

*Dearest Éowyn,*

*I was very sorry to hear that certain members of the council are giving you such a hard time, and doing their best to delay important decisions. Still, this is not unexpected. Nor is how you described Khorazir's reaction to Falastur's opinions. It was wise to separate the two, otherwise I fear there might have been more than an exchange of hard words. You asked how I manage to endure these meetings. I assure you 'tis extremely hard at times. Once thing I must grant them, however: they provided me with excellent training for what awaited me here. The past days in the company of Al-Jahmir's special guests have been trying ones. I shall tell you more of that later. Today I managed to finally escape them by insulting Carandil so that our host decided to cast me out of the room and confine me to my chamber, with my water-ration halved. So this night is going to be somewhat uncomfortable, but actually I prefer this to having to endure their talk any longer. And I have time now to reply to your letter.*

*Needless to mention, I was pleased to read about Elboron's most recent discovery, and again I wish I had been there to witness it. As delightful as your letters are, they do not compensate for having you and the children around. Each day I am confined here increases my longing for you, and my feeling of loneliness. Sure, I have company of sorts, but not the people I want to see again. I wonder what changes your reply to Al-Jahmir's message will work here. Something must happen. During the past days tension rose steadily. Even the Umbarian seemed anxious at times, when he thought no one would notice.*

*But I wanted to inquire further about the children. The matter with Meriadoc is really strange, and I have no further explanation for it. But from your letter I take there has been some improvement. I am sure he will get used to it, as will Peregrin to the food. How have they reacted to their new horseys, by the way? Have they made friends with them yet?*

*Concerning Teherin's question about the myrtle bushes, during the past days I have not left the castle. The weather was too wet and cold, and Azrahil appears to have been sent away on some errand of his master's, for I have not seen him for some time. I recall from my past hikes in the countryside that a number of herbs grow here. In general the vegetation is rather similar to that of southern Ithilien, so there is a good chance myrtles can be found. As soon as I am allowed out again I shall look for them. What does Teherin need them for? Or what should I do with them should I find any?*

*You wondered about Azrahil. So do I. As I said, I have not seen him for some days now. After his falling out with Carandil Al-Jahmir seemed determined to keep the two apart. I shall certainly heed your warning concerning the young Umbarian, yet for the moment I do not consider him a threat. Of all the people here, in my eyes he is the most trustworthy and honourable. You may say that this does not mean a lot with the company assembled here, yet for me 'tis important. Whatever you decide to try and save me, and whichever actions you are going to take to stop Al-Jahmir and his allies, I do not think I shall get out of this without internal help – as Azrahil pointed out as well. So I shall try and secure his good will towards me.*

*What else befell here? In fact events here were a mirror of your discussions at Dol Arandur: Al-Jahmir and his guests talked about how to use their prize most effectively. In seemingly endless discussions they attempted to foresee what your reply would say, and how Gondor is going to react to their actions. Al-Jahmir mostly left the daring talk to the others, and sat by listening and sometimes making notes – which reminds me of the strange scribe you mentioned, Tarostar. I recall that during my stay in Pelargir, a man was present at most meetings, taking notes. Falastur never mentioned his name, and I took him for one of his scribes. Your description matches the person I have in mind. Try and find out more about him. Falastur would not have brought him if he was not in some way important for him. And be careful of all you say, lest it be recorded by him, and used by the Lord of Pelargir for some shady purpose.*

*To return to the gentlemen assembled here, I was astounded they invited me to their discussions at all. They do not even consider the possibility I may spy on them, and forward information to their enemies. Then again they are so convinced no one can harm them here, because Barad Gwaelin is such a safe place, and because Gondor would not dare attack with me in mortal danger. I have come to suspect Al-Jahmîr is trying to ensnare them, and deliver them to Gondor because they annoyed him for some reason. I know for a fact that his judgement of the situation is very accurate and realistic. He is aware of your dilemma, and also of your general attitude towards him. He knows that with your reply you will only try and buy more time, but that Gondor cannot afford to deal with traitors and criminals. Again it makes me wonder what it is he really wants. Although he has plans for a grand return to Umbar, he seems equally content with dealing Gondor a stab by killing me, and then vanishing to safety. For this purpose I think he has invited the corsair. His ship is to bear them away, should the plan go awry.*

*Víressë 11th:*

*I was not able to finish the letter yesterday because Al-Jahmîr had changed his mind about my presence at dinner, and I was fetched to attend. Obviously Carandil had talked him into it, so see the poison at work. But poor Carandil was bound to be disappointed. I was in pain, yes, but I was able to control and conceal it, and thus outwardly appear calm and unconcerned. The only one who knew what was going on inside me was Al-Jahmîr, and I could see how watching me gave him silent pleasure. I feel very tempted to share my water with them again, but at the moment I am glad about every drop I have left.*

*Luckily there was distraction for the others, so that soon they lost interest in me. Apparently yesterday was an official day of celebration in Umbar, going back to some obscure victory of the Umbarians against a warlord from the Far Harad hundreds of years ago. So there was a small feast at Barad Gwaelin, organised mostly by Kathuphazgân, who ever since his arrival had complained about the fact there was neither music nor women nor anything exciting at Barad Gwaelin. Yesterday his brother arrived with a shipload of exotic fruits and spices, musicians, dancers and acrobats (even a man who climbs into a box full of poisonous snakes, and comes out unscathed). Although I was in no mood for celebration, even I found the evening enjoyable. The music in particular was a nice change from taunting remarks, brooding silence or petty discussions. And Túrin would have liked the dancers, especially the rather scantily clad ones, and Elboron the little monkey one of the acrobats had taught to do tricks.*

*At first Al-Jahmîr was all but pleased by this action, but in the end he seemed to enjoy the feast, especially when Kathuphazgân's brother, Rabazûl, presented him with a couple of fine hunting falcons and a lion cub, in exchange for his hospitality, and also, it seemed to me, as a sign of appreciation and respect. Apparently Al-Jahmîr is not entirely without friends in the South, despite his recent fall from grace. The feast greatly improved morale among his men, too. I wonder if the newcomers will be allowed to stay, however. If yes, they may offer new possibilities to prepare my escape. I do not think they realised I am kept prisoner here, or indeed recognised me. In my haradaic garments I looked hardly different from the Umbarians. I wonder how they will react when they find out. They mostly look like honest people who prefer to stay out of political troubles.*

*For now I must close. I want to send Aiglos on his way before they fetch me to supper again. If I can trust the guard, Azrahil returned not long ago. I wonder where he has been off to. Perhaps tomorrow I shall be allowed out again, so that I can look for the myrtle bushes, and try and get some information out of him.*

*It seems that for the moment we can do naught but wait until the messenger arrives here. I hope future discussions are going to be less tedious for you. Do not forget to look after yourself well. It grieves me that such a great load has been placed on your shoulders while you are still recovering from our sons' birth, and have hardly had a moment to relax ever since. Watching those dancers once again reminded me of how much I miss you – as if I needed a reminder! Not even Al-Jahmîr with all his evilness can fathom how much this hurts, to be parted from you like this.*

*Love always, Faramir*