

Dear Éowyn,

The fierceness of your reply startled me, but I understand I fully deserve it. Even when I was watching Aiglos fly off I wondered if I should have expressed my feelings the way I did. Thank you for reminding me of my promise, and my sincerest apologies for adding to your grief with my careless words. It was never my intention to hurt or scare you. I was not very well that evening, and could not help feeling depressed. I was deeply touched when I read Elboron cried for me at night. Not regarding what he is doing to me, this alone is enough to make me want to make Al-Jahmîr pay. And he will, one day.

By now my dark mood is almost gone, and the past days have been much brighter. Please tell Elboron I very much look forward to learn about the wonders of toad-world from him. The frogs should be out and about soon as well. Perhaps he could draw me a picture of one? If I could be sure Aiglos would not eat it on the way, I would send him one of the lizards. I am sure he would love the creature. However, I fear it would spoil the surprise if only the tail arrived ...

I have filled some of the water into the phial, and hope the sample is enough for Teherin to analyse it. Her concern that it may not hold indefinitely I share. It seems to last for a few days at least, but when I sampled a little of the saved water today, I thought it tasted different. It has lost some of the strange metallic bitterness, and tastes more stale. I do not know yet if the poison in it still works or not. I shall try this out tonight.

Speaking of the poison, there is something I have to report that hopefully will cheer you up as much as it cheered me. Two days ago I managed to return a little of his limitless kindness to my host. It happened thus: We had just finished lunch, and he had demanded we play another game of chess when there was a commotion in the courtyard below. Azrahil came in, explaining that an errand-rider was outside and demanded to see Al-Jahmîr at once. The guards had stayed the stranger, and he had started to make trouble, claiming his errand was so urgent it boded no delay. I do not know what he had to report, but of a sudden my host was extremely eager to meet him, and moreover furious at the guards because they had treated the messenger so roughly. Azrahil then got angry in his turn (he is an extremely proud man, and not exactly known for his patience), and replied the guards had only been doing their job, which was to protect their master from all eventualities. This only increased Al-Jahmîr's anger, and the two almost fought each other near the door. (On a side-note, I noticed this subtle tension between them earlier, and wonder if it might turn to my advantage at some point to play the two against each other; but first I must learn more about Azrahil, and indeed Al-Jahmîr)

Meanwhile I sat at the chess-board, with nobody heeding me. I wondered if there was something I could do to use this brief spell of freedom effectively. My eyes fell on my bottle with water, and Al-Jahmîr's cup and the flagon with wine he had been drinking from.

When he returned, still furious about Azrahil and the guards, but obviously pleased about what the messenger had reported, to my great relief he did not seem to notice that the amount of wine in the flagon had somewhat increased, and also that it tasted a little different. We played then (he won, because I thought it unwise to infuriate him further), and in the course of the afternoon he almost emptied the flagon. At first I was not sure if it was affecting him at all. Then came supper, where he ate very little, all the time looking paler than usual, and although he seemed determined to hide it from me, it looked like he was feeling sick. Lest his suspicion fall on me, I pretended lunch had made me sick as well.

Now, the next morning he did not show up for breakfast. I had in mine in my room, with only the lizards for company (which anyway I prefer to the serpent Al-Jahmîr). I managed to overhear Azrahil talk to some of the guards, explaining that their master had not been feeling well during the night, and that the cook was in for

trouble now. Poor cook. He or she have been doing their job well. It would be a shame if they got replaced by someone less skilled in the kitchen.

Al-Jahmîr returned for lunch, still looking rather shaken. I pretended not to take notice, although it was obvious he had had a rough night. Needless to say my pity was limited. It was about time he tasted some of his own wickedness. I know I have to be careful not to anger him, yet I cannot simply sit here and endure everything he does to me (and you) without retaliating. He accused me of "repeatedly choosing to annoy him", and the Valar forbid I should cease this now. I have a reputation to lose, after all. But ere you object, yes, I shall be cautious. I know what he can (and will) do to me should he find out, and I do not want to experience it. (By the way, concerning Khorazîr's warning, I honestly doubt anything Azrahîl might do to me could be worse than the pain the poison causes)

I do not have much else to report. I wonder what news the messenger brought that so delighted Al-Jahmîr, and which he deemed so important that he even set his otherwise high security aside. Unfortunately I did not manage to catch sight of the errand-rider, so as to try and determine whence he came. I wonder if the Umbarian has yet sent word to Gondor. He has not mentioned anything to me, and given no indication of such a message, either. Still, I wonder. What he said about keeping me here for his own pleasure does not sound entirely convincing to me. He is too practical a man to "waste" a valuable prisoner for his own sport only. Moreover, if I judge his situation rightly, he has lost much of his power and status in Umbar, and is feuding with parts of his own family, and thus needs Gondorian support to return home in style. Thus sooner or later he will contact King and Council. 'Tis up to them, then, to decide how to react. They should know, however, that he is not an honourable, trustworthy man. He will try and cheat them whenever he can.

I shall end for now. I do not want to burden Aiglos with a longer letter when he has to carry the phial as well. I hope all of you are well. I miss you terribly, and even my somewhat raised spirits cannot alleviate my longing to return home. I dreamt of you last night – the first really good dream I have had here since the dreams have returned –, and it has made this longing even more acute. Even though I do have company of a kind here, there are times when I feel very lonely. I so envy Aiglos who can simply fly over to you in a few hour, and in fact everybody who can be with you right now. I doubt they know how lucky they are.

But greet them nevertheless. Fare you well, melda, and may the Winds of Manwë speed our winged messenger on his journeys.

*Love always,
Faramir*