

*My dearest Faramir,*

*I'm afraid it is my turn to apologize for the late letter. Things have been rather busy here since a certain someone arrived with his little pet. Yes, he's here now, though he came to us rather cold and damp. The day after Aiglos returned, we had three straight days of strong summer storms. A pair of our rangers found him while out on patrol on the afternoon of the third day, which would have been the 2nd of this month. The poor lad was curled up next to the trunk of a willow, the lion awake next to him. Luckily he had the foresight to tie her to the trunk, so she could only go as far as her leash would allow. Otherwise, Azrahil may have found himself without a companion after the rangers came upon them.*

*He was cold not only because of the rain. He had been wounded while escaping the island, and though he was lucky that there was no poison, the arrowhead was still in his shoulder and he had lost plenty of blood. He was able to make it to Dol Arandur with help, but after Teherin saw to him he slept for several hours. His wounds were becoming infected, and extracting the arrowhead was tedious. His previous injuries, the flogging and broken nose, had become more aggravated by the journey and needed re-tending ere they became worse.*

*The lion we were not sure what to do with, but with Túrin's help, we put her in a cage out in the garden. He is quite taken with the creature, and she seems to be mildly fond of him as well. At least, well, she didn't fight too much around him. He says he can hardly believe that there's a real lion here now, especially one so small. Visilya and I both told him what we thought when he said he wanted to show Pharzi to the boys, and he was rather disappointed with our response.*

*But back to our other guest. Azrahil slept through the night, the slight fever he had developed had abated by morning. He woke up somewhat confused, but Túrin was there to talk to him when he woke. We had put Horsey next to him, as another reminder (Elboron hadn't seen it yet), but he refused to say more than a few words until he talked to me. When I came in, he tried to stand but was still too weak to be moving much. A scowl crossed his face, apparently angry that his strength was so depleted. Túrin gave me his seat and stood nearby.*

*"I bring a token from your husband," Azrahil said, reaching for Elboron's toy.*

*I took the toy and looked it over carefully. It certainly needed washing before Elboron could have it again. "This does not belong to my husband," I said after a moment.*

*He paled slightly, then replied quickly, "No, it is his son's."*

*"How did it come to you?" I asked, wanting to see how well his story matched yours. Before he answered, he glanced mistrustfully at Túrin, something I had seen him do several times already. "This is Túrin, son of Húrin, Warden of the Keys of Minas Tirith, and one of Faramir's closest friends. They have been through much together, and he is well acquainted with South and the deserts. You need not distrust him."*

*“Your lion is a truly remarkable creature,” Túrin said. “The last time I was close to one, I almost became its lunch.”*

*After this, Azrahil seemed more open, but not entirely at ease, which is understandable. His story paralleled yours, and he continued on with how he escaped the island and traveled across Gondor. He knew he could not ask anyone for help, nor could he board any ships, especially with a lion cub in tow, so he did about the only thing he could do: steal a rowboat and put to sea. Luckily for him, the tide was going out when he started across the channel. He lay in the bottom next to Pharzi to make it look like the boat was abandoned and simply drifting away. Several times when he peered over the sides to check his bearings he saw lights from his uncle’s search boats behind him, but amazingly, none of them either saw the boat or thought it worth pursuing.*

*After he felt he was far enough from shore to not be seen, he sat up and started rowing the long journey across. The currents helped him some, but that doesn’t shorten the distance any, nor did his flogging wounds appreciate the constant motion. By morning he was close to the Lebennin coast. The tide was starting to turn in, so he brought the oars up and rested awhile. He started to doze, and his boat started to drift toward the outlying reefs. He jerked awake to the sound of wood colliding with rock. The boat soon split apart, and he was pulled under by the waves. When he resurfaced, he had lost his grip on Pharzi’s rope and could not see her anywhere.*

*“She had complained the entire time about being in the boat and getting wet when the waves spilled over the edges,” he said. “I didn’t know if she knew to swim, so I thought I had lost her.” The waters were rough that morning, so after being rolled along and under by the waves more than swimming them, he passed out after reaching the shore and crawling up to some bushes beyond the tide line. Waking some time later, he moved inland in search of food, finding enough to take the edge off his hunger, but certainly not enough to satisfy.*

*He went back to the beach to see if any salvageable wreckage had washed on shore and spied a ship coming from the direction of Tolfalas. He crouched behind some large, smooth rocks and watched the ship until he was certain it had not seen him. The sudden squawking of seagulls behind him startled him, and he turned to see his little lion trying to catch one of the birds. He considered the fact that she had survived the sea was a good omen for the rest of the journey. After finding a new rope to keep her close, they set off inland.*

*They avoided the roads in Lebennin, keeping mostly to the underbrush and forests until they got to Pelargir. There they commandeered another rowboat and started up Anduin. “I feared Pharzi was going to bite me for making her get into another boat,” he said. Keeping the lion out of sight was critical. Along the way Azrahil overheard people talking about a fugitive from Umbar who had a pet with him, and that there was a hefty reward for whoever brought both back dead. Because of this, they traveled mostly from twilight to dawn, which during the summer didn’t give them much time to move. This plan didn’t change once they got on the water. If anything, it was more difficult to not be noticed on the river, especially when traveling at night without a lantern.*

*A day after passing the fork at Erui, they landed the boat on the Ithilienian shore. The rains start-*

*ed soon after. The rest of the story is simple. They stayed out of sight and kept moving until they reached the outskirts of Dol Arandur and stopped to rest. The rangers found them, and you know the rest to this point.*

*Azrahil's story was interrupted by the servants bringing his breakfast and Teherin coming in to check on him. She checked his bandages before he ate and said that the uninterrupted rest in a proper bed had done him good, but he was still far from mended. When she finished with him, he started devouring the breakfast. He had been eying it the entire time, and I can only imagine how famished he was after so many days. We talked for several more minutes, then it was clear that he was starting to become tired again, so Túrin and I told him to get some rest, and we left the room.*

*The timing was excellent, for we had hardly left the hallway when a servant came to tell me that a message from the King had arrived. I had written Elessar the night before, almost as soon as I knew that Azrahil had been found, and his reply stated that he would be at Dol Arandur by sundown.*

*The next days were spent wringing every bit of information that we could from Azrahil. He was rather uncomfortable when the King began questioning him directly, but Elessar's easy manner soon calmed him. He gave us a wealth of information, names, places, stockpiles. It was not always easy to get an answer from him, though. At times he hesitated or would need encouragement to continue. After one particularly insightful revelation he closed his eyes and murmured, "I'm a dead man."*

*Without missing a beat, Elessar replied, "No, you're very much alive and we intend to keep you that way."*

*I showed him your last letter on the parchment roll, and he translated the relevant parts of the listings on the back. Túrin had translated what he could, but there were still gaps left to fill. There are some here, namely my brother, who do not entirely trust the young man. I cannot blame them too much, but the fact that what he has already told us matches what you've related, and that his translation of the parchment agreed with what Túrin managed to come up with, should hopefully make him a little more trustworthy in their eyes. (Éomer had intended to leave on the 1st, but then your letter arrived with news that Azrahil was coming, and he said that there was no way he would leave us alone with someone as dangerous as that around. I hope by now his thoughts have changed.)*

*The guard here has been doubled since Azrahil was found. I highly doubt it's much of a secret that he's here, and certainly Al-Jahmîr would like to see him dead. One thing Azrahil could not tell us was the name or location of the other spy in the area. He said he was not privileged enough to know that, not even when he was sent to ambush you. What he does know is that this spy acts as a go-between for Al-Jahmîr and the people he sends to do his dirty work but is not supposed to jeopardize his secrecy by getting directly involved.*

*Well, what information we cannot get about that spy from Azrahil we'll try to wring out of Amlaith. Speaking of Amlaith, he refuses to believe that he is now worthless to Al-Jahmîr. He is convinced*

*that the Umbarian is going to send a rescue party to free him from prison. He has not given us any valuable information because he says that Al-Jahmîr would kill him if he did. Not even the argument that he was facing death with treason charges against him swayed him.*

*Elessar finished his questioning and returned to Minas Tirith on the 5th. I received a letter from him this morning with more information about his plans. He wants to try to force Al-Jahmîr off the island. Azrahil was able to give us profiles of the ships that his uncle may use, and Elessar is able to match capabilities. The question now is how to force his hand without putting you in danger. What Azrahil was able to tell us about Barad Gwaelin and the surrounding areas, and indeed his uncle's resources, helped greatly. We will get you out of there, do not doubt that.*

*But on to happier things. Elboron is delighted to have Horsey back and takes the toy with him everywhere again. He has met Pharzi, and to be honest, I think he is rather afraid of her. I am not too disappointed by that: it will keep him from getting too close to her, which takes some worries off of me. I will admit I do not like the idea of such a dangerous creature so close to my babies, even if Túrin scoffs and says Pharzi is just a baby herself. Baby or not, she still has teeth and claws and knows how to use them. The accounts of Azrahil's escape are evidence of that.*

*The twins are well and showing more of their personalities as the days go on. Meriadoc seems to be the quieter of the two, content to watch his livelier brother get into trouble. I have already had to repair Peregrin's Horsey once. He found a loose string near one of the hooves, and by the time I saw what was happening, his Horsey was almost missing a foot.*

*Vorondil is delighting his parents by trying to walk around furniture while holding on for dear life. He has a shy smile that is certain to get him into trouble with the ladies when he gets older. I see a lot of his father in him, which may not be a good thing. I don't know if the world can handle another Túrin.*

*I shall close for now. I hope that you are safe and well, despite the long delay that it has taken to get this letter written. Remember that there are many good people working to bring you home to us, and we cannot thank them enough for all their efforts. Your family will be here waiting for you when you return.*

*Love,  
Éowyn*