

Melda,

*your letter has both touched and comforted me. 'tis good to know all of you are well. Please give my regards and sincere thanks to all who have been helping you in this dark time. I forgot to add greetings to them in my last message, but they of course are also in my thoughts. I smiled when I read about the toads. If they would like to find really big ones, tell them to have a look down at the lowest pond. They like to hide underneath the stem of the fallen alder-tree that lies in the water. And I shall have to speak a serious word with Khorazir when I return! I am beginning to develop serious doubts if 'tis really a good idea to have him look after the boy. How has he reacted to the events, by the way, as someone who has spent some time in Al-Jahmir's prison himself?*

*What grieves me deeply is the fact I cannot watch the little ones grow and change right now, and indeed that I cannot help you look after them. 'tis well you have so many people around you to assist – and protect – you, nevertheless it hurts to know I shall miss so much of their first weeks in this world. I smiled about your comparison of Meriadoc with a halfling. I hope Peregrin is going to discover his "hobbitish" side soon as well, so that he will not be as much trouble to you at night. I would have loved to introduce Elboron to the splendours of toad world, but, well, at least this way Túrin could assist you in a way both he and the lad thoroughly enjoyed.*

*I was greatly comforted to hear the rangers survived, and returned little hurt. I have come to believe that the poison they used to catch me and the one that is keeping me here are two different substances. I very much hope Teherin is going to find out more about it. The past two days I have been feeling better, mostly because I drink that cursed water regularly now, even at night, every few hours. As for the substance, it appears to be one that dissolves without a trace in water, and leaves no residue, at least not in the bottle 'tis contained in when it is brought to me. What I have noticed, however, is a slightly bitter, metallic taste. The symptoms are such that at first I feel terribly thirsty (which usually wakes me up at night), then a stinging pain begins to spread from my chest into every part of my body. It almost seems to be transported there by the blood itself. When it has reached the arms and legs they first lose all strength, then the muscles begin to cramp. All the while the skin feels like 'tis burning from the inside, although it looks almost normal on the outside, with only the veins showing more clearly. What happens afterwards I cannot recall clearly, or else I prefer not to, since the very memory of it makes me feel sick. According to Al-Jahmir I have not even experienced the full force of the poison yet, as they still managed to subdue the pain with another dose of it only. They way he said this made me shudder inwardly, in expectation of what might happen should one day he decide to dispose of me.*

*I have not yet been able to find out more about the poison, how it is called or whence it comes, nor a possible antidote, because for the past two days I have been entirely confined to my room. Al-Jahmir left yesterday morning, which means I do not have to endure his company for a while. I suspect he is about to meet with allies of his, perhaps with Barahir and his nephew Ciryaher, who, according to what Falastur said at the last meeting of the council, fled to Tolgalas after Al-Jahmir had been taken prisoner in Pelargir. I wonder if they are going to decide further about my fate, and perhaps send an official message to you or the King.*

*Do you know what the reaction in council was when they received tidings of my disappearance? And have you found out more about the Umbarian's informant at Dol Arandur? 'twas well to keep secret the fact we have found a way to communicate behind my captors' back, but as long as this person is still on the loose, I shall find little rest here.*

*I have tried to learn a few things from my guards, but have not gotten far, as they are very careful in what they tell me. Most of them seem to hail from the vicinity of Umbar, by the way they talk, and Azrahil appears to be of the nobility, perhaps even a relative of Al-Jahmir's. He keeps a keen eye on the guards, and I do not want to imagine what happened to the unfortunate fellows who were on guard duty the night I tried to escape. The men watching me are of Al-Jahmir's household, and apparently followed him into exile, for I have come to believe that even if he wanted to return to his lands near Umbar, he could not do so without some struggle. Which sheds a wholly new light on his reasons for hiding here, and my abduction. Perhaps he wants to try and exchange my life for getting reestablished in Umbar, with Gondorian help.*

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*Well, the past two days have been thankfully quiet. They left me in peace, and only brought me food and more water. Thus I had no trouble receiving the buzzard. There is a high window in my room – too small for me to squeeze through, but large enough for the bird. The poor thing arrived here all wet and ruffled, for the weather has been cold and very windy these past few days, with strong gales from the south-west and cold showers. But at least this wind will speed the return journey. Does the bird have a name, by the way? It seems unfit to only refer to it as “the buzzard” all the time.*

*Apart from the bird my only companions have been a few lizards who, fleeing from the cold, wet weather found shelter in my room. They are funny creatures, of a strange kind I have not encountered in Ithilien before, with large feet that enable them to scuttle up and down vertical walls as if walking on flat ground. Also, they can change the colour of their skin, which gets interesting when they pass over the dolphins at the ceiling, or sit on the patterned blanket on my bed. Elboron would love them. Ah, the buzzard seems to like them, too. It just ate one.*

*Another animal that has been a great comfort to me is indeed Horsey. I only have to look at it to be reminded of home, and those thoughts clearly brighten my otherwise dark days. Do tell Elboron that Horsey is safe with me, and that I am glad to have it here as a friend that reminds me of my little boy. It seems what Al-Jahmîr considers my greatest weakness – my love for you and the children – has turned into my greatest strength.*

*For now it seems there is little I can do but keep my eyes and ears open, to pick up any information that may help me shorten my stay here. And yes, I shall be careful not to infuriate Al-Jahmîr, lest he gets the idea to cancel my water-rations. I shall end now, for the bird seems to be getting nervous.*

*Fare you well, melda. I wish I would dream of you as well, but lately my sleep has been dreamless, and the spells far too short. My deepest thanks to all who are with you, and help you to cope with the situation. In that they are helping me as well. Give the boys a kiss from me. The one for you I shall save for when I return, as I do not know how to send it via buzzard-mail.*

*Love,  
Faramir*