
Character Biography Emeldir the Manhearted

By Robinka

There are a few notable women of the House of Bëor mentioned by name in *The Silmarillion*. Among them, there is the one who has only one actual sentence to her, plus a few mentions in passing, and yet we all know that one sentence sometimes can make for the whole, long story. Our today's heroine is Emeldir, the mother of Beren Camlost. To have a famous husband and even a more famous son may be intimidating, but Emeldir seems to stand her ground, despite her laconic appearance. Let us see what we can find out about her.

Extraordinary nobody, or I have a name, can't you hear me roar

The "Index of Names" in *The Silmarillion* gives the following description of Emeldir:

Called the Man-hearted; wife of Barahir and mother of Beren; led the women and children of the House of Bëor from Dorthonion after the Dagor Bragollach. (She was herself a descendant of Bëor the Old, and her father's name was Beren; this is not stated in the text).¹

This description is almost as long as the actual passage concerning Emeldir in *The Silmarillion's* chapter entitled "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin", and that can be evidence of how scarce the mention of her in fact is. On the other hand however, quantity rarely equates quality, and we can easily deduce from that tiny number of lines that Emeldir was indeed a significant character and a fine addition to the great house of the Edain.

There are two versions of Emeldir's nickname, hyphenated and not hyphenated. In this bio I choose to use the latter. "Tolkien Gateway" suggests after Patrick H. Wynne that Emeldir's name can be derived from Sindarin words 'emel' meaning *mother* and 'dir' meaning *man*, which may be seen as a kind of testament to her 'manly' courage and comes close to the epithet 'manhearted'. Also, I assume, her name could be translated as 'mother of man', and that way it would rather indicate her son's valor, not hers directly.

A descendant of both Bëor the Old and Marach,² Emeldir married Barahir. We do not know when. What we can find in *The Grey Annals* is that she gave birth to her son Beren in the year 432 of the First Age.³ She was twenty-six at that time. We neither know anything about her life prior to her marriage, nor before the times of the Dagor Bragollach. It is safe to say that we know nothing about her except that she was the wife of Barahir and the mother of Beren, who inherited his name after his maternal grandsire. Was that a habit? Or is it, more likely, an indication of her close relationship with her father? I opt for the latter because from the genealogical tables of the House of Bëor we cannot draw a conclusion that the Edain of that house named their children after their ascendants.

Mama said,⁴ or I'll be your Éowyn tonight⁵

After the Dagor Bragollach, Morgoth's power overshadowed the Northlands.⁶ Barahir remained in Dorthonion, fighting his enemies, but Morgoth pursued his people to death. The forests of the realm were so filled with dread and enchantment that even the orcs rarely passed through. It was called the Forest under Nightshade – the dreadful Taur-nu-Fuin, where trees were black and grim, and anyone who dared stray among them was haunted by 'phantoms of terror'. The situation in which Barahir's people found themselves was rather hopeless. And here comes the passage in *The Silmarillion* that makes Emeldir a heroine:

At last so desperate was the case of Barahir that Emeldir the Manhearted his wife (whose mind was rather to fight with her son and her husband than to flee) gathered together all the children that were left, and gave arms to those that would bear them; and she led them into the mountains that lay behind, and so by perilous paths, until they came at last with loss and misery to Brethil.⁷

Either by her own decision, or with a little bit of persuasion, Emeldir – clearly a woman capable of wielding weapons and knowledgeable as to the ways of defence – took upon a task of saving the women, children, and probably the elderly, too, of her tribe. And she succeeded, even though there were casualties during the escape since it was not an easy trek in the green hills, only a lifesaving mission under the nose of an ever-watchful enemy and his spies. The tragic cost of her providing rescue came also in the fact that she never saw her husband and her son again. However, it was thanks to her courage and talents that the two famous families of the Edain, Húrin's and Huor's, came into being, because she saved the lives of Morwen and Rían, the wives of Húrin and Huor respectively, and from Huor's and Rían's blood came generations of rulers of Men in Middle-earth.

(...) Some were there [in Brethil] received among the Haladin, but some passed on over the mountains to Dor-lómin and the people of Galdor, Hador's son; and among those were Rían, daughter of Belegund, and Morwen, who was named Eledhwen, that is Elfsheen, daughter of Baragund.⁸

The men of Dorthonion became outlaws, hiding in the mountains, hunted and slain one by one, until only twelve remained with Barahir, and from there another great tale of the First Age begins. The refugees, as it is said in *The Silmarillion*, never saw them again. We know nothing of Emeldir's further doings, nor do we know when and where she finally met her demise. Though, I believe that she stayed with her relatives in Dor-lómin throughout the rest of her days, hopefully enjoying a well-deserved respect and fame what what she had done for her people. Or at least until the realm was overrun by Morgoth.

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "The Index of Names."
2. The genealogical tables in *The History of Middle Earth, Vol. XI: The War of the Jewels: The Latest Quenta Silmarillion*, Commentary on "Of the Coming of Men into the West, (i) The House of Bëor." Emeldir (born in the year 406 of the First Age) was the daughter of the man named Beren, had two unnamed siblings, and was his third child.
3. *The History of Middle Earth, Vol. XI: The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals*, § 139. In the commentary, Christopher Tolkien states that Emeldir is not named in earlier texts (§139).
4. Song by Metallica: Kirk Hammet, James Hetfield, Jason Newsted, Lars Ulrich.
5. I can't help but think about the scene in *The Two Towers*, when Éowyn insists that she can fight, but her uncle asks her to lead the people of Rohan to Helm's Deep. I wonder whether Emeldir might have had a similar conversation with Barahir.
6. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
7. Ibid. The same paragraph we can find in *The History of Middle Earth, Vol. XI: The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals*, §159.
8. Ibid. In *The History of Middle Earth, Vol. 5: The Lost Road and Other Writings, The Later Annals of Beleriand*, Annal 257, and *Quenta Silmarillion*, §139, Rían and Morwen lived in Hithlum and therefore did not have to escape from Dorthonion. As it is said in *The Grey Annals* (commentary on §159), when the Dagor Bragollach began, they were sojourning among their kinsfolk. But that story was rejected and Emeldir came onto the stage as their savior.

About the Author

A lifelong president of the fanclub of Beleg Cúthalion, Robinka (also known as Binka) has a healthy dose of admiration for the Grey Folk of Doriath, but approaches the Noldor with reverence. She is a proud owner of a T-shirt with the caption: "Beleg lives! I don't care what Túrin says.". Binka lives in Poland with her husband and a rescued dog. Her path in the fandom is rocky, but nothing short of adventurous.