> Brodda's hopes for an heir are also mentioned, but Tolkien has dodged the further implications of this. Apparently, he was not prepared to deal with the complications a son of Aerin and Brodda would have posed—or with the idea that Aerin had practised some kind of contraception to prevent such a son being born.

Tolkien has also added a problematic comment here: "there were few women amongst his own [i.e. Brodda's] following, and none to compare with the daughters of the Edain."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this comment could be taken as a reflection of Brodda's original low status—and scarcity of women might perhaps also be explained by the forcible removal of the Easterlings to Dor-lómin by Morgoth. However, it would also be possible to interpret this in the light of a negative comment about Easterling women that occurs as a stray footnote to the story of Tuor, in which it is said that he experienced Easterling women as "proud and barbaric" as well as cruel.<sup>21</sup> But Brodda could not be expected to share Tuor's views, unless Tolkien is imputing to him a kind of cultural cringe. The various descriptions of the Easterlings—although driven by plot and partly reflecting Tolkien's source material—are among the most troubling, when one considers the impact of racist clichés on the *Legendarium*. We can in any case assume that Aerin could have well done without this dubious compliment, if one is concealed in this statement.

The violence in the marriage between Brodda and Aerin was not confined to its beginning; later we are told that he often beat her.<sup>22</sup> Aerin's feelings about Brodda are largely expressed indirectly in the later versions of the *Narn i Hîn Húrin* and not until later in the story. This is in fact the point at which she first appears as a named character in the narrative and is introduced simultaneously as a victim and an agent, for paradoxically, in this situation of general disempowerment, the enforced marriage with Brodda empowered her to a degree. We are told that she was able to support Morwen, stealing back for her some of the goods that Brodda had robbed her of. This she seems partly to have done with the help of slaves who were able to escape from Brodda's badly guarded stockade.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the relationship between Aerin and

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Morwen seems relatively distant at this our first glimpse of it—Aerin apparently sends the provisions through others, Morwen rather grudgingly accepts them, because anything that even remotely resembles charity hurts her pride. It is only later that we learn that Aerin had Morwen's confidence, which seems to imply close personal contact, whether she had already had it at this point or gained it during the following years.<sup>24</sup> (I'm looking at this from a text-internal point of view within the *Narn* here—in terms of the overall development of the Legendarium it is the closeness between Aerin and Morwen that is original and this relative distance that developed later, as we shall see.)

Because shortly after this Túrin leaves Dor-lómin and the focus of the story shifts with him, we lose sight of Aerin again almost immediately. But when Morwen eventually left Dor-lómin with her daughter Nienor to try and find Túrin in Doriath, she told Aerin where she was going and why.

One year and three months later Túrin returned to Dor-lómin himself, on his deluded quest after the fall of Nargothrond to find his mother and sister. This was more than twenty-one years after he had left Dor-lómin and last seen his mother (and, of course, he had not seen Aerin in that time either), but that also means that, by then, Aerin had been married to Brodda for even longer than that. Although her situation was little short of intolerable, she had been living with it for over two decades.

Túrin returns to his native land as a stranger and an outsider. A certain amount of haste and jumping to conclusions seems to be part of Túrin's character. At this stage, this natural tendency of his seems to have been reinforced by a spell of Glaurung's lies that lay heavy on him.

We learn, immediately when she is mentioned again, that Aerin exerts sufficient influence on Brodda to keep a house more open for destitute wanderers and dependants than elsewhere in Dor-lómin, although she does so at constant risk of punishment by her husband. Although Túrin is warned by Sador, his informant, to be cautious, for Aerin's sake and his own, he is at once provoked into confronting Brodda.

While Brodda shows signs of intemperance and a violent and dangerous temper and is very free with insults to the Edain of Dor-lómin, there is a certain irony in that, like a good husband, he rushes to defend Aerin's honour when a stranger (Túrin) accuses her of lying (even though she is in fact prevaricating).

Túrin lays claim to kinship with Aerin, who visibly reacts with great fear. This fear is clearly fear of her husband, but perhaps also of the whole situation in general and not necessarily fear only for herself—she almost certainly realizes immediately who Túrin is, possibly even detects a family resemblance with Morwen. When Túrin takes a further step and claims her allegiance as Lord of Dor-lómin, she acknowledges her loyalty to him immediately—probably to him both as Lord of Dor-lómin and head of her house.

The irony of what she has to tell him about Morwen, without her foreknowledge or intention, inflicts great pain on Túrin and provokes an uncontrolled outburst, as he now recognizes that Glaurung has deceived him into neglecting his obligations to Finduilas and Nargothrond. It may, however, perhaps not make so very much difference at this point that he loses control in this way, as an Easterling is apparently about to assail him, although he is holding Brodda as hostage. The situation by then may already be irretrievable, in any case. However, fighting breaks out in the hall. The aged dependants and servants of Morwen that Aerin had previously

been protecting and supporting take part in the fighting and die—that is, Sador does and among the others who die in the fighting the number of the aged and badly equipped would have been high.

Thus it is in a hall littered with the corpses of Edain as well as Easterlings that, despite her earlier acknowledgement of loyalty, Aerin speaks sharp words to Túrin, as his uncontrolled rage is dying down and seems about to be succeeded by depression. She accuses him of childish rashness and says that, although her life had been harsh before, she now expects that she will be killed by the Easterlings in revenge—as well as any others who were involved. She expresses neither grief nor relief at the death of Brodda himself—it is Túrin who suggests earlier that she could not possibly care for his fate, because he mistreated her. While in one way this seems an instance of Túrin's high-handedness, it is remarkable also because in an earlier version Aerin did say this herself, with less cause (see below). Maybe to Tolkien it later seemed inappropriate for her to do so.

It is at this point that it appears that Túrin and Aerin knew each other well when Túrin was a child, but the reminiscences lead to an exchange of insults, not to familial bonding. (In fact, Túrin's attitude to Aerin throughout seems to be a somewhat unbalanced mixture of showy and possibly exaggerated courtesy and aggressive rudeness.) Although Túrin once called Aerin *aunt*, he says, he accuses her of always having always been a coward, even in the matter of aggressive dogs. His comment that Aerin was "made for a kinder world"<sup>25</sup> reminds the reader of a similar comment made earlier about Morwen's cousin Rían.<sup>26</sup> The gentle and feminine has no place in this doomed, heroic world—or so it is implied. But Aerin, it turns out, is perhaps not quite as gentle and feminine as all that.

Aerin rejects Túrin's offer to rescue her and take her away out of Dor-lómin to Morwen. She is too old, she says, and would die on the journey through the rigours of winter. Her reference to her white hair is rhetorical, but would not be effective if her hair were not, in fact, white. The rigours of the journey are real enough; they are described elsewhere in the *Narn*<sup>27</sup> and also in the *Tale of Tuor*.<sup>28</sup> Aerin sends Túrin (who leaves together with anyone who might have the strength to defend her) away.

It is also during this conversation that Aerin's previously asserted bond to Morwen comes through most strongly in her own words: "Go first to Morwen and comfort her, or I will find all the wrack you have wrought here hard to forgive" (Túrin, of course, does not do this—he has a habit of ignoring good advice) and "Go! To stay will make all the worse and rob Morwen to no purpose."<sup>29</sup> She is perhaps also saying that in her eyes Túrin has just failed as Lord of Dor-lómin, but he had better not fail his family obligations to Morwen as well.

It is a bitter farewell, although Túrin gives her a low bow, and it is a very final one. Not only does Túrin never see this relative of his again—when he and his companions look back, they see that the hall has been fired<sup>30</sup> and Asgon explains to Túrin that he has essentially misunderstood Aerin all along and that it was probably she who fired the hall: "Many a man of arms misreads patience and quiet. She did much good among us at much cost. Her heart was not faint, and patience will break at the last."<sup>31</sup>

Because of the point of view adopted by the narrative, we cannot know for a fact that Aerin died at this point and that she burnt herself alive with the hall, but it does seem to be implied. Aerin, who in life fought for her people by non-violent methods and in ways that the *Legendarium*

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associates with the feminine gender, dies a death that is in some ways reminiscent of Denethor's in *The Lord of the Rings*, both in its heroic status and in its despair.

The world of the *Narn* is a darker one than that of *The Lord of the Rings*. Aerin is poignantly contrasted with Túrin. While he has pursued battle against Morgoth at all costs as his chief duty to his heritage, she has been taking care of Túrin's people as best she could. But it is by no means only Túrin's fault that he could not undertake this part of his duties or even that his return to Dor-lómin only causes destruction and essentially ruins Aerin's life's work. In the end both fail, Aerin and Túrin, before the malignity of fate that prevails in post-Nirnaeth Beleriand.

To return briefly to the different role of Aerin in the earliest version of Túrin Turambar's tale: it has already been hinted that the version in *Book of Lost Tales II*<sup>32</sup> shows a number of differences from the later versions. Aerin (earlier: Airin) was originally the relative and also friend of Morwen, rather than of Húrin. Brodda, her husband, was originally not envisaged as an Easterling and, in fact, Morwen (earlier: Mavwin) trusted him sufficiently to leave her goods in his care, when she left to go looking for Túrin. Brodda, however, embezzled her possessions. Túrin, having learnt this, attacked him and killed him in his hall and in the uproar also killed a relative of his own, Orlin, as well. Airin was not present, but arrived later to pronounce justice in the matter. While she had apparently not been wed by force in this version, she had been mistreated by Brodda and avoided him for his boorish behaviour. As a figure of authority, with considerable skill of diplomacy, but also a good deal of frankness with regard to the unhappiness of her marriage, she managed to pacify those baying for Túrin's blood and extricate him from this dangerous situation, while reproving him from his rashness and temper.

This is a less tragic and a very interesting version of Aerin. I cannot think of any scene quite like this in the later Legendarium. However, this version of Aerin is clearly incompatible both with Tolkien's later development of Túrin's--and above all Morwen's--character and with his later version of the political situation in Dor-lómin, so it is not surprising that it was abandoned early in favour of the later development that we see in the *Unfinished Tales* and the published *Silmarillion*.

## Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Túrin Turambar."
2. *The Children of Húrin*, especially Chapter XII ("The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin").
3. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, especially the section "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin."
4. *The Book of Lost Tales II, Turambar and the Foalókë*.
5. He seems to be mentioned only once, when Túrin calls her "Aerin Indor's daughter" (*Unfinished Tales*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin"). Tolkien used the name *Indor* elsewhere, so we know for certain that it is a man's name.
6. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
7. "Taliska" as a name for a language of the Edain apparently changed its reference in the writing of the *Legendarium*. The name is not used in the published *Silmarillion*.
8. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men Into the West."
9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin." Compare the reminiscences of Sador in *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Childhood of Túrin."
10. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Doriath": "Grey she [i.e. Morwen] was and old." For a discussion of Aerin's white hair, see below.
11. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin."
12. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men Into the West." It is the blonde hair that is most significant in this context, because the Brodda and his Easterlings called the Edain of Dor-lómin "Strawheads" (*Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin").
13. *Book of Lost Tales II, Turambar and the Foalókë*.
14. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle". Compare also *The Children of Húrin*, Chapter II, "The Battle of Unnumbered Tears."
15. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle."
16. *The Silmarillion, Akallabêth*.
17. Refrain of the song "Rule Britannia."
18. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
19. *Ibid*.
20. *Ibid*.
21. *Unfinished Tales, Of Tuor and his Coming to Gondolin*, footnote 31.
22. Sador says so (*Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin").
23. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin." It is not explicitly stated that the escaping slaves and Aerin were cooperating, but I think it is implied.
24. "She knew all the counsel of your mother", says Sador (*Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin").
25. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin."
26. *The Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Childhood of Túrin."
27. Túrin almost dies on the winter journey to Doriath (*Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin").
28. *Unfinished Tales*, "Of Tuor and His Coming to Gondolin".
29. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin".
30. This is the new hall built by Brodda mentioned in *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin." So for Aerin it is a symbol of her marriage and of Easterling oppression, not an ancestral home.
31. *Ibid*.
32. *The Book of Lost Tales II, Turambar and the Foalókë*.



## About the Author

Himring has been writing Tolkien fan fiction since the winter of 2009. She mostly writes *Silmarillion* fan fiction, with a particular focus on the Sons of Fëanor, especially Maedhros and Maglor. Her main archive is at the Silmarillion Writers Guild. Her stories can also be found at Many Paths to Tread and Archive of Our Own (AO3), including those that are not *Silmarillion*-centred.