

Durwyn, the Bastard Paladin of Rillifane

My name is Hloradurwyn, though most everyone calls me Durwyn. My mother, Kuridir, always called me her Little Lurue, yet never told me why. I was born on Midsummer's Eve, the 30th day of Flamerule in the 9529th year of the Alliance of the Eight Tribes and the 2nd Age of Shanatar, although the surface folk call it 1445 DR, The Year of the Malachite Throne. Raised in the depths of Mithral Hall by my clan, the Battlehammers, yet I never felt at home there nor been accepted by my people.

I am a half-breed of dwarven and unknown stock. Being a bastard half-dwarf was sin enough, but Mother refused to reveal who the father was, and this uncertainty and impropriety made the tribal leaders furious. Were it not that Mother was a distant cousin of Connerad Brawnnavil, 12th King of Mithral Hall, we would have been turned away years ago.

The identity of my father has bothered me forever. Sometimes I would find Mother with a faraway look in her eye. Then she would cry and I knew she was thinking of him, but she never spoke of Father to me or anyone else. Not having a father figure left me empty inside. Dwarven men and women have very different cultures and I had no one to show me the way. With just the two of us, life was hard.

I didn't make life any easier, for I was a wayward youth. I was forbidden to leave the confines of these gargantuan stone halls, so I took it upon myself to explore every inch of my dungeon prison. I once knew every passage, chamber, and secret door of that massive kingdom, but now I can barely recall the path to my front door. I once snuck all the way through the dwarven army complex into the quarters of General Dagnabbet Waybeard to "borrow" her favorite helmet. Of course, I was caught. That bitter, old crone wanted me charged with treason, but it was merely a prank, I am no thief. I was punished, but General Waybeard never forgave me, as we shall see.

I have only one vague memory of ever leaving Mithral Hall. When I was 15, Mother took me on a journey, but I can't recall to where exactly. Having lived my entire life underground lit only by torches, in a realm of greys, browns, and black, I was unprepared for the colorful kaleidoscope that is the world. Green grass, yellow flowers, red sunsets, and a vast sky so blue and bright that it made the cavernous Mithral Hall seem like an insignificant anthill. Even my simple shirt which I only knew as a dingy tan was now the purest white I'd ever seen. And my skin! In the dim of our cave, I looked grey like everyone else, but now untethered by the sun, I shimmered with a peculiar purple sheen.

Mother warned, "This is why you stay in Mithral Hall. Deep down, inside Mother Mountain's warm embrace, you blend in and appear like everyone else and over time you will be accepted. But out here in the wild, you are exposed, and you will be reviled for your uniqueness. Better to stay below." But she was wrong. She never saw the bullying, the exclusion, and the open mockery I faced day after day just for being different, for not having a father, for never growing a single whisker of facial hair, for just being me. I tried to explain this to Mother, but she would speak no more of the matter.

We arrived at some sort of circus or carnival and my senses were overwhelmed by the cacophony of sights, sounds, and smells. Mother set up camp outside the fairgrounds, she said she had to find someone and would be right back. She ordered me to stay at camp, and forbade me to enter the carnival when she went inside. I tried to obey, but I felt compelled to explore this intoxicating new world. Having no money, I snuck inside. Of course, I was caught immediately.

I barely have any memories of what happened next. A rough hand grabbing me from behind. A man speaking in rhymes and riddles. Sitting in a tent playing with a six-legged cat; or maybe it was eight. Confusion as to where I was. A complete sense of feeling lost and hopeless. But worse, the look on Mother's face when she found me. She wasn't mad, but had a look of such forlorn sorrow and abject

fear, that I could never look upon her again without seeing that same look in her eyes. We did not speak the entire journey home; I can't even remember how we got home.

In the dwarven tongue, Hloradurwyn means "lost soul" and for the next 25 years, I truly lived up to that name. A life filled with loneliness, apathy, and disappointment. Mother and I rarely spoke. I still never grew a beard and was treated as a pariah, as if I was purposefully shunning my heritage and culture. I was denied my one goal to become a soldier; Waybeard's hands were all over that one. I survived by being a mushroom farmer, and not a very successful one. I had no purpose, no drive, no direction in my life. And it was about to get even worse.

In 1486 DR, two events occurred that would alter the course of my life forever. First, Mother died. On her deathbed, she was filled with regret. She said she failed me. She prayed I could find a home here in the dark with her kin. But she was wrong. My path lay down a different road in the light. She begged me to seek out the Witchlight; that it would guide my way, answer all my questions, find my purpose, and give me peace. For the first time in years, I saw her smile. And then she died.

Her soul had barely been put to rest when the second event occurred. King Connerad left Mithral Hall on that famous doomed expedition to Mount Gauntlgrym. He abdicated the throne to his General, my nemesis, Dagdabbet Waybeard. I swear, her first official act was to have me exiled. I was barely 40 years old, still a child in the eyes of the dwarven elders, and I was thrust into a world I knew nothing about. I turned my back on that cold, stone tomb and never looked back. But I had nothing to look forward to either.

Lost, homeless, and without a clue, I wandered the land aimlessly, wheresoever the whims of Marthammor Duin, the dwarven god of wanderers, took me. I survived adrift for five years, having found no answers, no direction, no peace. Yet I had never felt more free than I did amongst the untamed wilderness. With the grass as my bed and the stars as my blanket, I finally had a sense of a word I never felt under the cold, hard rock; home. But still something was missing, so I travelled on.

Once while lost in the woods, I climbed a tree to gain my bearings. The tree was rotted and fell over, taking me with it. The trunk landed on top of me, breaking my leg and pinning me beneath. I would have died had not a small band of elven faithful found me and saved me, in more way than one. But ever since that day, I have been afraid of heights and prefer to keep both feet on ground.

The elves who found me belonged to a sect that worshipped Rillifane Rallathil, the sylvan god of nature. I travelled with them while I healed. I learned their ways, traditions and language. From the rangers, I learned archery and tracking. The druids taught me the respect and love of the world we live on. While the clerics showed me faith and how to channel the power of the gods through me.

Here I've finally found a purpose. Casting aside the dour dwarven gods, I have dedicated my mind, body, and soul to the tenets of Rillifane; to serve and protect all forms of nature, including men and beasts and everything else on this precious, fragile land. And to seek out and smite those who would choose to subvert or destroy that natural balance. I am Durwyn, the bastard Paladin of Rillifane.

I journeyed with my elven companions for almost two years. Then I heard tales of a carnival nearby. More importantly, I heard the whisper of a name, Witchlight. The elven High Priest, Shantasurnar, understood my need to break company and wished me well, even if he was hesitant to send me off without a guide. He pointed me in the right direction and sent me on my way. Shortly, I was engulfed in a thick fog but I was not deterred. I strove on until I could finally hear the sounds of laughter and song. I emerged from the fog to find the glorious Witchlight Carnival. This was definitely the same place as my dreams; I could feel it in my soul. There are other people here. I guess I'll get in line.