

Dearest Éowyn,

I cannot describe how good it feels to finally be able to write to you again – although it may be somewhat shaky still, and not exactly helped by the fact that Pharzi, Azrabil's small lion, is playing on floor at my feet, tugging at my blankets and making funny noises while doing so. Four days ago I was finally allowed out of bed, and now I am sitting in a chair by the window. 'tis good to be able to stand and walk again, slow though it is. But even Zinizigûr seems astounded by the swiftness of my recovery, now that the cursed fever has been banished. Unfortunately, she still forces me to drink her "tea" three times a day. She was unwilling to tell me what it is made of, and by its taste, I am not sure anymore if I would like to know. My theory is that it tastes so foully to persuade me to use what energy I have to get well soon, only to be rid of it.

But before I tell you more about what befell here let me give my heartiest congratulations to Elboron! Until your letter arrived early this morning I was not sure what day it was, because no one had cared to inform me how long I have been unconscious. I was afraid I had already missed the date. Please tell him his father thinks of him all the time, and cannot wait to return to him (and his brothers, and of course his mother). I looked for something small to send him, but the only thing that might interest him is Horsey, and I do not think it would reach home safely if I entrusted it to Aiglos. Nevertheless I hope you will celebrate properly. After all this time during which the twins had people's chief attention, he will be delighted that they should concentrate on him again, especially now that Khorazir has left. It was very kind of him to stay so long, despite Aravôr needing him back home. It shows how much he cares, and I shall not forget his support. To know that you and the children have so many friends about to give aid and comfort is a great solace to me as well, as I have mentioned before.

But it seems I am not entirely without friends here, either. Azrabil being one. I have not yet had an opportunity to thank him. I have not seen him these past days, ever since he sent off the last message to you. I fervently hope nothing bad has befallen him. He has risked so much to save me. And one never knows with his uncle. Al-Jahmir may have decided Azrabil has become too great a threat. He did not hesitate to try and kill me, too, despite being aware of possible bad consequences for himself.

Upon my inquiries, however, the healer said he was away on an errand of Marek's, and bound to return today. I noticed earlier that she seems to care for the young man, and even to be looking after him from time to time. The day he wrote the message here (apparently spending far more time than he should have with me), I heard her defend him fiercely against Al-Jahmir who obviously had come to personally fetch and scold him, but who again was not allowed in here. In fact I have not seen him since the day he decided to get rid of me – not that I complain. And there have been other occasions when the healer appeared to be acting protectively towards Azrabil. When he is not around, she refers to him as "mik", small boy, and seems convinced he is a "good lad". All these observations combined led me to the suspicion she has known him since childhood. Yestereve when she was again trying to make me drink her awful tea, I inquired about the young man. At first she was reluctant to answer, but you know I can be rather persuasive, and after a while she yielded and began to talk. And she revealed some fascinating facts. But ere I report those, I must gather up my blankets again. Pharzi has finally managed to pull them to the floor and get completely entangled. You know, I should very much like to bring the lion home with me. Not only Túrin would adore it, but Elboron as well. Unfortunately she is not going to remain this small and cuddly, but ere long is going to grow into a fierce lioness. Moreover Azrabil, although he is careful to conceal it, has grown very fond of her, and she of him too, it seems.

Now, as to what revelations my conversation with the healer yielded: a question that had occupied me ever since I had woken and seen her tattooed face hovering over me, was why she had agreed to journey to Barad Gwaelin to heal Al-Jahmir's prisoner. Even in my feverish state I had noticed the tension between her and the guards, and I overheard a conversation between her and Marek outside the door where she threatened to poison him should he try and come near me, or contrive to cause me further harm. So I wondered why, if obviously she had

no love for Al-Jahmîr, she had agreed to help him in his rather desperate situation (Azrabîl told me of Elessar's letter). After some vague, evasive answers, the healer admitted she had not come for Al-Jahmîr's, but rather for my sake, because my survival was important to people she owed a favour to. At first I thought Khorazîr or Aravôr might have sent her, but then remembered you had not mentioned that Khorazîr had indicated he knew her in person. Upon my direct question who had sent her she gave me one of her penetrating stares, then her mouth twitched (I assume this was meant as a smile). "A lady," she said.

Now, my acquaintance of ladies in the South is, as you will be pleased to hear, rather limited. "Does she have a name?" I inquired.

"When I got to know her, her name was Narejde. When you met her, she went by another name, I assume. Her real name I never learned."

"Silwen," I said. "According to what she told me once, she was born in Gondor. She sent you? That is a surprise. And considering how much you seem to hate Al-Jahmîr, to come here at her bidding, she must have rendered you a great favour once."

"She has," she replied curtly, making clear she did not want to speak any more of it.

"So how did you meet her?" I asked instead, hoping to keep the conversation going.

"She was one of the slave-girls at Al-Jahmîr's palace in Umbar, and for a while his cursed half-brother Zohrân's favourite. At that time I worked as a healer for Marek's father, and also acted as midwife from time to time when one was needed. Narejde's had a child from Zohrân, and the birth almost claimed her life."

"I remember she once mentioned she had a daughter who she lost," I said, upon which she looked at me strangely.

"Aye," she said slowly. "That is what she was told when finally she recovered. But the child did not die at birth, but lived. Zohrân wanted to keep it away from her."

I must have cursed under my breath, for she nodded appreciatively and patted my shoulder. "Has anybody told her the truth by now?"

"I told her the child had not died at birth, but I that I was not sure it was still alive. Part of my reason to undertake the journey hither was to try and find the child."

"Here?" I asked. "To be honest, apart from you and your apprentices I have not seen any women here. Unless ..." A certain suspicion had begun to form in my mind, and refused to be pushed aside again. She watched me with a twinkle in her dark eyes. Finally she smiled.

"They do not look much alike. He has more of his father's looks about him. Luckily he lacks his father's vicious cruelty and haughtiness. Knowing the surroundings he grew up in, I cannot help wonder how he managed to turn into the decent lad he is."

I nodded, still somewhat stunned by the revelation. "Does he know who his mother is? Does he know she is still alive?" I asked.

"No. I have not told him anything yet. For a long while I was not sure it was indeed him I was looking for. But now I am certain. He must learn the truth one day."

I nodded thoughtfully. "If you will, I can have a word with him. We need to talk anyway."

She clapped my shoulder again, as if this was exactly what she had hoped I would say. "I need not tell you that you owe him for what he has done for you. If Marek learns of it, he is going to suffer a very painful death. He knows this, and although he would never admit it, he is afraid. And he cannot count on his family's support like you. So yes, talk to him. And now drink your tea!"

With that our conversation was ended. And now I have let the pen drop to the floor for the second time. I think I need a rest. Pharzi has fallen asleep as well. I shall finish the letter later.

Lótessë 18th,

'Tis early evening now. Yesterday I slept through most of the afternoon, and woke when Azrahil returned, and Pharzi started making noises to welcome him. He was still clad in his travelling garments, and looked even grimmer than when I had last seen him. Upon my careful inquiries, he said things were improving for Al-Jahmîr again. Apparently his family in Umbar is considering to aid him, and moreover Kathuphazghân's brother has offered his help because Marek saw to it that some of the corsair's slayers were hunted down. Azrahil was unwilling to talk about his errand, and I did not want to press him for information.

I handed him your message instead, which surprised him. He was surprised even more when he saw I had not opened and read it. Although he turned towards the window to peruse it, I was able to see his reaction. I think your letter touched him deeply. When he was through, for a while he simply stared at it, then he reread it, before finally turning round to face me. "Your wife fought in the War?" he asked with a frown. "I heard a tale of a woman from the North who alone slew the captain of the Dark Lord's host."

"That was her," I said, smiling slightly upon seeing his expression.

"I did not know. She must be very brave. And strong, too, otherwise she would not have been able to endure what she did."

"Are you referring to the War or the situation at hand?" I asked.

"Both. How did you meet?"

I told him, and afterwards we sat in silence for a while. "It must be very difficult to be parted from her thus," he said at length. "And from your children."

"Yes," I admitted. "Today is my son's second birthday, and I cannot be with him. And the twins do not even know me, most likely, for I was abducted a few days after their birth."

"I did not know that," he said. "It makes Marek's plan even more vicious."

I nodded, and again there was silence, until I asked, "What about you? Have you got a sweetheart in Umbar or elsewhere?"

He smiled grimly. "She is promised to another. I was not good enough for her family."

"What if your fortunes changed suddenly?"

He snorted. "How? You know what I am. I cannot change that. Moreover I doubt I shall live to see her again. Marek will see to that."

"Do you not think 'tis time you set aside these gloomy thoughts? Yes, you may die here, and so may I. And we may not. True, with your attitude, your chances for survival are rather slight. Because you refuse to look ahead. Your mind is so set on achieving an honourable end that you do not consider the alternatives. How old are you? Barely come of age, I reckon. And you want to throw your life away just so, ere it has really begun? Do not be such a fool, Azrahil. You know, there was a time when I thought very similarly to you. That was also during the War, when the Dark Lord's forces were assailing my City. My father sent me out on a hopeless errand with hard words, and set out I did, with no hope to ever return. I was desperate, the only thing that kept me going was the concern for the men serving under me. I was wounded and almost died. In the end I was saved, but a chance to speak with my father again was denied to me. He had died in the meantime, under cruel circumstances. To this day I regret what befell, and that we should have parted thus. It would have been easy to yield to grief and despair, but I did not."

"Because you met your wife."

"Partly yes. I realised I was needed, by her and others."

"I am needed by nobody," he stated.

"Wrong. I need your help to get out of here. My family needs your help because they want me to return to them safely. Stop pretending you do not care for others. 'tis not a weakness, you see. Even if your uncle and the people you grew up amongst think it is. And stop regarding yourself the lowest of creatures. To your father's kin you may be a traitor, but we have seen what kind of people they are. Do you not realise that through what you have done, what you have risked here you have already won great honour? Honour which shall not be forgotten. My family and friends know of it. Soon your reputation is going to spread. And people will not think less of your because your father was Zohrân Al-Jahmir, or because you betrayed your treacherous kin, but because you acted honourably and bravely, at great personal risk. And there is something else. I owe you for what you have done for me. Not only my thanks, but a lot more. At the moment there is indeed little I can do for you, but hopefully my fortunes are going to improve soon. Once that is the case, I shall do what lies in my power to repay my debt to you."

He shook his head, although I could see that my words had touched him. "You owe me nothing."

"I shall suffer no discussion on this subject, Azrahil. Do think about what I have said."

He glanced at me gravely, and of a sudden he smiled. "Your wife's letter did not sound very differently."

"Well, listen to her, then, if you refuse to listen to me. There is something else I would like to tell you. It concerns the other half of your family."

He frowned at me again. "Are you referring to my mother? What of her? I never knew her. She died at my birth. Moreover she was a slave."

"Does that make her a bad person? How do you think she ended up in slavery? And what if she is still alive?"

He shrugged. "So what? All these years she has not shown interest in me. And I have gotten by without her."

"All these years she believed you had died at your birth. Apparently your father caused you to get separated. But now she knows you are alive. I understand you have little interest in meeting her. But perhaps it would be good for both of you – if only to spite Zohrân and your uncle. For she is one of his sworn enemies."

Slowly his curiosity seemed to be getting the better of him. "How comes you know her?"

"Tis a long tale. For now it will suffice to say we have a common friend in the South. But I am quite certain you have heard of her before. Her name in Umbar was Narejde, and I think she has taken to using it again. But for many years she went under the name of Naeramarth." Here he started, and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Her?" he gasped. "She is indeed known to me. There is still a high reward on her head, because Marek holds her responsible for killing my father. Her and Khorazir and his son. I cannot believe she is my mother."

"Believe it."

"But that would make me ...," he hesitated, as if only now realising what this indicated. "That would make me half a tark," he stated indignantly.

Now I had to smile. "Surely there are worse things than that."

He had risen from his chair and was pacing the room now agitatedly. "I am afraid this is all I can tell you," I said after a while during which he had not heeded me. "But perhaps if you have a word with Zinzigür, you will learn more of the matter. Apparently she was present at your birth, and knows what befell afterwards."

For a moment I was not sure if he had heard me at all, but then, slowly, he nodded. Then he gave me a questioning glance. "Why did you tell me?"

"As I said, I consider myself in your debt. Moreover I thought that since you are about to sever ties with your father's kin, you might be interested in learning that there is another family you have, even though you do not know them."

Again he turned to the window, then taking a deep breath, as if he had made up his mind about something, he faced me again. "I thank you," he said gravely. "Now I must go. Marek has got some explaining to do."

"Be careful around him," I cautioned. "Even more so now. He already suspects you of treason."

"I shall be careful," he replied, and departed, taking the lion with him.

Well, I recall there were other things I wanted to tell you, but 'tis late now, and I am very tired. Moreover Aiglos has just arrived, so I shall close and send him on his way. I hope Elboron enjoyed his birthday despite everything, and that things are calm and peaceful back home. Please tell the little ones I miss them and cannot wait to see them again. And you I miss even more, melda. Take care of yourself. As long as Zinzigür rules around here, I do not think you need to worry about me.

*Love always,
Faramir*