Character Biography

Gethron

By Oshun

Gethron is an aged man of the people of the House of Hagor who plays small but a not insignificant role of tragic story of Hurin Thalion and his family. The details that an attentive reader may glean from the texts tell them that he was a brave man and true, who perfectly accomplished, against major odds, his single known charge. He succeeds in transporting the child Túrin from his mother’s beleaguered position in Hithlum, through an Orc-infested wilderness, racing against the onset of bad weather, to the safety of the court of Thingol and Melian in Doriath. Then he survives the trek back to Morwen to inform her that her son has reached a safe haven and been accepted there.

When Túrin Turumbar was still a young boy in Hithlum, he and his mother Morwen bid farewell to his father Húrin Thalion, the Lord of Dor-lómin and head of the House of Hador, as he goes off to fight in the Núnaeth Arnoediad (Battle of Unnumbered Tears). Stoic Morwen did not shed a tear at his leaving, although she knew this was a most dangerous undertaking. Húrin, who is perhaps more hopeful than the wife he leaves behind, has rallied all of his able-bodied warriors to accompany him. As they ready to take their leave, Húrin lifts young Túrin onto his shoulders and calls out to his troops, "Let the heir of the House of Hador see the light of your swords!"¹ This passage provides without any lavish description a perfect screenshot of the beautiful, brave, tightly controlled Morwen, their young son open-mouthed with awe and a perhaps just a little fear, and the strong and still youthful Húrin, handsome and incandescent with hope, before Morgoth’s curse steals from him all of his capacity for joy.

For all practical intents and purposes, this parting leaves Morwen in charge of Húrin’s people. She considers her first task to be the protection his son and heir to the House of Hador, having promised his father she would do so. A notable complication is that she is aware at that point that she is expecting another child. Morwen was not, however, left entirely alone in Hithlum, although any able-bodied men who remained behind with her were on the elderly side. The rest of their settlement was composed of women, children, and those with some form of functional impairment.

By the time that Morwen and her people hear of the great defeat of their warriors and their allies in the Núnaeth Arnoediad, Easterlings and straggling Orcs had already begun to encroach upon their territory and overrun their settlements: "The Easterlings came into the land in great numbers, and they dealt cruelly with the people of Hador, and robbed them of all that they possessed and enslaved them."² Morwen’s greatest fear was that her son—the heir to the leadership of the remnants of the House of Hador—would be captured and enslaved, if not killed. Her fierce reputation temporarily held back the Easterling raiders in closest proximity to her: "But they dared not yet lay hands on the Lady of Dor-lómin. . . for the word ran among them that she was perilous, and a witch who had dealings with the white-fiends: for so they named the Elves. . ."³

After much consideration, she decided that she would seek refuge for her young son within the bounds of the Girdle of Melian in Doriath. In The Silmarillion, we are told that "... Morwen sent
Túrin forth with two aged servants, bidding them find entry, if they could, into the kingdom of
Doriath. These two Men of the House of Hador are not mentioned by name in the account in
the published Silmarillion, which is first published with a summary of the tale of Morwen and
Húrin. These aged men are, however, named in the Narn i Chîn Húrin or The Tale of the
Children of Húrin provided in Unfinished Tales. The account later separately published, in
2007, in the book The Children of Húrin, edited by Christopher Tolkien to form a discrete
narrative of the story of Túrin Turambar, also contains many of the details found in
the Unfinished Tales version.

When Morwen tells her son that she must send him away, he objects to leaving her behind and
then wants to know why these men must accompany him and not his dear friend
Labadal/Sador.

'I cannot go alone!' said Túrin. 'I will not leave you. Why should we not go together?'

'I cannot go,' said Morwen. 'But you will not go alone. I shall send Gethron with you, and
Grithnir too, perhaps.'

'Will you not send Labadal?' said Túrin.

'No, for Sador is lame,' said Morwen, 'and it will be a hard road. And since you are my
son and the days are grim, I will not speak softly: you may die on that road. The year is
getting late. But if you stay, you will come to a worse end: to be a thrall. If you wish to be
a man, when you come to a man’s age, you will do as I bid, bravely.'

Only the least imaginative of readers cannot see in their mind’s eye a visualization of their
departure and farewell to Morwen. This moment is left without minute physical description, but,
nonetheless, its context enables the readers to construct for themselves an almost filmic
visualization of a stalwart, grief-stricken Morwen, already obviously pregnant, bidding goodbye
to her young son. Grumpy and gloomy, but as brave as he has been instructed to be by his
mother, the handsome young Túrin is framed in her memory with his guides and protectors on
either side of him. Gethron and Grithnir, rough-hewn, hoary elders, are girded and armed for the
road and well past the prime of their manhood, but still strong and unbent and fired with a
determination to complete their mission.

The trio’s road would be “long and evil,” but Morwen manifested wisdom in her choice of the
guardians and guides for her son:

Gethron and Grithnir, who had been young in the days of Hador, and though they were
now aged they were valiant, and they knew well the lands, for they had journeyed often
through Beleriand in former times. Thus by fate and courage they passed over the
Shadowy Mountains, and coming down into the Vale of Sirion they passed into the
Forest of Brethil; and at last, weary and haggard, they reached the confines of Doriath.
But there they became bewildered, and were enmeshed in the mazes of the Queen, and
wandered lost amid the pathless trees, until all their food was spent. There they came
near to death, for winter came cold from the North; but not so light was Túrin’s doom.

Of course, they became entangled in Melian’s version of a barbed-wire fence and nearly died in
their effort to break through it. At the lowest point of their despair, they heard the sound of a
horn—that of the greatest woodsman of them all, Beleg Strongbow, who dwelt in the marshes

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on the border. They were fortunate that Beleg was not only a consummate woodsman and border guard but one who was wise and compassionate: "He heard their cries and came to them, and when he had given them food and drink he learned their names and whence they came, and he was filled with wonder and pity." Beleg contacted Thingol and Melian and they welcomed the exhausted travelers into their halls. Therein "Gethron spoke the message of Morwen before Thingol and Melian; and Thingol received them kindly, and set Túrin upon his knee in honour of Húrin, mightiest of Men, and of Beren his kinsman." After listening to the words of the grizzled veteran, Thingol took upon himself and his court the undertaking of sheltering Túrin as his foster son until such time, should it come to pass, when he might be able to return to his own lands:

With him for a while remained Gethron and Grithnir his guardians, though they yearned to return again to their lady in Dor-lómin. Then age and sickness came upon Grithnir, and he stayed beside Túrin until he died; but Gethron departed, and Thingol sent with him an escort to guide him and guard him, and they brought words from Thingol to Morwen.

When Gethron was finally able to assure Morwen that her son was safe from harm, he must have been relieved to have accomplished his last and perhaps his most difficult duty to his House. Although simply written and unembellished, the tale of Gethron's service to his Lord and Lady is a poignant, if fleeting, glimpse into the brave and loyal heart of but one of many unsung heroes of the House of Hador.

Works Cited

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the SWG archive.

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