

Dearest Éowyn,

I am very sorry to hear you and two of the boys have caught a cold. Hopefully your condition has improved by now. Although over here a number of people are ill as well, I have so far been spared, thankfully. Do look after yourself, and try and rest as much as possible. Has Teherin returned from her journey yet? The knowledge of her being around to help you would ease my concern, for despite you telling me not to worry, I cannot help doing so.

I would like naught better than to have you and the boys around, but please do not take any risks. At the moment the weather is so evil over here that even sending out errand-riders gives me a bad conscience. If it can be managed – I am quite sure Elessar would give me leave to travel to Dol Arandur – and you and our sons are recovered and the weather has improved, I shall come and fetch you. The ride will be a nice change from council-work, too, so let us hope 'tis not going to be delayed much longer.

I took your advice to heart. Most of the time I managed to sit through certain lords' tirades against me calmly. Today I did lose my temper, however. Lord Ondoher who holds considerable lands in southern Lebennin accused me of conspiring against Barahir and Ciryaher, causing their deaths by "selling them" to Al-Jahmir and his pirate friends in order to lay hands on Tolfalas. The fact that Azrahil had slain Ciryaher on his uncle's orders only increased Ondoher's malice. In his eyes the entire case of my abduction was set up to lure the Lords of Tolfalas to their deaths.

"There is no proof whatsoever that the Steward was indeed tormented by this Al-Jahmir," he stated, walking about the chamber agitatedly. "And whoever has heard of this mysterious poison he claims to have been kept prisoner with. There is a simple reason why he was not detained more securely and given comfortable quarters instead: he was, right from the beginning, in league with this Umbarian. And now he even possesses the cheek to bring Lord Ciryaher's murderer and Al-Jahmir's foremost killer to this council to make fools of all of us!"

A lot more followed along the same lines. Even Falastur was silent after Ondoher had ended, and if such a thing were possible, I would say the Lord of Pelargir was quite shocked by how far his neighbour had taken things. At one point Azrahil left the chamber, which was for the best, I think, because otherwise there would have been injured people. I tell you, it cost me much to limit my counterattack to words only – I will not speak of defence, for I shed some light on his own shady plans for Tolfalas. The fact Elessar let me and refrained from interfering clearly showed his support of my version. Lacking any proof against me and weighed down by my accusations, Ondoher was forced to apologise. 'Tis not going to be his last word, though, I fear. As for Tolfalas, the question of who shall rule there is going to occupy us for weeks to come. How I look forward to this!

You inquired after Azrahil. Although he is still treated with open hostility by many of the lords, the fact he has not risen to their baits and kept his temper throughout the trials (for trials they were) did impress many. Moreover a good number of them seems convinced now that he is a "good Southron", and one to be trusted. Elessar and Imrahil put in a good word for him, too. He has recovered from his cold as well. Due to lack of time for leisurely pursuits, I have not managed to show him much of the City yet. One day during lunch break we had a walk down to the main gate, and he admired the handiwork of the dwarves who made it. He was curious if there were any dwarves in the City as he would like to learn more about them. He told me he had only seen a dwarf once, during a feast in Umbar. The dwarf had been a prisoner, and had been made to fight a lion to amuse the guests. Apparently the dwarf won, slaying the lion with his hands only. Azrahil had been only a child, but the deed had impressed him greatly, he said.

Recalling the event made him remember Pharzi. He asked me to inquire how she was doing in this "impossible" weather. I think he misses her, and is really concerned about her welfare. "How is she supposed to cope

*with this dreadful wet and cold weather when even people used to it cannot?" he asked.*

*On our way back to the Citadel something happened which caused him to slightly change his mind about the weather, however. Ever since our arrival in Minas Tirith, day after day one could observe how the white cloak on Mindolluin's shoulder lengthened, although there had only been rain down in the City. That day, however, it began to snow. When Azrahil noticed it, I could not help smiling about his confused expression. He told me later he had never seen snow up close before, nor felt it, despite yearning to do so ever since he had heard tales about the north as a small boy. It was plain to see how the tiny white crystals fascinated him. When we passed a group of boys engaged in a fierce snowball battle I caught the eager glint in his eyes – obviously he would have enjoyed joining them. Well, I admit I felt a similar urge. 'Tis a real pity we get so little snow in Ithilien!*

*But to be honest, I am not sure if I like the snow right now. It came very early. I can only recall a few winters when we had snow in late Hisimë already – usually it hardly snows in the City and the lands about, only in the higher reaches of the Ered Nimrais. It looks like we might be getting a long and cold winter. 'Tis going to make journeys difficult. Speaking of journeys, I related your question to Azrahil. He told me he had given the invitation due thought, and has decided to take the journey upon himself as soon as the King gives him leave. He said he wanted to write to Khorazîr to tell him 'tis unlikely he is going to make it to the Midwinter feast, but that nevertheless he is going to try.*

*A week ago (how time flies!) I dined with Túrin and his family. His parents and sister with family were there as well. It was a merry gathering. Lossanna's friend (and future husband – their wedding is set for Súlimë) told tales from his latest expedition. He and his apprentices have drawn some excellent maps of the Ethir Anduin, for the use of vessels travelling up and down the Great River. I think I will invite him to Ithilien next year. We could do with more detailed maps of some parts of the fief, too. The lands about Poros are virtually uncharted.*

*Anyway, as I mentioned in my last letter, I had hoped for an opportunity to talk to Húrin about his illness. But the atmosphere was so relaxed, and the people surrounding me (including Túrin's father himself) so happy and at ease, that I simply could not muster the courage. During the past week I saw him in council only, meaning I did not raise the subject, either. I did have a talk with Túrin, however, about a rather serious yet altogether different matter.*

*After dinner, when Vorondil had been brought to bed and sung to sleep by his father, Túrin asked me to accompany him for a stroll in the garden. There was a fine drizzle going down and it was cold, thus I knew there was something weighing on his heart. Being Túrin, he did not keep it to himself for long.*

*"You know Vorondil really misses Elboron and the twins," he stated, wrapping his cloak more tightly about himself to keep out the cold.*

*"I do," I replied. "Elboron has inquired about him as well. I hope to be allowed to fetch them as soon as the weather has improved."*

*Túrin nodded, watching me strangely. "The thing is, they can't be around terminally, can they."*

*I smiled wryly. "Not unless either of us leaves his home. What is the matter, Túrin?"*

*He sighed. "Ever since we returned from Ithilien, Visilya has been hinting that ... well ... she wants another child."*

*I looked at him surprisedly. "And you do not? I seem to recall you saying, not long ago, that there could not be enough children."*

*He shrugged uncomfortably at this. "Aye, and I still hold to that. The thing is ... lately I've hardly had time for Voro. And Visilya, for that matter. And work's not going to cease in the months to come. I just don't know how I could cope. How do you manage?"*

*I think I blushed at this. "Less well than I should like, I fear. But I have heard few complaints lately. Do not worry, Túrin. You will cope alright. The little ones make you shift your priorities very swiftly."*

*He seemed somewhat relieved, but still looked troubled. "I take it Visilya complained?" I inquired.*

*He kicked away a bit of gravel. "She threatened she would make me sleep in the guestroom if again I spent the half the night poring over papers, after attending council all day. You know how she is. Very ... impulsive. I tried to argue and she took that ill. There was some smashed crockery afterwards, you know."*

*"Really so bad?"*

*He shrugged again. "You don't want to argue with her!" he replied simply. "They didn't make her captain of the Secret Guard for nothing, I guess." He took a deep breath. "Anyway, I don't know what to do. Work's not going to lessen. I'm worried about father, too." This statement dealt me a stab. "I mean, he's going to need me more and more, now he's getting on."*

*"But all of this does not account for you being so reluctant about providing Vorondil with a sibling, is it?" I inquired.*

*He gave me a sharp look, then smiled. "Damn your perception," he said, before sighing again. "You're right, of course. The main reason is ... well, Visilya."*

*Now I understood, and was touched. "You are worried about her, right? Because of her age and all."*

*He nodded. "I've heard some of the healers say that she was very lucky things went so well with Voro. And that a second pregnancy would endanger her, and the baby. I know she's willing to take the risk. She can be reckless, as well you know. But I'm not sure I am, although I'd really love to have another child. And now I don't know what to do."*

*"Have you told her what you have just told me?"*

*"In a way, yes. But I don't think she sees my point."*

*"Perhaps you should consult the healers together, to get a reliable opinion on the dangers of another pregnancy. And if you want me to, I will have a word with her, although I am not sure this would help much. I shall tell Éowyn as well. Perhaps 'tis best if the ladies talk this through. Túrin, I wish there was more I could do for you, but I fear ultimately this is something you and Visilya have to settle between yourselves."*

*"I know. Thanks nevertheless."*

*We were interrupted then because Túrin's mother called us to come in again. The next day Túrin told me he had not had to sleep in the guestroom, so I reckon they had another talk, although the matter seems to remain unresolved. Perhaps you should really have a word with Visilya. To be honest, I am not sure what I would do in Túrin's situation. I recall, however, how much I worried about you after the miscarriage, fearing that another pregnancy might end as grievously, and that thus I might be responsible for that grief. I was wrong then, I know that now, and with my withdrawal hurt you more than I would otherwise.*

*Right, 'tis time for me to end this letter. The errand-rider is waiting outside, and I fear that if I delay him any longer he will leave without my message. Moreover Imrahil asked me if I would like to join him for dinner tonight. I am already late for that, although I am sure he will accept my apology. Fare you well, melda, and do look after yourself well. And after the boys. I am glad Elboron has Horsey back. Greet them from me, and tell them I think of them all the time. As I do of you. I love you!*

*Faramir*