

An excerpt from "Of Beren and Lúthien" in *The Silmarillion*

By the counsel of Huan and the arts of Lúthien he was arrayed now in the hame of Draugluin, and she in the winged fell of Thuringwethil. Beren became in all things like a werewolf to look upon, save that in his eyes there shone a spirit grim indeed but clean; and horror was in his glance as he saw upon his flank a bat-like creature clinging with creased wings. Then howling under the moon he leaped down the hill, and the bat wheeled and flittered above him.

They passed through all perils, until they came with the dust of their long and weary road upon them to the drear dale that lay before the Gate of Angband. Black chasms opened beside the road, whence forms as of writhing serpents issued. On either hand the cliffs stood as embattled walls, and upon them sat carrion fowl crying with fell voices. Before them was the impregnable Gate, an arch wide and dark at the foot of the mountain; above it reared a thousand feet of precipice.

There dismay took them, for at the gate was a guard of whom no tidings had yet gone forth. Rumour of he knew not what designs abroad among the princes of the Elves had come to Morgoth, and ever down the aisles of the forest was heard the baying of Huan, the great hound of war, whom long ago the Valar unleashed. Then Morgoth recalled the doom of Huan, and he chose one from among the whelps of the race of Draugluin; and he fed him with his own hand upon living flesh, and put his power upon him. Swiftly the wolf grew, until he could creep into no den, but lay huge and hungry before the feet of Morgoth. There the fire and anguish of hell entered into him, and he became filled with a devouring spirit, tormented, terrible, and strong. Carcharoth, the Red Maw, he is named in the tales of those days, and Anfauglir, the Jaws of Thirst. And Morgoth set him to lie unsleeping before the doors of Angband, lest Huan come.

Now Carcharoth espied them from afar, and he was filled with doubt; for news had long been brought to Angband that Draugluin was dead. Therefore when they approached he denied them entry, and bade them stand; and he drew near with menace, scenting something strange in the air about them. But suddenly some power, descended from of old from divine race, possessed Lúthien, and casting back her foul raiment she stood forth, small before the might of Carcharoth, but radiant and terrible. Lifting up her hand she commanded him to sleep, saying: 'O woe-begotten spirit, fall now into dark oblivion, and forget for a while the dreadful doom of life.' And Carcharoth was felled, as though lightning had smitten him.

Then Beren and Lúthien went through the Gate, and down the labyrinthine stairs; and

together wrought the greatest deed that has been dared by Elves or Men. For they came to the seat of Morgoth in his nethermost hall that was upheld by horror, lit by fire, and filled with weapons of death and torment. There Beren slunk in wolf's form beneath his throne; but Lúthien was stripped of her disguise by the will of Morgoth, and he bent his gaze upon her. She was not daunted by his eyes; and she named her own name, and offered her service to sing before him, after the manner of a minstrel. Then Morgoth looking upon her beauty conceived in his thought an evil lust, and a design more dark than any that had yet come into his heart since he fled from Valinor. Thus he was beguiled by his own malice, for he watched her, leaving her free for awhile, and taking secret pleasure in his thought. Then suddenly she eluded his sight, and out of the shadows began a song of such surpassing loveliness, and of such blinding power, that he listened perforce; and a blindness came upon him, as his eyes roamed to and fro, seeking her.

All his court were cast down in slumber, and all the fires faded and were quenched; but the Silmarils in the crown on Morgoth's head blazed forth suddenly with a radiance of white flame; and the burden of that crown and of the jewels bowed down his head, as though the world were set upon it, laden with a weight of care, of fear, and of desire, that even the will of Morgoth could not support. Then Lúthien catching up her winged robe sprang into the air, and her voice came dropping down like rain into pools, profound and dark. She cast her cloak before his eyes, and set upon him a dream, dark as the outer Void where once he walked alone.

Suddenly he fell, as a hill sliding in avalanche, and hurled like thunder from his throne lay prone upon the floors of hell. The iron crown rolled echoing from his head. All things were still.

As a dead beast Beren lay upon the ground; but Lúthien touching him with her hand aroused him, and he cast aside the wolf-hame. Then he drew forth the knife Angrist; and from the iron claws that held it he cut a Silmaril.

As he closed it in his hand, the radiance welled through his living flesh, and his hand became as a shining lamp; but the jewel suffered his touch and hurt him not. It came then into Beren's mind that he would go beyond his vow, and bear out of Angband all three of the Jewels of Fëanor; but such was not the doom of the Silmarils. The knife Angrist snapped, and a shard of the blade flying smote the cheek of Morgoth. He groaned and stirred, and all the host of Angband moved in sleep.

Then terror fell upon Beren and Lúthien, and they fled, heedless and without disguise,

desiring only to see the light once more. They were neither hindered nor pursued, but the Gate was held against their going out; for Carcharoth had arisen from sleep, and stood now in wrath upon the threshold of Angband. Before they were aware of him, he saw them, and sprang upon them as they ran.

Lúthien was spent, and she had not time nor strength to quell the wolf. But Beren strode forth before her, and in his right hand he held aloft the Silmaril. Carcharoth halted, and for a moment was afraid. 'Get you gone, and fly!' cried Beren; 'for here is a fire that shall consume you, and all evil things.' And he thrust the Silmaril before the eyes of the wolf.

But Carcharoth looked upon that holy jewel and was not daunted, and the devouring spirit within him awoke to sudden fire; and gaping he took suddenly the hand within his jaws, and he bit it off at the wrist. Then swiftly all his inwards were filled with a flame of anguish, and the Silmaril seared his accursed flesh. Howling he led before them, and the walls of the valley of the Gate echoes with the clamour of his torment. So terrible did he become in his madness that all the creatures of Morgoth that abode in that valley, or were upon any of the roads that led thither, fled far away' for he slew all living things that stood in his path, and burst from the North with ruin upon the world. Of all the terrors that came ever into Beleriand ere Angband's fall the madness of Carcharoth was the most dreadful; for the power of the Silmaril was hidden within him.

Now Beren lay in a swoon within the perilous Gate, and death drew nigh him for there was venom on the fangs of the wolf. Lúthien with her lips drew out the venom, and she put forth her failing power to staunch the hideous wound.