

Dearest Éowyn,

thank your very much for forwarding Khorazîr's letter to me. I read his account with great interest. I am glad things turned out well for Azrahil in the end. The lad has already seen far more hardship than is good for him in his young life. Hopefully he is going to be spared much more. To read about Naeramarth's reaction was touching, as is in fact the way Khorazîr describes her. I have come to believe she means much more to him than he lets on. And I agree with you – we should be present at their wedding. I also would like to go, despite being aware of the difficulties, and the dangers.

'Tis true, would be journeying with greater protection than a common errand-rider. Which of course does not guarantee a safe passage. What befell me last year shows that not even in our very realm the safety of travellers can be secured. I was captured virtually on our very doorstep. But on the other hand we may be able to use the knowledge that our enemies are most likely going to learn about our plans for travelling to Khiblat Pharazôn for our advantage. You are right, they are not going to have a lot of time to prepare a trap. Nevertheless, catching us might be a desirable prize. Maybe 'tis going to lead them to a rash act, which gives us the opportunity to catch them in return. It worked with Azrahil and his half-brother. I may work with his uncle, too.

So aye, despite certain reservations I still hold, we should go indeed. In order to arrive in time, we should be leaving by the end of this month at the latest. Usually the journey takes about a fortnight, but under current conditions we should take more detours and delays than normal into consideration. Well, we can discuss it more fully upon my return. I should be back home on the 17th, or early on the 18th at the latest. I found a boat for Elboron, and Imrahil gave me a little present for him as well. He would not say what it is, and 'tis so wrapped that I cannot guess what it might be, but he assured me our eldest is going to enjoy it.

Speaking of the boys, please give my thanks to our little ones for their "letter". I enjoyed it tremendously. I bet they loved getting their hands all muddy. So, Peregrin chased the cat and she scratched him? It astounds me this did not happen much sooner. They sometimes tease her quite a lot, and so far, when they were smaller still, she endured it (or simply fled). But apparently her patience has reached its end. Has Elboron recovered from his fit of utter stubbornness yet? It seems very unlike him to refuse any food – by the way, I noticed how the little ones always become "my sons" instead of "our sons" when they have caused some mischief. I hope you are not implying that they got that from my side only.

Anyway, I hope they are not giving you too much trouble. With the weather this warm and fair (is it like that in Ithilien, I wonder – down here we had not a drop of rain ever since we arrived, only strong winds and bright sunshine) they should be able to spend a lot of time outside. And with their friend Vorondil to keep them company, they should be truly happy and content, and less inclined to use their boundless energy for pranks. Ah, but then again ... he may provide them with new inspiration ...

So, Visilya fled the City to spend some time in Ithilien? Well, it does not surprise me. I did surprise her husband, however, and troubles him, too. He turned up in my quarters while I was perusing your letter, with a broad smile because I had just found the boys' message. He inquired what was so funny, and I told him, whereupon his face took on a grave and somewhat tense expression.

"Visilya hasn't answered the letter I sent her the day we arrived here," he said gloomily.

"Perhaps she has not received it yet," I replied, and told him of her present whereabouts. This only darkened his mood further.

"Nice of her to tell me," he said, scowling. Then his expression changed to a downcast one. "But serves me right,

I guess. Lately I seem to be getting everything wrong around her."

"Túrin, I do not believe the problem lies with you alone, and it does not do for you to want to bear all the blame," I told him, seeing how troubled he was. I went on quoting your conversation with Visilya to him.

At her doubts if he still loved her and his son he turned very pale. "She really thinks I don't love her or Voro anymore? But how ... I mean, I've never implied any of that nonsense, have I? How can she believe that?" By now the colour was returning to his cheeks, and he seemed to be getting angry. I tried to calm him, telling him that I understood both his and Visilya's problem, having been in a similar situation once. He listened, but afterwards looked more miserable than before.

Casting himself into a chair opposite me and running a hand through his (of course) tousled hair, "I'm aware of the problem," he sighed. "But I don't know how to solve it. Not with everything else going on at the moment. I can't divide myself in two, or three, or ten."

"But you could divide up the many tasks you burden yourself with. You have family and friends willing to share them with you, and to bear their bit. Do not believe they would not cope. They are much stronger than you think. And they worry about you, I know that much. Try to ease their concern by allowing them to help you. And as for Visilya, you need to talk to her. I shall return home in a few days, and you should come with me, and until then think carefully about what you wish to tell and what to ask her."

"What if she doesn't want to see me, or talk to me?"

"Nonsense, Túrin. She knows as well as you that you need to talk. And I am sure she misses you already. Obviously she has been missing you for quite some time now. She may be angry at first, but honestly, I do not believe she is going to keep that up for long. Perhaps a few days away from Minas Tirith and your worries there is exactly what you need, both of you, to find back together again."

He bit his lip. "Alright," he conceded, "I'll accompany you. Tell me, were things ever as difficult between you and Éowyn."

"At one point they were even worse," I admitted. "Only in retrospect I see now how very close I came to losing her, through my own fault. Through lack of communication. Do not make the same mistake, Túrin." He nodded, then suddenly he looked at me and smiled slightly. "You know, I never thought there would come a time when I asked your advice concerning the ladies."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" I asked, with feigned indignation, glad he had overcome his fit of misery and was ready to jest again.

"Ah well, you know ... when we were younger you couldn't really be called an expert in these matters, could you? And I used to have this reputation"

I grinned. "How could I forget? But, well, strangely your wealth of experience and expertise in that area does not seem to be helping you much now, does it?"

He shrugged. "Vis has always been a difficult case. Do you remember that one journey to Pelargir? Must be about twenty years ago. When she simply vanished because she thought I'd betrayed her with that other girl – don't recall her name – and when she left us with that ward of hers, the street-urchin?"

"I remember," I replied. Túrin had gotten himself into a lot of trouble then by courting Visilya and another girl at more or less the same time, although as you know my chief attention during that errand was placed elsewhere, and I do not remember the entire journey overly gladly.

Yet fact is, during the past days I have often been reminded of those events. Perhaps that is due to the surroundings. The other journey had also taken place about this time of the year. Perhaps it is because of Falastur, who played not a small part in the events two decades ago. Ah, which reminds me. I have not told you yet of his reason for inviting us in the first place.

Fact is, even after more than a week I am not entirely sure what it really is he wants of us. Lordship has been rather close about it. I assume, however, that his chief reason for inviting all of those present at the events south of Tolfulas last year was to try and learn more about how the hunt for Al-Jahmir is going, and if we have any information beyond the official accounts of the goings on in Umbar and vicinity, and the current activities of our favourite Umbarian. Also, it seems like Falastur and his son and family have been receiving threats lately, the source of which can most likely be located in that area as well. Moreover, Pelargir has also experienced trouble with their messengers, especially those travelling to the South. Ships have been attacked and there appears to be an continuing increase of pirate activities, especially in the channel between Tolfulas and the mainland. Falastur issued a number of complaints to Elessar concerning the safety of this strip of sea, chiefly because the King is now responsible for manning the forts on the island, and sending out regular patrols.

Falastur was careful, however, to remain courteous on the whole and not to add an edge to his complaints as is usually the case with him. He did not insult me once, keeping the snide remarks to an utter minimum which at times made me wonder if he was feeling alright. Although he would never admit it, I think in a way he is really frightened, not so much perhaps for his own person, but more for the welfare of Caranthir and his family. To be honest, this hint of care and selflessness in the Lord of Pelargir surprises me. Even more surprising are his latest dealings with Imrahil. You know that the two of them used to be the best of friends once, before Denethor married my mother who Falastur loved, and their friendship took a turn in the opposite direction because Falastur blamed Finduilas' brother of interfering. Anyway, you have witnessed how they usually deal with each other in council and on other social events. Cold courtesy is already an achievement for them, and generally 'tis best if they do not remain in the same room for too long. But things appear to be changing now.

Yesterday I dined again with Imrahil. Elessar was again at Falastur's, and Túrin was out for a stroll through the shipyards. When I arrived at my uncle's quarters, I found him standing at the window looking out over the river and the harbour. He was deep in thought, his expression quite unfathomable. Stepping over to him, I greeted him. He only nodded, then pointed to a tall old building on the riverside that was obviously in the process of extensive restoration. Part of the roof had collapsed, and the beams and rafters showing were blackened as if by fire.

"It was struck by lightning a few weeks ago," he said. "Not much could be saved, they said. People wanted to tear it down, but Falastur stopped them and now is having it restored." He turned to me. "Strange that he should do so, is it not?"

I shrugged, not really knowing what he was driving at. His mood and moreover his interest in the derelict building struck me as slightly odd, as well as raising my curiosity. "Well, I reckon 'tis cheaper to simply repair it instead of having to rebuild it from scratch. You know how Falastur always looks after his purse. If there is an opportunity to save money, he would be sure to use it."

"Perhaps," Imrahil agreed, thoughtfully. "That would be very like him, would it not? Still, looking at this house makes me wonder if our dear Lord of Pelargir is not getting a little sentimental on his old days."

"Sentimental? Falastur? I do not think he is that old yet. But what makes you think so?"

He smiled, almost a little wistfully. "Well, I remember that old house very well. As boys we used it as our secret hideout whenever I was in the city. There was a bakery on the ground floor, and lots of storage-rooms in the upper levels. It was an excellent place to play in, always with the opportunity to steal a small cake or a fresh loaf of bread." He sighed. "Those were great days ..."

I laughed softly, amused and at the same time touched by the twinkle in his eyes. I could almost see that boy who used to nick food from the bakery. "My dear uncle, could it be that you are the sentimental one?"

He glanced at me, shrugged and smiled. "Me? Perhaps. If so, I do not mind. But it really astounds me that Falastur should develop such tendencies. You know, we had a long conversation this afternoon after you and Elessar had left. He was not in the best of moods, as you may remember. And I was rather weary and not really interested in having to endure more talk with him after the long day. Moreover I could not imagine what on earth he wanted to discuss with me alone. Anyway, I stayed, and now actually I am glad I did so. At first the conversation continued from where we had left off, and it was all but amiable. But at one point – to be honest, I do not remember how it happened – a subject was broached we found we, for a change, wholeheartedly agreed on. Thence the conversation became much easier, until suddenly I realised we were chatting about rather trivial matters which had naught to do with politics anymore. From there we even moved on to family-life. I would never have thought that one day I would converse about my sons' and daughter's and grandchildren's doings with Falastur, the very man who during the past fifty years has been trying to throw as many stones as possible in my and my family's paths."

I nodded thoughtfully. His account revealed a wholly new side of the Lord of Pelargir. "He may have done it on purpose," I mused. "To gain some particular bit of information from you. He can be very shrewd, as well you know. Also, he is an excellent actor."

He smiled wryly. "That is what I thought as well at first, indeed knowing him only too well. And rest assured, I acted accordingly and put my guard up high. Yet after a while I felt silly doing so. Either he is a better actor than any of us is aware of, or else his friendliness for once was genuine. You know, Faramir, we are not getting any younger, and our strife has gone on for too long already, wasting energy and resources on both sides. And I am weary of it. For a long time now I have considered how to try and ... well ... make peace with him, although it was not me who declared war in the first place. I do not think we could ever be friends again like we used to, but at least we could end this stupid feud. And who knows, in the end things might improve for you as well."

I shook my head, laughing softly. "Falastur may be in the mood to overcome his resentments against you, but I do not believe he is ever going to extend this courtesy to include my person. He enjoys far too much humiliating me in public."

"His favourite pastime, indeed," Imrahil agreed with a grin. "And he has become a real expert at it. Although I was surprised to hear only little criticism and taunting remarks from him during our stay here so far."

"Well, thankfully Elessar and you did most of the talking. But he has got a few days still to pour some well-chosen words on me. Tomorrow we are going to discuss the new levies for goods shipped up and down Anduin, and how they are going to be split between our fiefs, Lebennin, and Minas Tirith. He is not going to like my suggestions."

"I suppose not," Imrahil agreed. We were interrupted by a servant, informing us that dinner was ready. During the meal my uncle told me some more of his conversation with Falastur. Needless to mention, the next day the Lord of Pelargir was his old refreshing self, and our discussion proceeded quite according to my expectations. Still, Imrahil's tale gives me hope that deep down Falastur is not as haughty and vicious as he pretends.

Anyway, 'tis getting late, and I should like to get this message under way ere nightfall. My (and Túrin's) regards to Visilya and Vorondil. I do not know whether or not 'tis wiser to tell her he is coming. I shall leave this up to you. Tell the boys I will be back home soon to play with them in the garden, and remind Elboron that I am going to be very disappointed to find that he continues to refuse his meals.

My love to all of you, and to you, melda, in particular, Faramir