

Éowyn,

*I cannot tell you how much your message means to me, especially now. Praised be Lordel and his faithful bird! I daresay it saved my life today. You will understand why when I tell you what has befallen me since the ambush at Sir Carnen. But first, tell me how you have fared, you and the children. It grieves me that my disappearance has made your plight so much more difficult, and that again at a time when you need me most I cannot be there for you. Believe me, if there was a way to return to you this instant, I would not linger here another moment. But, alas, there is none.*

*Ere I continue: please make sure you and the children are safe! Based on what I learned here, I have reason to believe Al-Jahmir has someone he trusts established in an influential position at Dol Arandur. You must try and find this person, and make sure he or she cannot cause you harm. It may sound pathetic, but at the moment my life more or less depends on the knowledge you and the boys are well and unhurt. As long as he cannot harm you, I think I can see this through somehow.*

*You may wonder where I am now. I am still not entirely sure, but I think they brought me to an old fortress on the north-western tip of Tolfalas. From my window I can see the sun set in the ocean every evening, and on clear days I think I can very dimly descry the southern coast of Lebennin. I have yet to find out more about this place, but so far I have been more or less confined to my room.*

*The past week has been an extremely tough one for me. It was indeed Al-Jahmir who planned the attack; it was carried out by Azrabih, his right hand, and carried out well. Although we suspected a trap all along – you may recall my reluctance to set out at all –, the ambush was set at a place so unlikely that, despite our care, it took us by surprise. In the confusion that ensued, I managed to escape on Narák, using his great speed to my advantage – or disadvantage, as it turned out. I fervently hope the men survived, as it was clear from the start that the whole purpose of the venture was to catch me, alive. Hidden bowmen loosed a whole shower of small, poisoned darts at me. One pierced my right arm, two others pricked my forehead and my right thigh. At first I was not troubled by this, as the wounds were not serious. But very swiftly I found myself grow extremely weary. I scarcely managed to stay mounted, and my eyesight grew dim. Thus, realising that no escape was possible, I wrote the message I hope you received, entrusted it to Narák, and sent him on his way. Did he get through alright? I knew the message would cause you pain, but I thought you would prefer this to weeks of doubt about my fate.*

*Narák was hardly out of sight when my captors arrived. By then I was not able anymore to offer them any resistance. The moment they reached me, I passed out. I woke for the first time when it was dark. They had bound me, taken away everything except my shirt and trowsers, and covered the wounds with strips of cloth. From what sounds I could pick up, as well as the cool, moist air and the smell, I assumed we were near the river. My whole body ached, and even with my hands and feet free, I doubt I would have been able to move, much less escape.*

*I must have lost consciousness again soon after, and in this state was carried onto a ship. The next day or two we journeyed down Anduin. I was barely conscious most of the time, locked away in some dark compartment, and when I was, I looked forward to passing out again, so great was the pain. Whatever the poison they administered me, 'tis an evil substance. Now and again someone would come and force me to drink some water. Once they also changed the bandages, but that was about the only attention I received.*

*It must have been in or near Pelargir when there was some tumult on board. Apparently the ship was being searched, but even though I tried make myself heard, no one took notice. Again I lost consciousness, and did not wake up for another day or so. When I finally did, I found myself lying on a bed, beneath a slightly vaulted ceiling of white-washed stone painted with blue and grey dolphins. The pain had lessened, and I felt less dizzy and spent. The wounds had been treated expertly. To my surprise my arms and legs were free and unbound. But near the door stood two guards, clad in a livery of green and silver. And next to my bed sat their master himself, watching me with a slight, amused smile.*

*Al-Jahmîr greeted me like an old friend. And during the first days he treated me like a welcome guest he had been looking forward to for a long time, although underneath his joviality his true attitude towards me was plain to see. I still have no idea what exactly he wants from me. I do not think he has contacted you or the King yet for ransom, and to be honest, I am not sure he is interested in that sort of thing at all. For now he simply seems to enjoy having me completely at his mercy, and to make my life as difficult as possible.*

*In which he succeeds. Éowyn, I wish I could tell you that everything is alright here, but it is not. I cannot complain about my lodgings, nor the food. There seems little risk that the guards will hurt me, despite their obvious hatred for me, the tark. But Al-Jahmîr ... He is evil. He has seen to it that even if I managed to escape, I would not get very far. And if someone freed me from this place, unless I find a way to change my present plight, this would kill me.*

*Al-Jahmîr caused the water I am provided with to be poisoned with a substance that does not show any effects as long as I take another dose regularly, every few hours. If I do not, the result is pain. Perhaps I should not complain of that to one who has only recently given birth to twins, but you know I am not a squeamish person when it comes to enduring physical pain (alright, not counting stitches), and this ... 'tis worse than anything I have ever experienced. I would not wish it on my worst enemy, not even Al-Jahmîr, and this means a lot.*

*Perhaps you wonder how I found out about the poison. Every evening I am bound to dine with my host, where he delights in taunting me. Two days ago we played a revanche at chess. In retrospect I know I should have lost on purpose, and the thought did cross my mind during the game. Yet an opportunity to beat him presented itself, and annoyed as I was by his constant teasing, in addition to having felt unwell ever since my arrival at his place, I took the chance and annihilated his force.*

*Needless to say he took that ill, as I experienced the following evening. After supper he began to inquire about you and the boys, revealing a knowledge of even minor details of our life at home that shocked and unsettled me deeply, indicating he has loyal informants firmly established at Dol Arandur, who, as he put it, «Only await my command to end all you hold dear with one swift stroke». Try as I might, I was not able to hide my anxiety from him, and he delighted in it, knowing he had struck at my most vulnerable spot. And then, when I was about to be escorted back to my room again, he showed me something the sight of which almost dealt a physical blow to me.*

*«Since you must be feeling very lonely here,» he said gloatingly, «so far from your beloved wife and family, here is something from home to cheer you up.» With that he produced a small thing made of cloth and held it up for me to see. I recognised it instantly: it was Horsey, Elboron's beloved doll Lothíriel made for him. At first I thought it was a fake, but there is no doubt 'tis the real thing, down to the missing ear and stitched leg. I do not want to imagine how upset he must be with Horsey gone, as he would not be parted from it night or day. Although I cannot see right now how it can be managed, I will find a way to return it to him in person!*

*It was well for Al-Jahmîr that his guards were there to hold me in check. I would have hurt him otherwise, and badly, too. Smiling evilly, he tossed the doll towards me, then nodded to his men to return me to my chamber. Two hours I spent there in great distress, till after the changing of the guard. Then I escaped. Or tried to. At first it was not as difficult as I had thought. I had imagined the guards to be the greatest obstacle, but I got past them alright. I was not even sure if I was being pursued, and I made good progress.*

*While I fled through the dark, rocky country, always close to the coast, I realised that the pain in my wounds, then in my entire body increased steadily. Al-Jahmîr had told me that the food and water had been poisoned, and since I had been feeling ill these past days I thought it was another little device of his to make my life unpleasant. I understood I had not grasped the full seriousness of the situation until another hour or two later. The pain was so strong then that I was unable to continue, or even keep on my feet. My body felt as if on fire; I could not localise where the pain came from as it was simply everywhere, its intensity increasing with every moment. I longed to lose consciousness, but there was no escape that way, as my body refused to yield to this state.*

*The pain only lessened after Al-Jahmîr and his men had found me again (I do not want to imagine what would have happened had they not), and provided me with a bottle of water containing another dose of the poison. When I was able to walk again, we set out on the return-journey, during which the Umbarian delighted in gloating over me, yet admitted to being somewhat impressed by the fact I had gotten that far under the circumstances.*

*The following days I have been feeling rather ill and quite weak with a slight fever, obviously effects of my escape-attempt and the severe poisoning it caused. But worse than anything have been the fear and worry for your welfare and safety, and my situation that prevented me from protecting or even warning you. I have been trying to convince myself he only wanted to cause me pain by telling me about home, and that he has no power in Dol Arandur, but I did not succeed. And just when things seemed darkest and most desperate, and my hope altogether spent, the buzzard arrived with your message. That is why I said it saved my life. I do not consider myself someone to lose hope easily, but this afternoon, ere the bird came, there was pretty little left.*

*Although my urge to return home is greater than ever, I cannot see how I could possibly manage to stray from this place more than a league or two without an ample supply of either the cursed poison, or the antidote. I will try and find out more about them, and where Al-Jahmîr stores them. In the meantime, please take care of yourself and the boys. Try not to worry too much about me (which is a useless thing to ask of you right now, I guess). But as I said, as long as I know you are safe and sound, I think I can take whatever my host has devised for me. I promised you to return home, and I shall, somehow.*

*I must end now. Soon they will come to fetch me to supper. Please tell Elboron and Meriadoc and Peregrin I love them and think of them all the time – that is, when I do not think of you, melda.*

*Love always,*

*Faramir*