

Dearest Éowyn,

'tis a great comfort to hear you are feeling better, and that Teherin allowed you out of bed. Also I am relieved to find all of you well and unhurt. Please continue to be very careful, and do not stray from the house without company again. 'Tis almost certain that Al-Jahmîr has issued certain orders concerning you and the little ones. At the moment he is very swift in dealing out death-sentences. So far there is no real indication that my turn will come soon, so fear not for me. During the past days I have been one of the lesser things on my host's mind. Long may this state continue!

But you are right: your life and the boys' are in great danger right now. Without your letters my plight here would be altogether unbearable. And even with our correspondance, the fear that despite all security measures someone could harm you tears me apart. I can only hope you will manage to catch this cursed spy, and thus utterly shatter Al-Jahmîr's vile plans.

Which are not going too well at the moment, from what I have learned – although I am not sure yet if that is indeed a reason to rejoice. You may recall how during our conversation he was suddenly called away by a guard. As to what befell exactly, I can base my account on guesswork only, for no one cared to tell me what happened. But here is what I picked up from brief exchanges with the guards, a few words from Al-Jahmîr, and some hints from Azrahil, as well as things I saw:

For whatever reason, during the hunt a quarrel broke out between Barahir and Kathuphazgân. Although both had guards accompanying them, since the quarrel was a matter of honour, they insisted on settling it Southron fashion. They fought a duel, which left both Barahir and the corsair dead. Though victorious in the duel, despite agreements, Kathuphazgân was attacked by Ciryaher and the Tolfalas guards in an attempt to avenge their lord and kinsman. The corsair's guards struck back, so when Al-Jahmîr arrived he and his guards had a hard time settling the fight.

You can imagine what this did to his already dark mood and overly strained patience. Kathuphazgân had maintained an important position in his escape plan which was now foiled utterly. I am not sure what happened, but there are certain hints that Ciryaher and his men left Barad Gwaelin during the night. The night after, Carandil disappeared, with his men.

I had been confined to my room during all this time, and seen neither Al-Jahmîr nor his nephew, so I do not know what the Umbarian's immediate reaction was to their abrupt and certainly unplanned departure. Two days ago I was allowed out again, to dine with Al-Jahmîr. His face showed signs of little sleep, a lot of stress, and great anger. Lest he should vent it on me, I restrained myself from uttering anything which might increase it. I even let him win at chess, for that night we played again. It seemed to me he needed this for distraction.

The confirmation that he had been waiting anxiously for something came when, around midnight, Azrahil returned. He looked weary, his expression grim, his garments stained by travel – and blood. Yet he seemed unhurt himself.

"That was swift," Al-Jahmîr remarked, not looking up from the chess-board. "Did you get both?"

"No," came the grim reply. "Only Ciryaher. Carandil has completely disappeared. But there are scouts about to search for him."

Al-Jahmîr flashed a dark glance at him. "You know we cannot risk him to leave the island," he returned sharply, "and perhaps return to Gondor on bent knees, ready to trade information of our abode for a kingly pardon. So do

not dawdle here, but see to it that he cannot reveal his knowledge to anybody!"

Tired as he was, and obviously appalled by having been reduced to one of his uncle's mean killers, not surprisingly the proud young man's reaction was not what Al-Jahmir wanted to hear. With a few strides Azrabih crossed the room towards us, and kicked against the low table the chess-board stood upon, so that the pieces fell over and were scattered. "Perhaps you should have thought about that before you lured these maggots here," he said fiercely. "What good have they brought us? They have been planning to betray you from the very beginning. I warned you before, but you refused to listen, as usual. And now things have turned against you because you lost control of the situation, and you leave it to me to settle the matter, again as usual. And I am sick of it! Sick of this entire venture. It is going to fail, and you know it!"

I had expected a fierce reaction from Al-Jahmir, but he remained surprisingly calm. Calmly, he picked up the chess-pieces and put them back on their proper positions. Watching Azrabih closely, I could see how this deliberate disregard of his person enraged him even more. My warning glance passed unheeded.

"So, I am not even worthy of a reaction from you, am I?" he hissed. "I only exist to do your dirty work, to slay those who have become inconvenient or dangerous to you! And at times I am considered able enough to play watchdog for your prisoners, but only if it pleases you in your great mercy. So what if I decided to leave as well? Would you get along without your little underling? Would you manage if you had to dirty your own hands for once? I almost wish I would be around to see you struggle, and ultimately fall."

With that Azrabih spun around and turned to go, but halted again when finally Al-Jahmir stirred, having returned the last piece. "You are going nowhere, Azrabih," he replied coldly, with deadly calm, glancing up at the furious young man with a fell light in his eyes. "You have sworn allegiance to me, and you know what fate awaits oathbreakers. If I fall, so will you. Remember what you are! Desert me now, and your name will sink even lower than already it stands. Today I shall forgive your lack of respect and gratitude. One more outbreak like this, however, and I shall not be so lenient. I shall watch you very closely from now on, and should you foolishly decide to turn against me, you will pay for it, and pay dearly. Now, get some rest, and return to the hunt tomorrow! And do not disappoint me again!"

Azrabih stared at him for a moment, pure hatred in his eyes, but with great effort he pulled himself together. "As you wish, sire," he said tonelessly. Saluting stiffly, he again turned to go. Before he stepped through the door, however, he cast a quick glance towards me, too brief for me to read. Yet, in combination the exchange I had just witnessed, I think I can safely assume he has moved another step in my direction.

But this is about all I can say to his person, and the developments here. Yesterday I was again locked away in my room, and only allowed out to dine with Al-Jahmir again. Azrabih had left again, and no tidings of his progress reached us this evening. We spoke little, yet the Umbarian indicated once more that he has sent word to his people at Dol Arandur, so please, please be careful in all you do. I am not sure when he sent out the command for the spy to get active, and how long 'tis going to take for the message to reach him or her. But I fear you must expect some action any moment now.

Also, word must be sent to Elessar and Imrahil, should they have left Dol Arandur by now. I am not certain about whither Carandil fled, yet I consider Al-Jahmir's concern to be well-founded. There is a possibility he is going to try and return to Lebennin, or else seek refuge at his old friend's house, in Pelargir. Falastur must be watched even more closely than usual. I would not put it beyond him to muster a fleet to attack Barad Gwaelin, once he knows of Al-Jahmir's hideout, to attempt to catch or kill the Umbarian and so win sympathies in Gondor. Needless to say he is not going to take great care if I survive this attack or not. Should Carandil indeed show up in Gondor, you must try and catch him before he can reveal his knowledge to the wrong people.

How is Teherin's research coming on? Has she discovered anything about the poison or the antidote yet? If somehow she managed to concoct the poison, this would be a great help, for then I could try and flee from here, perhaps

with the King's and our friends' aid, and she could keep me alive until she finds the cure. I am aware I may sound impatient, and ungrateful, too. She has already invested so much work in this, but, Éowyn, I have a dark feeling that my situation here is not going to improve, on the contrary. Something tells me I shall need Teherin's skills ere long.

Ere I close, let me speak of brighter things. I enjoyed your account of your visit to the walnut grove (although we shall definitely have to discuss the cheating-issue when I return). Hopefully Beruthiel is not going to find the young squirrels. On the other hand, it would be incredibly funny if again she brought one into the house. Imagine Elboron, Túrin, Khorazîr and your brother all trying to catch it. When the little one complains about his hair being cut, tell him his father could do with that as well, and moreover that he would not be able to see me upon my return with his hair dangling in his eyes. Also, I shall make sure to have a word with the twins about their choice of meal-times.

For now fare you well, melda. Please write again as soon as possible, for I shall have no quiet moment here without knowing you are out of danger. Tell the children I love them and think of them all the time. As I do of you, of you most of all!

*Love always,
Faramir*