

Dearest Éowyn,

it looks like you caught my subtle hint and wrote a reply. I sent the additional sheets out of fear you might have run out of paper. Nay, seriously, I do not know how they got sent. I must have grabbed the whole lot lying on my desk ere I folded and sealed the letter, not noticing the extra weight. Blame it on the fever, if you wish. I am grateful for your reply, and relieved to hear that nothing serious has befallen at home. Poor Peregrin, though. I hope he is doing better already. I think he does not quite have Meriadoc's constitution, although he seems tough as well. 'Tis also a relief to know Teherin has returned. I do not doubt that our son is going to recover from the illness in no time.

Your account of your conversation with our eldest made me smile. Tell him I look forward to continuing the tale, and hope 'twill not be long hence. I also hope there is going to be some snow for him to throw. At the moment we rather have rain over here, but should temperatures continue to drop, there might be snow soon. As for the mud game, well, next summer Meriadoc and Peregrin might want to join us. I am sure they will delight in it – as would you, I am convinced, if only you gave it a try –, although I fear the washerwomen will not.

My condition has improved, too. There is no need for you to write to Elessar. He has banished me from council anyway until I am completely recovered. According to him I am not, even though I feel much better and the fever is gone. I wonder what Imrahil wrote to you, though. I hope he did not worry you over much. I know he is concerned about me, a concern he shares with Aragorn. I believe the two of them have conspired against me, and contrived to keep me prisoner in my lodgings. Luckily I am not confined to bed anymore, and thus was able to use the time as productively as possible under the circumstances, mostly dealing with smaller matters of the fief. One can only sleep and rest so many hours a day, you know. Restless is not a strong enough description of how I feel.

These minor tasks sufficed only little to quench my restlessness. I know I am needed in council. Right now matters are being discussed that concern the future of Ithilien as well as that of the entire realm. Imrahil mentioned my counsel has been asked for several times, and Azrahil who visits me regularly stated plainly that he was feeling more comfortable with me around (he thanks you for the tidings of Pharzi, and hopes to gain leave to journey to the South soon). And even Falastur seems to miss me, if that were possible. Imrahil said he has been uncharacteristically silent these past days. Apparently he lacks his favourite opponent, or else he really requires my opinion, if only to reject it utterly and complain about it. Strangely, some of our heated discussions have been very fruitful in the past. And they make for good entertainment, as Duinhir of Morthond once told me.

'Tis not that I look forward to returning to council. As I have complained about countless times, council work usually is all but enjoyable. Especially because many of the lords in their narrowmindedness and greed and unwillingness to cooperate show little interest in anything beyond the borders of their own fiefs, and attack everybody who does. Yet on the other hand it simply does not feel right for me to be confined in here while the others do all the work and make all the decisions. Although I know 'tis for my good, I cannot help feeling shut out. I am aware of course 'twas never the King's intention to make me feel this way. He thinks he is doing me a favour. And he is. And I know I should not complain. And yet ...

Restless, as I said. I feel like I am falling short of my appointed duty, and moreover that I am wasting precious time here – time I should spend with you and the boys now that I am on holiday, so to say. Ah, but there is a knock on the door. Most likely 'tis Haleth with my tea.

The visitor turned out to be Elessar instead. It almost seems like he sensed my restlessness and thus invited me to a walk outside from which I have only just returned.

We were clad in heavy cloaks as we passed along the battlements of the Citadel until we reached the furthest point. It was a clear but cold day, with a strong wind from the southwest bringing dark clouds laden with rain. I was glad to be allowed out again, and actually rejoiced in the weather, especially because there were brief spells of sunlight that glinted on the river far away, and made the fields of the Pelennor below glow in warm, earthy colours. As we looked toward the East, I was reminded how often I had stood there with Boromir, gazing towards the Land of Shadow and asking ourselves what was passing there.

Today there was no shadow on the hills of the Ephel Dúath that lay folded in blue. For a long time neither of us spoke, each lost in contemplation. Elessar looked weary as he glanced at the far hills. The stress of the past days plainly showed in his features. At length he sighed, then looked at me.

"You look much better, Faramir," he said with a faint smile.

"I feel better, too," I replied. "Well enough, in fact, to resume my duties in council." Voicing the thoughts which had been troubling me, I added, "I fear I have been a burden rather than a help lately, adding to your worries with my illness."

He gazed at me thoughtfully. "So that has been troubling you, has it not?" And he smiled wryly when I nodded.

"You should know by now that you are never a burden to me," he said gravely. "As for your duties, if any of my lords was in need of a holiday, it was you."

I shook my head. "I have been absent from council for the better part of this year, and created a lot of extra work for you and others with my 'holiday'."

"According to my knowledge you did not 'create' it. Faramir, do not blame yourself for what befell you. Nor for this illness which I am sure results from what Al-Jahmír did to you. On the contrary, it is I who is to blame. I begin to realise that for years I have driven you much harder than I had a right to. I have given all dangerous and unpleasant errands to you, not keeping in mind you had your own fief and moreover a wife and family to look after. Need I mention the Morgul-campaign? I should never have sent you there in the first place, knowing how close you had come under the Shadow during the War. And many of the enemies you made recently, you made on my behalf."

I wanted to object, but he held up a hand. "You know I am right. You never complained about the load I put on your shoulders. On the contrary, if you were not able to cope anymore, you sought the blame in yourself. I have treated you very unfairly, and I apologise. Others should have borne their share as well. The thing is, of all my lords you are the one I deemed the most trustworthy, and moreover the most capable. Why do you think I made you my Steward? Not because you were of the House of Húrin and your ancestors had been stewards for many generations, and thus because you had a better claim to the Stewardship than others. Nay, I chose you because I deemed you the best man for the office."

I blushed at this compliment. "But you did not know me," I pointed out. "We had never met before."

He shrugged and gave me a smile. "I had heard good things about you. From your brother, and from Mithrandir. Mostly from him, in fact. Also I knew your father, better, perhaps, than he suspected and would have liked. He disliked me, and I partly understand why. I always tread warily about him. Yet I noted and recognised his qualities, many of which you share. Perceptiveness, a keen wit, resourcefulness. Well, and the past decade has proven that my choice has been a good one."

Touched by his words, I could not think of a fitting reply aside from a murmured thanks. For a while we stood in silence, ere finally I spoke. "You did not put a greater load on my shoulders than the one you have to bear yourself. As you said, you did not make me Steward because there was still an empty seat in council, but because you needed someone to fill this post with all the dedication it requires, to take some of the load from your shoulders. And the past days have shown that you cannot rely on me as you ought to, when a little stress causes me to fall ill already. I begin to believe you overestimated my capabilities."

He shook his head. "Faramir, I underestimated your loyalty and sense of duty," he returned sternly. "Any other would have complained long ago and not worked himself to utter exhaustion. But this is how you were brought up, is it not?"

I gazed out over the plain, now cast in blue shadow by low clouds. "Complaints were wasted on Denethor," I replied quietly. "This was a lesson I learned early on, and learned it well."

"But I am not Denethor," he said. "Even though I am King, to rule this country successfully I need people like you, Faramir. People to share the burden of government. But none of them should take more than he can carry. In the future, I shall take care to divide up the load more evenly and justly. And of you I demand that you will tell me if the duties I bestow on you are getting too burdensome. That said, I would indeed appreciate if you returned to council tomorrow. Your judgement and counsel are required. Also" – and here he grinned – "things are boring without you and Falastur arguing."

Now I grinned as well. "Admit it, this is the true reason you appointed me Steward – to provide entertainment in council."

He clapped my shoulder. "I already look forward to your performance tomorrow."

"I shall endeavour not to disappoint you." Then in a more serious tone I thanked him. We remained on the battlements until the light was failing, talking about many things. I am grateful for the conversation. I had never heard him speak my praise so openly. I still feel slightly embarrassed when I recall his words, but pleased and greatly encouraged, too.

What else is there to tell? I finally met with Túrin again. He came to visit me two days ago, looking as pale and troubled as I have hardly seen him before. He has indeed spoken with his father. Húrin told him what he knew of his illness, and despite certain fears he had harboured this dealt Túrin a deep blow. It grieved me to see him so grim and downcast, and moreover so helpless. 'Tis not like him at all. But he has changed recently. He is more thoughtful and silent, gone is most of his usually infectious cheerfulness and optimism. I tried to console him and indeed cheer him up as best I could, although there was little cheer I could offer him in the matter of his father. He is determined to try and find a cure. I know everything must be tried to help his father, and I am going to do what I can to aid him in his quest. Yet I fear there is little we can in fact do. And Túrin knows this, and it gnaws at his conviction that there exists a solution for every problem. Ah Éowyn, I so wish I could help him. Recently he has done so much for me – for us, in fact.

Well, it might take his mind off this grievous matter when you and the boys arrive. He told me Visilya and Vorondil (and he, of course) are very much looking forward to your arrival. As am I, I should add. Tell Peregrin he must recover swiftly so that you can journey over soon. I have written to Mablung to come to Dol Arandur to escort you with his company. I know Beregond would want to accompany you, to personally assure your safe delivery, but he should remember that he is not allowed to enter the City, and I do not think 'tis a good idea if he journeyed only to its gates and was forced to turn about. It would remind him too strongly of his sentence. Moreover 'tis always a relief to me to know he is in charge back home while we are away. I doubt any of the others would fill the office of "Steward's steward" as well as he does.

'Tis getting late, and although I am loath to admit it, all this resting has tired me. And now that I am allowed back in council, I should get some sleep in order to be rested tomorrow. Kiss our sons from me and tell them I look forward to their arrival here. Your kiss you will have to fetch in person. Do not delay too long to get it!

*Love,
Faramir*