

*My dearest Faramir,*

*Before all else, please, tell me you are safe and well. A sense of foreboding has hung on me all day and I have been unable to shake it from me. Do not worry about the children or me; we are fine.*

*Today has certainly had its share of unexpected events, and we welcomed them until mid-morning. Visilya was delighted to discover that Vorondil's first tooth had finally come in during the night. (You may remember that he was rather quiet when he first arrived here, but now he is babbling away. It's oftentimes difficult to get him to be quiet!) After I had finished giving the twins their first morning nursing, Visilya suggested that we take Vorondil and Elboron out to see the horses. It was such a warm, clear, and sunny morning that I couldn't have resisted even if I had tried.*

*Khorazîr went with us, claiming that he was coming along as our bodyguard or at least as an extra set of hands to help with the children. Don't let his talk fool you; no matter what he says, he is going to spoil that grandchild of his horribly. I did not realize until we reached the stables that this was the first time I had been down there in over half a year. Before we even got to the horses, Elboron had to show me where the saddles and bridles were, where the grain was stored, and other little things that made him proud. I was afraid my grey beauty would not remember me, but I should not have doubted her.*

*I took the grey out with Visilya and Vorondil while Khorazîr took Elboron off to find Narâk. We saw them come out a few minutes later with our son sitting on Khorazîr's shoulder and your horse prancing and kicking at the end of his rope. I took Elboron while Narâk worked off his excess energy. The look on our son's face told me he was completely amazed at the sight of the horse bucking, jumping, and tearing up clumps of grass. After Khorazîr felt Narâk had calmed enough for the boy, he put Elboron up on his back and off we went on a leisurely walk. Because I am still sore from the birth and not ready for riding, I let Visilya and Vorondil ride my grey. Vorondil chattered and bounced in his mother's lap the entire time.*

*We had been out for almost an hour and were on our way back toward the stables when I saw a flash of sunlight on metal. A rider clad in green and silver was coming toward us, escorted by several of our own guards. As Visilya slipped off the grey, I told her and Khorazîr to wait there while I went forward. Already a coldness was beginning to wash over me. I knew that no matter what this rider's errand was, things were now being put into motion and could not be undone. At least the silence was finally breaking.*

*After a few formalities, he handed me the letter and said that his master was eagerly looking forward to a reply. We exchanged other insignificant words and then he announced that his errand was complete and, declining any services of our stables save for a little water, he left. I waited until he was out of sight before I rested my face against my mare's neck. Whatever was in this letter, I did not want to see it.*

*Khorazîr put the horses away while Visilya and I took the children back inside. I left Elboron with Mariel and found a quiet place where I could read the letter. It contained nothing surprising thank to Aiglos and your letters, but if it were not for those, the letter would have given me little hope. Al-Jahmîr wants me to make him an offer in exchange for your life and safe return. If he finds it worthwhile he will pursue it, and if he does not or if it "annoys" him, negotiations will cease. He says to be reasonable and consider a reply carefully. He gives no details about what it is that he wants. The only time he does not speak in generalities is when he says a messenger will arrive on the 10th of Viressë for my reply.*

*The letter gives no indication that the King has received a similar letter. However, I sent a messenger to the city this afternoon with a copy of the letter. What does this devil want, Faramir? That seems like an almost useless question to ask, since Gondor does not bargain with villains and outlaws like Al-Jahmîr. But at least he has given us almost two weeks to ponder the situation.*

*We have received no word yet from Túrin or Teherin. Though it is disappointing that the poison does not last more than a few nights, I doubt we should really be surprised by this. Surely Al-Jahmîr guessed you would try to escape like that. Maybe it's even better that you use all the water you're given anyway, to keep your strength and health. I hope that the small amount of water in the vial was enough for Teherin to study.*

*There is nothing new to tell about the search for the spy here. Berúthiel comes and goes as she pleases, and Lordel has remained silent about the matter. So, like most things, all we can do is wait until something happens.*

*Oh yes, I had almost forgotten that Khorazîr had some things to say about Azrahil. He said that it is very likely that Azrahil resents and maybe even partially blames his uncle for his father's death. (This resentment may even extend to you, since you were the one who let Naeramarth go free, thus giving her the opportunity to kill Zohrân.) He also says that Azrahil's name is not entirely famous yet, and he thinks the man may wish to keep it that way. Thus, becoming involved in this plot to kidnap and hold a high member of Gondorian society may not have been to his liking. Khorazîr said he is also interested in learning what else you can discover about him.*

*I must end for now. It is getting very late (I think the clock may have chimed midnight), and I need my sleep if I am going to be worth anything tomorrow. Oh, speaking of tomorrow, Caracil is coming to pick up the chart with the new rates for the bridge tolls along the Poros. I have searched your office thoroughly and cannot find it anywhere. Where is it? He has business in this area until the end of the month, then he must start back south.*

*Fare you well for now, my love. Elboron says you need to come home soon so he can show you the toads in the garden. I think he can amend that to just say you need to come home soon. Remember, you are always in all of our thoughts.*

*Love, Éowyn*