

Dear Éowyn,

I am sorry for the delay. They did not give me another lamp, the nights were very dark due to clouds veiling moon and stars, and since I was under close supervision throughout the days, I was unable to write earlier. I am well, and you need not worry about me at the moment. Until Al-Jahmîr receives your answer, he is unlikely to harm me, and I intend to give him no reason to change his mind. I learned of his message to you ere I received yours, nevertheless your account of how the tidings spoiled an otherwise beautiful day grieved me. Elessar must have been contacted as well. Al-Jahmîr mentioned it, although I do not know what exactly his message said.

Concerning what he sent you, the Umbarian implied during one of our conversations that he placed the decision about my future with you. Éowyn, do not believe a word he says. I suspect he is trying to torment you by loading you with the sole responsibility of how things proceed, and indeed what will happen to me. But that is not how things stand. My life is not in your hands, but in his (and to a certain extent in mine as well, which is comforting). And even if you, or Elessar, or anybody, make him an offer which suits him well, I do not think he has any intention of releasing me. For he knows that if he does, he has a big problem. He is in trouble anyway, without me back in Gondor and in a position to really upset him, and he is not going to worsen his situation. So with your reply you must attempt to buy some time, and I must use this time to find a way to escape from here. For whatever you offer him, it will not save my life, only prolong it.

Forgive me if this sounded desperate again. 'tis not that I feel desperate at the moment. I am only trying to take some of the load off your shoulders, for I know that otherwise you will blame yourself should things turn against us. And whatever happens, 'tis not going to be your fault.

Concerning Azrahil, if I remember Khorazîr's tale correctly, it was not Naeramarth who killed Zobrân, but Aravôr. But I agree with his judgement of Azrahil's attitude towards this venture, and his own place therein. For him there is nothing honourable in the plans his uncle has devised, and he fears (although he is loath to admit it, proud and dauntless Southron he is) Gondor's retaliation, for he is realistic enough to see that sooner or later we will strike back.

And I must admit I share his concern. Do not misunderstand me. Al-Jahmîr must be stopped and punished. But I know there are some very conservative people in council who still consider everybody living south of Poros Gondor's enemies, and this attitude is mirrored in the population in many places. And those same people, I am sure, will attempt and launch a campaign against the Haradrim, or another against the Umbarians, without realising that they are not our enemies. Our enemies are people like Al-Jahmîr and his allies, most of whom, I should add, are from our own ranks. At all costs an escalation of the situation must be avoided. Otherwise we will find ourselves in a new war. I would not see the peace we have worked so hard for cast away because some petty criminal has upset us. So whatever the council's decision, it must be governed by reason and moderation.

Now, what befell here since my last message? Two days ago visitors arrived at Barad Gwaelin. The Umbarian had been eagerly awaiting them for some time – in fact it was their message which so delighted him. The guests are Carandil, Barahir and Ciryaher, and an Umbarian corsair named Kathuphazgân (hah, I wonder if he has done anything grand to earn so grand a name). From what I gathered Al-Jahmîr had been trying to interest them in his plans for some time, but they refused to get involved, out of fear. But in the end he must have found a way to persuade them, and now they have joined our little round. Much to Azrahil's dislike, I should add. He stated his opinion of Carandil openly, calling him a "slimy toad that should have been squashed a long time ago", and worse things, until he was told to leave. Now here is one who should learn a little more about toads to fully appreciate them.

I first met the new guests at dinner, where my host presented me like a precious yet dangerous creature. Carandil, his hatred for me obvious, seemed delighted when the Umbarian explained to them in detail how he managed to keep me at his side. It gave me some silent pleasure when I saw the lords eye their food and drink very suspiciously afterwards. During the evening, they discussed how to use me to their greatest advantage. Both Carandil and Barahir would like to see their banishment revoked, and themselves reestablished as lords of their former realms. The latter goes for Al-Jahmir as well. As I suspected earlier, his ultimate desire is to return to Umbar and to regain his old lands and power there, with Gondor's aid, and moreover to gain more influence in Gondorian politics. Kathuphazgân is interested in "freedom of trade", as he called it. Apparently he wants us to legalise piracy, at least for a few select people like himself.

Although Al-Jahmir listened carefully to their talk and bold plans, he made very clear I am his prisoner, and that his own plans have absolute priority. Since so far the others have had no share in the dangers of catching me, they have little claim on what the venture may yield, unless they get more involved. I am not sure how exactly they could help him, and I doubt Al-Jahmir trusts them. My guess is they may try and cheat him by arranging my return to Gondor, and pretend they saved me to then be rewarded by the King. But Al-Jahmir is not stupid. I am certain he considered this eventuality. And for some reason he seems rather pleased by them agreeing to support him from now on.

For me also there is an advantage in this development. The Umbarian's attitude towards me appears to have changed at last. No longer he considers me a personal foe he can torment for his pleasure, but a valuable political prisoner he must keep alive when he wants to use him in negotiations. That said, he also implied he has no inclination to keep his word, should he agree to trade me for anything Gondor offers and which tickles his fancy. So be careful. I said so before: he will try and doublecross you – unless you doublecross him as well.

Enough of this now. I smiled about your account of your morning out with the horses. Vorondil seems to take after his father more and more. Túrin must be delighted to know he does not stop talking anymore. And I bet Khorazîr enjoyed pretending Narâk was still his horse. It sometimes feels strange that by now he has become such a trusted friend, someone we let look after our children without fear, when for so many years he pursued me in hatred. But then Khorazîr has always been honourable (unlike other people I could name), and would never have stooped so low as to hurt you or the children to get at me.

I fear the charts Caracil requires are in Minas Tirith. Perhaps Túrin can look for them. They are on my desk in the study. I was intending to bring them over, but then Teherin's message came so unexpectedly, and I left in a rush, and had other things on my mind than papers concerning the fief. While he is at it, Túrin could also fetch a document which should be lying right underneath the chart. 'Tis about the re-distribution of the Ethir Anduin in several aspects. It was something Falastur and I discussed during my stay in Pelargir. There are three copies of it, already signed by me. Túrin needs to take them to Falastur so he can countersign. One copy is for Pelargir, one for us, and one for the royal archives. And there was something else ...

Ah yes, I was about to issue a new law on the felling of timber. Several shipyards in Pelargir inquired if we could provide them with such, since Lossarnach and Lebennin have raised prices considerably. But because so much woodland has been destroyed by the fire, at the moment we can hardly afford to cut down much more. Nevertheless quite a number of people have been cutting timber without permission. I was about to contact the elves in northern Ithilien and the rangers in the south of the fief to keep their eyes open, to apprehend everybody felling trees without my explicit leave, and to fine them for it. Whoever cuts down a tree, must plant a new one. Perhaps you could send word to Mablung so he can look after the matter. Should the Pelargir people contact you concerning our decision, tell them that for the time being we do not have timber to spare.

How weird we should concern ourselves with these everyday matters in a time like this. But then I am happy about every piece of "normality" I can obtain. For now I shall close. How are the twins? You did not mention them in your last letter. I hope Peregrin has taken to a more agreeable schedule by now and does not keep you awake so much at night anymore. I wonder if I will be able to tell them apart still when I return. I doubt it.

They must have grown and changed a lot in the month I have been away. An entire month already ... – right now I feel very tempted to modify Al-Jahmîr's wine again. But no, I must be cautious. I only hope I will be allowed to leave the fortress again tomorrow. Azrahil may not be a friendly fellow, but I prefer his company to that of Al-Jahmîr and his friends. Another day of having to listen to their talk would kill my already strained patience.

I have full trust you will find a fitting reply for Al-Jahmîr. Keep to what we know about his plans. To pursue those he needs Gondor's aid, and he knows this. So tell him clearly Gondor will only consider his demands and indeed refrain from seeking him out and destroying him right away when there is a realistic chance of my safe return. Demand a proof that I am still alive ere negotiations continue, to buy more time.

Fare you well for now, melda. Please tell the children I miss them greatly, and that whenever I think of them my day brightens. And when I think of you 'tis like the sun shining after a week of rain.

*Love,
Faramir*