

My dearest Faramir,

It is a great relief to know that you are well. I had worried constantly since receiving Al-Jahmîr's note that something may have happened to you. Your letter eased my mind considerably. That does not mean I wish you were home any less, but it does make the pain more bearable.

So, the Umbarian has gathered his playmates so he can show off his new toy. Why does that not surprise me in the least? He acts like he captured you single-handedly himself instead of sending his henchmen out to ambush and poison. He is no man; he hardly even deserves to be called 'snake' since even snakes stalk their prey themselves. Nevertheless, I will take your words to heart considering his demands. I have begun several replies, but I have put lines through all of them, since quickly after the salutation my words turned from calm and diplomatic to brash and tactless. I assure you, though, that the formal reply will be entirely appropriate. Sometimes it is better to get the angry words out of the way before beginning.

Soon after your letter arrived, I sent a message to Túrin asking him to pick up the documents needed in Minas Tirith. That afternoon, an errand rider from the king appeared with a letter saying that he and several members of the Council were planning to come to Dol Arandur on the fourth of this month. I would assume that Túrin and the others would return at that time too. (With all this traffic coming through our home, I am tempted to turn this place into an inn and start charging guests!) Once they arrive, discussion will begin, of course, and I have no doubts that the conversations will be enlightening.

I almost wish that Al-Jahmîr had not contacted us. With Aiglos and your letters, I could at least pretend that you were perhaps on a journey somewhere that took you from home for awhile. I could imagine that you were entirely safe and unconcerned, and would soon say that you were on your way home. All the Umbarian's message has done is destroy those fantasies and remind me that this is indeed real and no game. Now that he has made contact, we have to cater to his fancy lest he should decide to end all of this.

This Azrahil becomes more intriguing each time you mention him. I wonder what makes him stay with his uncle, since from what you say it appears he is not comfortable with this situation. Honor, perhaps? Maybe he is not independently wealthy and needs his uncle's support before he can strike out on his own. Whatever the case, I am sorry you are stuck with him, but perhaps you will manage to find a way to make him useful before the end.

Carandil, Barahir, and Ciryaher – those are names I would have preferred not to see again so soon. It still baffles me that they were banished in the first place. Despite the fact that their resources were drastically cut, they still had the freedom to scheme and plot together. House-arrest in Minas Tirith with crown-appointed staff and guards would have been the better recourse, in my opinion. That way there would always be someone keeping an eye on them and monitoring their actions. It would have made it much more difficult for them to attempt what they're doing now. But, what's done is done, and no amount of complaining will change this.

There is little to report concerning the spy here. Berúthiel has disappeared again, meaning she is likely out searching again. As I see people during the day, I silently review everything I know about them, trying to find something suspicious or unusual about them. This usually gets me no farther than when I started. We checked everyone so thoroughly before we brought them here. It makes me wonder then if the spy is someone outside of our home, but then how did he or she manage to get Elboron's Horsey? After these sessions I usually end up with more questions than answers.

But enough of this talk, I am sure I will hear more of it than what I want over the next days.

You wanted to know about the twins, and yes, there is plenty to say about them. You are certainly right that they have grown over the past month. When you left they were hardly more than sleeping bundles, waking only when they needed to be fed or seen to. Now, however, they are awake more often during the day and becoming more aware of what's going on around them. They are beginning to coo and make noises, and I believe I saw their first real smiles not long ago. Meriadoc has discovered that he has feet attached to his body, and Peregrin has found that his hands are wonderful things to suck on. Peregrin is doing a little better at night now. He still wakes up three or four nights a week inconsolable, but it does not take as long to get him to settle as it used to.

Both babies recognize me clearly and are starting to really recognize their big brother too. And Elboron is becoming more used to the idea that they are here to stay. There are certainly still times when he gets jealous that he isn't getting as much attention as they are, but overall I think he is starting to like being a big brother. Often I let him help me get the twins ready for their naps. I have him get their blankets and then make sure they are covered up and warm before we let them sleep, and then he tries to talk me out of making him take a nap, which usually doesn't work.

Oh, Meriadoc had a traumatic experience (according to him) yesterday. Before she left, Teherin said I should start putting the twins on the floor on their tummies for a few minutes every day to make them use their neck and back muscles more. Well, yesterday I put them on the rug in our bedroom, and they gave me two very different responses. Peregrin seemed to enjoy the new view, especially when the cat walked in front of him. As soon as I put Meriadoc down, he screamed like he was being murdered. It gave me quite a scare and brought Mariel running to see what had happened. At first I thought a splinter or some other sharp thing may have been in the rug and poked him, but I didn't find anything. I don't know if it scared him or if he simply didn't like it, but he was crying real tears (not just complaining) that trickled down his little cheeks. I had to cuddle and soothe him for several minutes before he would quiet, still sniffing and hiccupping some. By that time, Peregrin decided it was time for him to get off the floor too and started whimpering to be picked up.

Even though they're twins, they still have so many differences between them. Little things, personal preferences. Peregrin likes it when I rock him to sleep whereas Meriadoc can drift off at any time (especially if he has a full stomach.) Meriadoc would nurse all day if I let him, but sometimes I almost have to convince Peregrin that he really does need to eat. It is going to be interesting to see how their personalities develop over the next few months.

Looking over your letter again, I agree that it sometimes seems strange to think how casually we let Khorazîr entertain Elboron in the stables or out in the gardens, or tell the twins some of his stories in one of the desert dialects (I can't even begin to translate what he's saying). I still remember his and your final duel as clearly as if it happened this very morning. I can still feel the wetness of the grass seeping through my shoes, and I can still see you pinned to the ground with a scimitar through your shoulder. I remember the silent oath I was preparing to swear to make sure I killed him myself as he held your sword's tip to your throat. And now to see him rock one of the twins or make sure Narâk has worn off enough energy for Elboron to safely ride him, it's like we have known two different Khorazîr's. Which, I suppose in a sense we have, haven't we? Maybe now we're seeing him as he was before... well, before.

I will close for now. Supper is almost ready and is smelling wonderful. Elboron says he misses you and wants you to come home soon. He says you need to hurry, too, before all the toads disappear. I doubt he will make it to the end of the week without discovering frogs as well. Last night I had the window open (the nights have been exceptionally warm lately) and I could hear several frogs croaking nearby.

For all of us here, I echo your son in saying we miss you and want you to return soon. Dol Arandur is so very lonely without you here, even with so much company and our dear children. Come home to us soon.

*Love always,
Éowyn*

P.S. I think you should not worry too much about telling Meriadoc and Peregrin apart. Meriadoc has a small birthmark near his right ear and Peregrin has a small mark on the bottom of his left foot. (Don't worry, I've had to refer to these marks sometimes as well!)