

Lúthien escapes

On the second day there came a call from the doorway: a voice gentle and musical. Lúthien hurried to the entrance and found standing there a fair-haired woman with most beautiful grey eyes. A look of sadness lay over her face.

"I am Finduilas," the woman said, "daughter of Orodreth, the brother of King Felagund. I am come to discover what I can do to serve you."

"Oh, welcome!" cried Lúthien. "Come within! Pray, sit with me! Tell me first, if you will, whether the King will see me, and how soon. It cannot be too soon. I have a most urgent errand in the North, but these brigands of whom you doubtless know have waylaid me, and I know not what is happening, nor what I can do. But I know the King would not countenance the misdeeds of these bravos, I *know* it. I beg thee, of thy mercy, carry the news of my distress to him as quickly as you may!"

The sadness deepened on Finduilas's face. "Alas!" she cried. "Have those faithless ones not told you? The King left us weeks ago. He rode north with Beren your beloved. My father held the throne in stewardship for him, but now these brothers have come back with a tale that Felagund is dead. They claim the kingship as the elder house of the Noldor. The people have turned from my father, they will not listen to his protests."

The hope drained out of Lúthien almost visibly and she sagged where she sat. "Then I am lost," she murmured, "and so is my beloved. And who knows? Perhaps the King as well. Beren lives yet, that I know; and he had companions, some seven of whom have met their deaths. I felt them go."

The fair woman stared at her. "With Felagund and Beren went ten companions," she breathed. "Therefore four lives might remain, and Beren's. It might be so. It might be so!"

"Yet here we sit, powerless," said Lúthien sadly.

Finduilas wrung her hands. "I would help you if I could," she said. "Oh, I would. What can I do? I will do anything within my power."

The maid of Doriath looked up. "Can you get me my cloak?" she said. "The usurper stole it. Had I that, I think I might escape." She explained further to the fair-haired beauty the powers of the cloak.

"I will try," said Finduilas at last, "but I doubt I can succeed. If Celegorm took it, he doubtless suspects its powers, and has it locked away. I will also think, to see if I can discover another way to free you. I will ask Father, he is very learned. But now, is there anything you need? Anything I can bring to you?"

"Clothes," replied Lúthien. "They have given me none. I have only what I stand in, and that has seen much weather since last I put it on."

"Oh, the low curs!" exclaimed the other. "I had suspected as much, but to hear it confirmed...! Stand beside me, Sister, that I might better judge thy height and girth."

When this was settled, Finduilas left her, with a promise to return. That she did; and as the days stretched into weeks, and the weeks dragged past one by one, until gales in the outer world had blown off all the leaves, her visits were the one thing that kept Lúthien from despair.

All attempts to retrieve the cloak failed; nobody could come up with another plan. Again and again the wave of horror returned to Lúthien, as she felt the teeth of death come ever closer to the one she loved, until she thought she would go mad from the strain of waiting for the worst-feared event.

The spouse of Orodreth, Gilrodel, now more sad-eyed than ever, came also from time to time; and once Orodreth himself, sunken now and shamed. But their daughter it was who was Lúthien's most constant and treasured companion.

Once she had a visit from Celegorm. She stood tall to meet him, eyes flashing. "You dare to show your face

in here?" she flamed. "Liar. Abductor. Usurper. Hunter of wolves, are you? You are little better than a wolf yourself. Take your thief's face out of my chambers! I do not need to bandy words with you."

Celegorm flushed. "You shall not bait me," he said. "I make no apology. Policy excuses deeds which private life would condemn."

"What need this interview then?" she said. "Your presence pains me. Pray do not prolong it."

"It is but shortly done," he said tightly. "You and I must marry. It is policy, as I said. Messengers have been sent to your father."

Lúthien's mouth fell open on hearing this. She laughed at the finish: a long, high laugh.

"Truly is it said that there is ever more filth in a mire-pond, dredge how one will," she said, and the lash in her voice made him wince. "I had judged thee too highly, son of Fëanor. Truly! Yes, I had! But strive on. There is infamy yet that thou hast not tasted; yea, a whole swamp full."

Celegorm ground his teeth. "Maid," he said, "you have judged me false, or not at all. I have only one goal before my eyes: the Jewels of my father, of which he was robbed. All else must stand aside from that."

"Get out," she spat. "Thou emissary of darkness. Thou hast ransomed thine honour for a gaud. Do as thou listeth, it matters naught to me. Get out!"

Besides Finduilas, Lúthien's most constant source of comfort was the great Hound of Valinor. She would lay her head on his warm shoulders and weep; the hound would whine his helpless distress, and lick the salt tears from her face. He stayed before her door as a constant guard. Twice he had, with bared fang and savage eye, warded off Curufin, creeping in the night; but the maid was spared the shame and horror of this knowledge.

There came a night when the eleventh wave of death rolled over Lúthien, almost oversetting her reason. All the companions, which must also include the King, were lost; no lives now stood between Beren and the wolf's dread maw.

She rose and sat cold in the darkness. It was almost over; the knowledge lay in her heart like ice.

She heard the click of claws and felt the warm breath of her friend. She embraced him in the dark and cried, "Oh Huan, why did I let go of my cloak!"

Huan stood there a moment, but he pulled away from her, and was suddenly gone. She wept then, feeling that her last friend had deserted her. She went and cast herself on her lonely couch.

She started up; was that a noise? She could not tell if it had been moments since Huan had left, or hours. She thought that morning was not far off. With elven sight she searched the dark. A shadow she made out, advancing along the wall, and her pulse began to beat; but she relaxed as she heard again the familiar click.

"Oh, Huan!" she whispered. "You gave me a fright. I am glad you have come back to me. Come, my friend, there is room for you too. See! I move over."

But Huan did not spring up. She heard something soft fall beside the couch. The great hound crouched down; just the vaguest outline of his head could be seen against the dark. Then, deep as a bell, came his voice. Huan spake, who never could before in this form, and only twice again before his death.

"Lady most beloved," spoke the hound, "the world has moved this night, and loosened my tongue. Hear my words, while I yet have power to make them!

"Lúthien, O flower of Doriath, I have loved thee from the moment I saw thee; as should all true creatures, Men, and Elves. Thy pain is my pain, thy quest is mine.

"I have brought thee thy cloak. Great indeed is its power: the two guards without lie already fast in sleep. With this key thou canst unlock the gates of Nargothrond and run free. But I will do more: I will come with

thee, and face all the evil of Gorthaur at thy side. Thou shalt ride upon my back for greater speed. But I pray thee, make haste! For I feel speech slipping from me again.”

Lúthien cast her arms tight about his neck, and wept anew; tears now of love and gladness, such that she feared her heart might fail from very hope and joy. “O my friend,” she wept, “O my friend! Thy love is returned, in brimming measure. Companions until death are we.”

Not long would Huan allow for this sweetness; he stood up, and nudged her to take up the cloak and come with him. Together the two made their way out of the city. Nobody minded the hound, who went in the public ways where he would; but Lúthien, coming like a shadow behind, wrapped in her cloak, sent all whom they encountered drowsing into slumber – a fair sleep full of dreams of spring, and warm days, and meadow flowers, and the laughter of love and children.

Out of the last gate they came, to find the world greying towards dawn. Huan crouched that Lúthien might sit astride his back; then he was away, flying north like the wind.

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