J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973)
Excerpts from *The Lays of Beleriand*

TÚRIN SON OF HÚRIN
&
GLÓRUND THE DRAGON

Lo! the golden dragon of the God of Hell,  
the gloom of the woods of the world now gone,  
the woes of Men, and weeping of Elves  
fading faintly down forest pathways,  
is now to tell, and the name most tearful  
of Niniel the sorrowful, and the name most sad  
of Thalion’s son Túrin o’erthrown by fate.

Lo! Húrin Thalion in the hosts of war  
was whelmed, what time the white-clad armies  
of Elfinesse were all to ruin  
by the dread hate driven of Delu-Morgoth.  
That field is yet by the folk named  
Nínin Unothradin, Unnumbered Tears.  
There the children of Men, chieftain and warrior,  
fled and fought not, but the folk of the Elves  
they betrayed with treason, save that true man only,  
Thalion Erithámrod and his thanes like gods.  
There in host on host the hill-fiend Orcs  
overbore him at last in that battle terrible,  
by the bidding of Bauglir bound him living,  
and pulled down the proudest of the princes of Men.  
To Bauglir’s halls in the hills builded,  
to the Hells of Iron and the hidden caverns  
they haled the hero of Hithlum’s land,  
Thalion Erithámrod, to their thronéd lord,  
whose breast was burnt with a bitter hatred,  
and wroth he was that the wrack of war  
had not taken Turgon ten times a king,  
even Finwég’s heir; nor Fëanor’s children,  
makers of the magic and immortal gems.  
For Turgon towering in terrible anger  
a pathway clove him with his pale sword-blade
out of that slaughter— yea, his swath was plain
through the hosts of Hell like hay that lieth
all low on the lea where the long scythe goes.
A countless company that king did lead
through the darkened dales and drear mountains
out of ken of his foes, and he comes not more
in the tale; but the triumph he turned to doubt
of Morgoth the evil, whom mad wrath took.
Nor spies sped him, nor spirits of evil,
nor his wealth of wisdom to win him tidings,
whither the nation of the Gnomes was gone.
Now a thought of malice, when Thalion stood,
bound, unbending, in his black dungeon,
then moved in his mind that remembered well
how Men were accounted all mightless and frail
by the Elves and their kindred; how only treason
could master the magic whose mazes wrapped
the children of Corthûn, and cheated his purpose.

‘Is it dauntless Húrin,’ quoth Delu-Morgoth,
‘stout steel-handed, who stands before me,
a captive living as a coward might be?
Knowest thou my name, or need’st be told
what hope he has who is haled to Angband—
the bale most bitter, the Balrogs’ torment?’

‘I know and I hate. For that knowledge I fought thee
by fear unfettered, nor fear I now,’
said Thalion there, and a thane of Morgoth
on the mouth smote him; but Morgoth smiled:
‘Fear when thou feelest, and the flames lick thee,
and the whips of the Balrogs thy white flesh brand.
Yet a way canst win, an thou wishest, still
to lessen thy lot of lingering woe.
Go question the captives of the accursed people
I have taken, and tell me where Turgon is hid;
how with fire and death I may find him soon,
where he lurketh lost in lands forgot.
Thou must feign thee a friend faithful in anguish,
and their inmost hearts thus open and search.
Then, if truth thou tellest, thy triple bonds
I will bid men unbind, that abroad thou fare
in my service to search the secret places
following the footsteps of these foes of the Gods.’

‘Build not thy hopes so high, O Bauglir—
I am no tool for thy evil treasons;
torment were sweeter than a traitor’s stain.’

‘If torment be sweet, treasure is liever.
The hoards of a hundred hundred ages,
the gems and jewels of the jealous Gods,
are mine, and a meed shall I mete thee thence,
yea, wealth to glut the Worm of Greed.’

‘Canst not learn of thy lore when thou look’st on a foe,
O Bauglir unblest? Bray no longer
of the things thou hast thieved from the Three Kindreds.
In hate I hold thee, and thy hests in scorn.’

‘Boldly thou bravest me. Be thy boast rewarded,’
in mirth quod Morgoth, ‘to me now the deeds,
and thy aid I ask not; but anger thee nought
if little they like thee. Yea, look thereon
helpless to hinder, or thy hand to raise.’

Then Thalion was thrust to Thangorodrim,
that mountain that meets the misty skies
on high o’er the hills that Hithlum sees
blackly brooding on the borders of the north.
To a stool of stone on its steepest peak
they bound him in bonds, an unbreakable chain,
and the Lord of Woe there laughing stood,
then cursed him for ever and his kin and seed
with a doom of dread of death and horror.
There the mighty man unmové sat;
but unveiled was his vision, that he viewed afar
all earthly things with eyes enchanted
that fell on his folk—a fiend’s torment.
I
TÚRIN’S FOSTERING

Lo! the lady Morwin in the Land of Shadows waited in the woodland for her well-beloved; but he came never from the combat home. No tidings told her whether taken or dead, or lost in flight he lingered yet. Laid waste his lands, and his lieges slain, and men unmindful of his mighty lordship dwelt in Dorlómin and dealt unkindly with his widowed wife; and she went with child, who a son must succour now sadly orphaned, Túrin Thaliodrin of tender years. Then in days of blackness was her daughter born, and was named Nienor, a name of tears that in language of eld is Lamentation. Then her thoughts turnéd to Thingol the Elf-king, and the dancer of Doriath, his daughter Tinúviel, whom the boldest of the brave, Beren Ermabwed, had won to wife. He once had known firmest friendship to his fellow in arms, Thalion Erithámrod—so thought she now, and said to her son, ‘My sweetest child, our friends are few, and thy father comes not. Thou must fare afar to the folk of the wood, where Thingol is throned in the Thousand Caves. If he remember Morwin and thy mighty sire he will fain foster thee, and feats of arms he will teach thee, the trade of targe and sword, and Thalion’s son no thrall shall be—but remember thy mother when thy manhood nears.’

Heavy boded the heart of Húrin’s son, yet he weened her words were wild with grief, and he denied her not, for no need him seemed. Lo! henchmen had Morwin, Halog and Gumlin, who were young of yore ere the youth of Thalion, who alone of the lieges of that lord of Men steadfast in service staid beside her:
now she bade them brave the black mountains, and the woods whose ways wander to evil; though Túrin be tender and to travail unused, they must gird them and go; but glad they were not, and Morwin mourned when men saw not.

Came a summer day when sun filtered warm through the woodland’s waving branches. Then Morwin stood her mourning hiding by the gate of her garth in a glade of the woods. At the breast she mothered her babe unweaned, and the doorpost held lest she droop for anguish. There Gumlin guided her gallant boy, and a heavy burden was borne by Halog; but the heart of Túrin was heavy as stone uncomprehending its coming anguish.

He sought for comfort, with courage saying: ‘Quickly will I come from the courts of Thingol; long ere manhood I will lead to Morwin great tale of treasure, and true comrades’—for he wist not the weird woven by Bauglir, nor the sundering sorrow that swept between. The farewells are taken: their footsteps are turned to the dark forest: the dwelling fadeth in the tangled trees. Then in Túrin leapt his awakened heart, and he wept blindly, calling ‘I cannot, I cannot leave thee. O Morwin, my mother, why makest me go? Hateful are the hills where hope is lost. O Morwin, my mother, I am meshed in tears. Grim are the hills, and my home is gone.’ And there came his cries calling faintly down the dark alleys of the dreary trees, and one who wept weary on the threshold heard how the hills said ‘my home is gone.’

The ways were weary and woven with deceit o’er the hills of Hithlum to the hidden kingdom deep in the darkness of Doriath’s forest; and never ere now for need or wonder
had children of Men chosen that pathway,
and few of the folk have followed it since.
There Túrin and the twain knew torment of thirst,
and hunger and fear and hideous nights,
for wolfriders and wandering Orcs
and the Things of Morgoth thronged the woodland.
Magics were about them, that they missed their ways
and strayed steerless, and the stars were hid.
Thus they passed the mountains, but the mazes of Doriath
wilder and wayworn in wanhope bound them.
They had nor bread nor water, and bled of strength
their death they deemed it to die forewandered,
when they heard a horn that hooted afar,
and baying dogs. It was Beleg the hunter,
who farthest fared of his folk abroad
ahunting by hill and hollow valley,
who cared not for concourse and commerce of men.
He was great of growth and goodly-limbed,
but lithe of girth, and lightly on the ground
his footsteps fell as he fared towards them,
all garbed in grey and green and brown—a son of the wilderness who wist no sire.

‘Who are ye?’ he asked. ‘Outlaws, or maybe hard hunted men whom hate pursueth?’

‘Nay, for famine and thirst we faint,’ saith Halog, ‘wayworn and wildered, and wot not the road.
Or hast not heard of the hills of slain,
or the tear-drenchéd field where the terror and fire of Morgoth devoured both Men and Elves?
There Thalion Erithámrod and his thanes like gods vanished from the earth, and his valiant lady weeps yet widowed as she waits in Hithlum.
Thou lookest on the last of the lieges of Morwin and Thalion’s son Túrin, who to Thingol’s court are wending by the word of the wife of Húrin.’

Then Beleg bade them be blithe, and said: ‘The Gods have guided you to good keeping.'
I have heard of the house of Húrin the Steadfast — and who hath not heard of the hills of slain, of Ninin Unothradin, the Unnumbered Tears? To that war I went not, but wage a feud with the Orcs unending, whom mine arrows bitter oft stab unseen and strike to death.

I am the huntsman Beleg of the Hidden People.‘ Then he bade them drink, and drew from his belt a flask of leather full filled with wine that is bruised from the berries of the burning South — and the Gnome-folk know it, and the nation of the Elves, and by long ways lead it to the lands of the North. There bakéd flesh and bread from his wallet they had to their hearts’ joy; but their heads were mazed by the wine of Dor-Winion that went in their veins, and they soundly slept on the soft needles of the tall pine-trees that towered above.

Later they wakened and were led by ways devious winding through the dark wood-realm by slade and slope and swampy thicket through lonely days and long night-times, and but for Beleg had been baffled utterly by the magic mazes of Melian the Queen. To the shadowy shores he showed the way where stilly that stream strikes ‘fore the gates of the cavernous court of the King of Doriath. O’er the guarded bridge he gained a passage, and thrice they thanked him, and thought in their hearts ‘the Gods are good — had they guessed maybe what the future enfolded they had feared to live.

To the throne of Thingol the three were come, and their speech sped them; for he spake them fair, and held in honour Húrin the steadfast, Beren Ermabwed’s brother-in-arms. Remembering Morwin, of mortals fairest, he turned not Túrin in contempt away; said: ‘O son of Húrin, here shalt sojourn in my cavernous court for thy kindred’s sake. Nor as slave or servant, but a second king’s son
thou shalt dwell in dear love, till thou deem’st it time
to remember thy mother Morwin’s loneliness.
Thou wisdom shalt win unwist of Men
and weapons shalt wield as the warrior Elves,
and Thalion’s son no thrall shall be.’

There tarried the twain that had tended the child,
till their limbs were lightened and they longed to fare
through dread and danger to their dear lady.
But Gumlin was gone in greater years
than Halog, and hoped not to home again.
Then sickness took him, and he stayed by Túrin,
while Halog hardened his heart to go.
An Elfin escort to his aid was given
and magics of Melian, and a meed of gold.
In his mouth a message to Morwin was set,
words of the king’s will, how her wish was granted;
how Thingol called her to the Thousand Caves
to fare unfearing with his folk again,
there to sojourn in solace till her son be grown;
for Húrin the hero was held in mind,
and no might had Morgoth where Melian dwelt.

Of the errand of the Elves and that other Halog
the tale tells not, save in time they came
to the threshold of Morwin, and Thingol’s message
was said where she sate in her solitary hall.
But she dared not do as was dearly bidden,
for Nienor her nestling was not yet weaned.
More, the pride of her people, princes of Men,
had suffered her send her son to Thingol
when despair sped her, but to spend her days
as alms-guest of others, even Elfin kings,
it liked her little; and there lived e’en now
a hope in her heart that Húrin would come,
and the dwelling was dear where he dwelt of old.
At night she would listen for a knock at the doors,
or a footstep falling that she fondly knew;
so she fared not forth, and her fate was woven.
Yet the thanes of Thingol she thanked nobly,
and her shame she showed not, how shorn of glory
to reward their wending she had wealth too scant;
but gave them in gift her golden things
that last lingered, and they led away
a helm of Húrin that was hewn in war
when he battled with Beren his brother-in-arms
against ogres and Orcs and evil foemen;
‘twas o’erwritten with runes by wrights of old.
She bade Thingol receive it and think of her.

Thus Halog her henchman came home, but the Elves,
the thanes of Thingol thrust through the woods,
and the message of Morwin in a month’s journey,
so quick their coming to the king was said.
Then was Melian moved to ruth,
and courteously received the king her gift,
who deeply delved had dungeons filled
with Elfin armouries of ancient gear,
but he handled the helm as his hoard were scant;
said: ‘High were the head that upheld this thing
with that token crowned of the towering dragon
that Thalion Erithámrod thrice-renowned
oft bore into battle with baleful foes.’
Then a thought was thrust into Thingol’s heart,
and Túrin he called and told when come
that Morwin his mother a mighty thing
had sent to her son his sire’s heirloom,
a helm that hammers had hardened of old,
whose makers had mingled a magic therein
that its worth was a wonder and its wearer safe,
guarded from glaive or gleaming axe—
‘Lo! Húrin’s helm hoard thou till manhood
bids thee battle; then bravely don it’;
and Túrin touched it but took it not,
too weak to wield that weight as yet,
and his mind mourned for Morwin’s answer,
and the first of his sorrows o’erfilled his soul.

Thus came it to pass in the court of Thingol
that Túrin tarried for twelve long years
with Gumlin his guardian, who guided him thither
when but seven summers their sorrows had laid
on the son of Thalion. For the seven first
his lot was lightened, since he learnt at whiles
from faring folk what befell in Hithlum,
and tidings were told by trusty Elves,
how Morwin his mother was more at ease;
and they named Nienor that now was growing
to the sweet beauty of a slender maiden.
Thus his heart knew hope, and his hap was fairer.
There he waxed wonderly and won him praise
in all lands where Thingol as lord was held
for the strength of his body and stoutness of heart.
Much lore he learned, and loved wisdom,
but fortune followed him in few desires;
oft wrong and awry what he wrought turnéd;
what he loved he lost, what he longed for he won not;
and full friendship he found not easily,
nor was lightly loved for his looks were sad.
He was gloomy-hearted, and glad seldom,
for the sundering sorrow that seared his youth.

On manhood’s threshold he was mighty holden
in the wielding of weapons; and in weaving song
he had a minstrel’s mastery, but mirth was not in it,
for he mourned the misery of the Men of Hithlum.
Yet greater his grief grew thereafter,
when from Hithlum’s hills he heard no more,
and no traveller told him tidings of Morwin.
For those days were drawing to the Doom of the Gnomes,
and the power of the Prince of the People of Hell,
of the grim Glamhoth, was grown apace,
till the lands of the North were loud with their noise,
and they fell on the folk with flame and ruin
who bent not to Bauglir, or the borders passed
of dark Dorlómin with its dreary pines
that Hithlum unhappy is hight by Men.
There Morgoth shut them, and the Shadowy Mountain fenced them from Faërie and the folk of the wood.
Even Beleg fared not so far abroad
as once was his wont, and the woods were filled
with the armies of Angband and evil deeds,
while murder walked on the marches of Doriath;
only mighty magic of Melian the Queen
yet held their havoc from the Hidden People.

To assuage his sorrow and to sate the rage
and hate of his heart for the hurts of his folk
then Húrin’s son took the helm of his sire
and weapons weighty for the wielding of men,
and went to the woods with warlike Elves;
and far in the fight his feet led him,
into black battle yet a boy in years.
Ere manhood’s measure he met and slew
the Orcs of Angband and evil things
that roamed and ravened on the realm’s borders.
There hard his life, and hurts he got him,
the wounds of shaft and warfain sword,
and his prowess was proven and his praise renowned,
and beyond his years he was yielded honour;
for by him was holden the hand of ruin
from Thingol’s folk, and Thû feared him—
Thû who was thronéd as thane most mighty
neath Morgoth Bauglir; whom that mighty one bade
‘Go ravage the realm of the robber Thingol,
and mar the magic of Melian the Queen.’

Only one was there in war greater,
higher in honour in the hearts of the Elves,
than Túrin son of Húrin untamed in war—
even the huntsman Beleg of the Hidden People,
the son of the wilderness who wist no sire
(to bend whose bow of the black yew-tree
had none the might), unmatched in knowledge
of the wood’s secrets and the weary hills.
He was leader beloved of the light-armed bands,
the scouts that scoured, scorning danger,
afar o’er the fells their foemen’s lairs;
and tales and tidings timely won them
of camps and councils, of comings and goings—
the movements of the might of Morgoth the Terrible. Thus Túrin, who trusted to targe and sword, who was fain of fighting with foes well seen, and the banded troops of his brave comrades were snared seldom and smote unlooked-for.

Then the fame of the fights on the far marches were carried to the court of the King of Doriath, and tales of Túrin were told in his halls, and how Beleg the ageless was brother-in-arms to the black-haired boy from the beaten people. Then the king called them to come before him ever and anon when the Orc-raids waned; to rest them and revel, and to raise awhile the secret songs of the sons of Ing.

On a time was Túrin at the table of Thingol—there was laughter long and the loud clamour of a countless company that quaffed the mead, amid the wine of Dor-Winion that went ungrudged in their golden goblets; and goodly meats there burdened the boards, neath the blazing torches set high in those halls that were hewn of stone. There mirth fell on many; there minstrels clear did sing to them songs of the city of Tûn neath Tain-Gwethil, towering mountain, where the great gods sit and gaze on the world from the guarded shores of the gulf of Faërie. Then one sang of the slaying at the Swanships’ Haven and the curse that had come on the kindreds since: all silent sat and soundless harkened, and waited the words save one alone—the Man among Elves that Morwin bore. Unheeding he heard or high feasting or lay or laughter, and looked, it seemed, to a deep distance in the dark without, and strained for sounds in the still spaces, for voices that vanished in the veils of night. He was lithe and lean, and his locks were wild, and woodland weeds he wore of brown.
and grey and green, and gay jewel
or golden trinket his garb knew not.

An Elf there was—Orgof—of the ancient race
that was lost in the lands where the long marches
from the quiet waters of Cuiviénen
were made in the mirk of the midworld’s gloom,
eré light was lifted aloft o’er earth;
but blood of the Gnomes was blent in his veins.
He was close akin to the King of Doriath—
a hardy hunter and his heart was brave,
but loose his laughter and light his tongue,
and his pride outran his prowess in arms.
He was fain before all of fine raiment
and of gems and jewels, and jealous of such
as found favour before himself.

Now costly clad in colours gleaming
he sat on a seat that was set on high
near the king and queen and close to Túrin.
When those twain were at table he had taunted him oft,
lightly with laughter, for his loveless ways,
his haggard raiment and hair unshorn;
but Túrin untroubled neither turned his head
nor wasted words on the wit of Orgof.

But this day of the feast more deep his gloom
than of wont, and his words men won harder;
for of twelve long years the tale was full
since on Morwin his mother through a maze of tears
he looked the last, and the long shadows
of the forest had fallen on his fading home;
and he answered few, and Orgof nought.

Then the fool’s mirth was filled the more,
to a keener edge was his carping whetted
at the clothes uncouth and the uncombed hair
of Túrin newcome from the tangled forest.
He drew forth daintily a dear treasure,
a comb of gold that he kept about him,
and tendered it to Túrin; but he turned not his eyes,
nor deigned to heed or harken to Orgof,
who too deep drunken that disdain should quell him:
‘Nay, an thou knowest not thy need of comb, nor its use,’ quoth he, ‘too young thou leftest thy mother’s ministry, and ’twere meet to go that she teach thee tame thy tangled locks— if the women of Hithlum be not wild and loveless, uncouth and unkempt as their cast-off sons.’

Then a fierce fury, like a fire blazing, was born of bitterness in his bruised heart; his white wrath woke at the words of scorn for the women of Hithlum washed in tears; and a heavy horn to his hand lying, with gold adorned for good drinking, of his might unmindful thus moved in ire he seized and, swinging, swiftly flung it in the face of Orgof. ‘Thou fool,’ he said, ‘fill thy mouth therewith, and to me no further thus witless prate by wine bemused’— but his face was broken, and he fell backward, and heavy his head there hit upon the stone of the floor rock-paved mid flagons and vessels of the o’erturned table that tumbled on him as clutching he fell; and carped no more, in death silent. There dumb were all at bench and board; in blank amaze they rose around him, as with ruth of heart he gazed aghast on his grievous deed, on his wine-stained hand, with wondering eyes half-comprehending. On his heel then he turned into the night striding, and none stayed him; but some their swords half slipped from sheath—they were Orgof’s kin—yet for awe of Thingol they dared not draw while the dazed king stonefaced stared on his stricken thane and no sign showed them. But the slayer weary his hands laved in the hidden stream that strikes ‘fore the gates, nor stayed his tears: Who has cast,’ he cried, ‘a curse upon me; for all I do is ill, and an outlaw now, in bitter banishment and blood-guilty,
of my fosterfather  I must flee the halls,
nor look on the lady beloved again’—
yea, his heart to Hithlum had hastened him now,
but that road he dared not, lest the wrath he draw
of the Elves after him, and their anger alight
should speed the spears in despite of Morgoth
o’er the hills of Hithlum to hunt him down;
lest a doom more dire than they dreed of old
be meted his mother and the Maid of Tears.

In the furthest folds of the Forest of Doriath,
in the darkest dales on its drear borders,
in haste he hid him, lest the hunt take him;
and they found not his footsteps who fared after,
the thanes of Thingol; who thirty days
sought him sorrowing, and searched in vain
with no purpose of ill, but the pardon bearing
of Thingol throned in the Thousand Caves.
He in council constrained the kin of Orgof
to forget their grief and forgiveness show,
in that wilful bitterness had barbed the words
of Orgof the Elf; said ‘his hour had come
that his soul should seek the sad pathway
to the deep valley of the Dead Awaiting,
there a thousand years thrice to ponder
in the gloom of Gurthrod his grim jesting,
er e he fare to Faërie to feast again.’
Yet of his own treasure he oped the gates,
and gifts ungrudging of gold and gems
to the sons he gave of the slain; and his folk
well deemed the deed. But that doom of the King
Túrin knew not, and turned against him
the hands of the Elves he unhappy believed,
wandering the woodland woeful-hearted;
for his fate would not that the folk of the caves
should harbour longer Húrin’s offspring.