

To Lady Éowyn of Ithilien, greetings!

you have reason to rejoice. Your husband's recovery has greatly advanced since my last message. The fever has fallen, and Zinizigûr said it is unlikely to return. Also, he does not lose consciousness anymore, and is far stronger already. His appetite has returned, and he is far more active, too. Restless, in fact, so much so that the healer had a tough discussion with him this morning. I was not present, but one of her apprentices told me he insisted on trying to get up. Zinizigûr forbade him to set a foot on the floor. I doubt he won the argument. It seems impossible to act against her will.

Even Marek fears her, and rightly so. I do not want to know what she is capable of doing to her enemies. He has not tried once to enter your husband's room. He is very interested in reports about his recovery, however. Even now, with your husband still confined to bed, he is considering how to secure against his escape. I think he has in mind to poison him again as soon as he can be sure it is not going to kill him. I mentioned this to the healer, and her felled glance told me that if Marek attempted this, he would be the first to feel the effects of the poison. So for the moment your husband is safe from more harm.

Even Zinizigûr was somewhat worried when I handed her the list of the poisons your husband has received so far. Especially the mention of this Black Breath worried her, and the fact he could only be saved by your king himself. She asks if the kingsfoil weed is a common plant in Gondor. It does not grow in the South, and she would like to obtain some of it. The other poisons are unlikely to have left traces, she said.

As for the damage the most recent one may have caused, I told her of what you wrote. She gave me one of her glances again (complete with the twitching lower eyelid that always appears when she is agitated), and said your husband can count himself fortunate if sterility is the only thing he retains from the poison. The original venom, apparently, was neither as painful nor as deadly as the one Marek used. It was mainly devised to give men who dared stray from home a rough night and perhaps a little fever afterwards. Some years ago, during the War, Marek learned of it, and had a powerful wizard from the East modify it, to use it on his very special enemies.

Even Zinizigûr is not sure yet what it may have done to your husband. Time will show, she said. His constitution seems to have prevented the worst. There are no damages to his eyesight or hearing, nor to his mobility. But sterility is indeed a possibly remainder. Also, there is a chance that his heart has been weakened permanently, and his general resistance against illness impaired. Moreover, during the past days he has repeatedly suffered from nosebleeds, even when he was hardly moving at all. We do not know yet what may have caused these.

But at the moment he is awake, and rather cheerful, too. I had to read what I had written earlier to him. Needless to mention he did not like the list of possible long-time damages very much. Now I have been reduced to acting as his scribe, while he is entertaining our little guest. To ease his restlessness, Zinizigûr has allowed me to bring in the lion-cup. She is now lying on your husband's blankets purring, while he strokes her belly.

He thanks you greatly for the letter, and hopes you will forgive that his last message caused you so much grief and anguish. He sends greetings to all your friends, and especially the children, but says it is high time he returned home, so see to it the boy Elboron gets some decent food again, after having been forced to eat what he finds lying around. He is delighted to hear the twins are faring so well, and cannot wait to see them and all of you again. He is confident he will be able to write the next letter again himself. He sends his love to you and the boys.

*Apparently he does not trust me yet, as he insisted on reading what I have just written. Which goes for you as well, judging from your letter. And why indeed should you trust me? I know what reputation I have in Umbar, and I am sure word of my ruthlessness and cruelty as Marek Al-Jahmîr's chief henchman has reached Gondor as well by now. And perhaps it is even justified. Under Gondorian law I am a severe criminal; in the eyes of my family and Umbarian customs I am traitor to my own kin now, which is even lower and more disgusting, and punishable by death. But I do not ask for your, or Gondor's, or indeed anybody's leniency. I do not help your husband because I have suddenly discovered my love for the tarks. Nor to strike a deal with you which may save me while my master perishes. Being associated with his family may indeed only bring shame and dishonour, yet I am of his blood, and his is the only family I have ever possessed. To cross his plans and indeed to deliver him to his enemies used to be my motivation for a while, but it is not so anymore. I simply want this to be over. I do not reckon with any personal gain from it anymore. Neither Gondor nor Al-Jahmîr is going to let me live after this. The only thing I can hope for is a swift end. And an honourable one too, perhaps.*

*So I am going to try and return your husband to you. I see now he is needed back home, if only to see to it that his son receives decent food again. I do not ask for any compensation, nor to be added to your king's short list. Since most likely this is the last message you will receive from me, fare you well. Your husband is very lucky to have you.*

*Azrahil*