
Character Biography Lalaith (Urwen)

By Oshun

Lalaith, the second child and first daughter of Húrin Thalion Lord of Dor-lómin and Morwen of the House of Bëor and a kinswoman of Beren, stands out within the narrative threads woven together into the lengthy tale of the children of Húrin as a singular bright light. Unfortunately, it is one which will be swiftly and tragically extinguished.

The firstborn of that ill-fated couple is their son Túrin, whose story is recounted at great length in *The Silmarillion*, *The Children of Húrin*, and in the *Narn i Chîn Húrin* section of *Unfinished Tales*.

Two years later, a girl child Lalaith, as blonde as Túrin is dark and as bright as he is shadowed, is born to Húrin and Morwen. She is credited with a joyful nature that lifts some of the heaviness from their people.

Túrin was the name of the eldest child of Húrin and Morwen, and he was born in that year in which Beren came to Doriath and found Lúthien Tinúviel, Thingol's daughter. Morwen bore a daughter also to Húrin, and she was named Urwen; but she was called Lalaith, which is Laughter, by all that knew her in her short life.¹

Lalaith is born in the aftermath of the Dagor Bragollach (Battle of Sudden Flame), a cruel time for the Eldar and the Edain and a particularly difficult period for her mother Morwen, who has recently survived the destruction of her homeland in Ladros and fled the scorched highlands of Dorthonion to the relative safety of Dor-lómin, along with other women of her people.²

Húrin wedded Morwen, the daughter of Baragund son of Bregolas of the House of Bëor; and she was thus of close kin to Beren One-hand. Morwen was dark-haired and tall, and for the light of her glance and the beauty of her face men called her Eledhwen, the elven-fair; but she was somewhat stern of mood and proud. The sorrows of the House of Bëor saddened her heart; for she came as an exile to Dor-lómin from Dorthonion after the ruin of the Bragollach.³

Húrin, whose trials and suffering come to rival or surpass the testing of Job of the Old Testament, is presented originally as a less stern figure than his stalwart wife but equally strong of will. He is said to resemble his grandfather Hador, who is the most illustrious of the leaders of the third house of the Edain, originally called the House of Marach, but renamed for him and know thereafter as the House of Hador. Húrin is said to be "fair of face and golden-haired, strong in body and fiery of mood."⁴ His passionate temperament is defined not as a sudden fire, but a steadily burning flame. Húrin has endurance.⁵ (See more about the relationship of Morwen and Húrin on this site in the [Character Biography of Morwen Eledhwen](#).)

Lalaith's brother Túrin is said to more resemble their mother in both character and coloring: a dark-haired child who grows into a handsome man, resembling the Noldor in appearance, but

cooler and more reticent in temperament. Lalaith, in contrast, is the stereotypical golden child, sunny of disposition and easy to love.

Her hair was like the yellow lilies in the grass as she ran in the fields, and her laughter was like the sound of the merry stream that came singing out of the hills past the walls of her father's house. Nen Lalaith it was named, and after it all the people of the household called the child Lalaith, and their hearts were glad while she was among them.

But Túrin was loved less than she. He was dark-haired as his mother, and promised to be like her in mood also; for he was not merry, and spoke little, though he learned to speak early and ever seemed older than his years.⁶

Túrin apparently does not get a break even as a little boy. But, despite the fact that he must be aware Lalaith is the favored child, he loves his younger sister.

At that time all the warmth of his heart was for Lalaith his sister; but he played with her seldom, and liked better to guard her unseen and to watch her going upon grass or under tree, as she sang such songs as the children of the Edain made long ago when the tongue of the Elves was still fresh upon their lips.⁷

During the early years of his children's life, Húrin is often absent. When he returns home after traveling "with the host of Fingon that guarded Hithlum's eastern borders,"⁸ his first observations of his daughter Lalaith are portentous.

'Fair as an Elf-child is Lalaith,' said Húrin to Morwen; 'but briefer, alas! And so fairer, maybe, or dearer.' And Túrin hearing these words pondered them, but could not understand them. For he had seen no Elf-children.⁹

The comparison of Lalaith to an Elven child is reminiscent both of her mother's fabled Elflike beauty and also of the much-cited reference from *Morgoth's Ring* relating to the similarity of Elven children to those of the Edain.

Nonetheless there was less difference between the two Kindreds, Elves and Men, in early youth; and a man who watched elf-children at play might well have believed that they were the children of Men, of some fair and happy people.¹⁰

Another line from the *Narn i Hîn Húrin* too beautiful not to cite is one which is also evocative of the alert and contemplative point of view of young Túrin, who figures so heavily in the account of Lalaith's life there and in *The Children of Húrin*.

None of the Eldar at that time dwelt in his father's lands, and once only had he seen them, when King Fingon and many of his lords had ridden through Dor-lómin and passed over the bridge of Nen Lalaith, glittering in silver and white.¹¹

His sighting of the dazzling Elven warriors occurs at their crossing of the same gurgling water way of Nen Lalaith from which Lalaith's name is derived. All of these events told of the childhood of Lalaith and Túrin occur after the breaking of the watchful peace of the nearly five-hundred-year-long siege of Angband, during the years of the High Kingship of Fingon and the building of the grand alliances of Fingon and Maedhros, which seek to boldly threaten Morgoth himself.

But the wiser were uneasy still, fearing that Maedhros revealed his growing strength too soon, and that Morgoth would be given time enough to take counsel against him. 'Ever will some new evil be hatched in Angband beyond the guess of Elves and Men,' they said. And in the autumn of that year, to point their words, there came an ill wind from the North under leaden skies. The Evil Breath it was called, for it was pestilent; and many sickened and died in the fall of the year in the northern lands that bordered on the Anfauglith, and they were for the most part the children or the rising youth in the houses of Men.¹²

This Evil Breath out of Angband might be compared to the plague or Black Death of our primary world, save that this Morgoth-bred pestilence primarily attacked children and the very young, the promise of hope for a future to the short-lived Edain.

The Evil Breath came to Dor-lómin, and Túrin took sick, and lay long in a fever and dark dream. And when he was healed, for such was his fate and the strength of life that was in him, he asked for Lalaith. But his nurse answered: 'Speak no more of Lalaith, son of Húrin; but of your sister Urwen you must ask tidings of your mother.'

And when Morwen came to him, Túrin said to her: 'I am no longer sick, and I wish to see Urwen; but why must I not say Lalaith anymore?'

'Because Urwen is dead, and laughter is stilled in this house,' she answered. 'But you live, son of Morwen; and so does the Enemy who has done this to us.'

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But Túrin wept bitterly at night alone, though to Morwen he never again spoke the name of his sister.¹³

Húrin suffers at least as deeply as his wife or his son and heir at the loss of the ebullient toddler Lalaith, dead at the age of three years, and is far more demonstrative of his grief.

But Húrin mourned openly, and he took up his harp and would make a song of lamentation; but he could not, and he broke his harp, and going out he lifted up his hand towards the North, crying: 'Marrer of Middle-earth, would that I might see you face to face, and mar you as my lord Fingolfin did!'¹⁴

But still Húrin is more than ready when Fingon calls him to battle again. He goes to fight in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (Battle of Unnumbered Tears) with the same high hopes that Fingon and Maedhros bring to that most heartbreaking of all the Battles of Beleriand.

Húrin cries out "*Aurë entuluva!* Day shall come again!" as he fights his losing battle against the forces of Morgoth (Silm. 195). The tragic life of his son Túrin is a headlong rush into the darkness, hastened by every effort he makes to find the light.¹⁵

The beacon of Lalaith the happy child, with her capacity to lift the spirits of a beleaguered people in dark days, is remembered as a bittersweet moment in a harsh period, made more

poignant by the fact that her father has predicted the brevity of her life and the darkness which will overtake her light.

Works Cited

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About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).