

To Lady Éowyn of Ithilien, greetings!

I must say your highly restrained letter belies your worry for your husband. Yesterday, one of Zinizigûr's apprentices found your previous correspondence. Your husband had hidden it in his room, along with the dagger my uncle gave him. Luckily she entrusted the letters to me, instead of handing it over to Marek. I shall keep it hidden from him. It is not his business.

To ease your fears, his condition has improved. Although the fever has not wholly abated yet, some days ago he woke for the first time. Since then has regained consciousness frequently, but only for brief spells. The healer said he talked a lot in his sleep, but since it was in a language she does not understand, she could not tell me what he said. But apparently he called for you, for your name she recognised.

Last night he woke while I was present. He recognised me, and actually seemed relieved to finally behold a familiar face. Zinizigûr looks somewhat terrifying. Her face his covered all over by strange tattoos. He was worried about his last message to you, and asked me if it had been sent off. I told him I had taken it upon me to inform you of his state, which touched him. Before he could say any more, though, he lost consciousness again, after indicating I should bring him the ragged horse-doll that lay on a nearby chair. His sleep seemed calmer afterwards. Zinizigûr was pleased about that. She inquired about the doll. I told her it was his son's, and she nodded gravely, saying that his love for his family was a more powerful remedy for his sickness than her rituals and medicines.

According to her, his chances for survival are good now, although she, like your healer, is worried about the high fever which is unusual in its intensity and persistence. She asks if he has been poisoned before, and how he was treated then. There are signs he is still in pain when conscious, and generally he is very weak. It is too early yet to tell if any permanent damage will remain, she said. And added she was not aware the tarks had such a remarkable constitution. She does not know anybody who has survived poisoning of this degree without going mad or being crippled for life. There is no sign of madness, you will be relieved to hear. Indeed, in those moments he was awake, your husband seemed to think very clearly. As for the possible damage to his body, we do not know yet. We must wait until the fever has been banished.

I still have not managed to read the mysterious message Marek received, but from what I picked up during our conversations, it was sent by your king himself. Yet not in his function as king, but your husband's friend. It seems he contacted Marek's sons who currently hold his lands and indeed his position in Umbar. From what Marek let slip in a moment of rage, they entered into an agreement about routes of sea-trade along the coasts south of Umbar. A highly profitable deal for the Al-Jahmirs. They are to be made responsible for controlling these routes if they refuse to aid their father furtheron, and moreover see to it he is delivered to Gondorian authorities should he ever set foot in Umbar and vicinity again. Needless to say this troubled him, because he had reckoned with their aid should his venture here fail. If indeed they turn against him, and make sure he remains an outcast who cannot return home, he will have lost everything. It is something he fears greatly.

During the past days, Marek has been desperately trying to remind them of their true allegiance. He also suggested to try and cheat your king, and to accept his offer despite working against him. I do not think he has succeeded yet, but I know his sons are inclined to listen to his suggestions. Your king must be very cautious when dealing with them. They are as false and treacherous as their father, only interested in their own advantage, at whatever cost. Their attitude makes me feel ashamed of my own blood.

Azrahil