

Dearest Éowyn,

I have just arrived in the City, and wanted to let you know that our journey was swift (so restless were Narák and the other horses that had we let them, they would have galloped all the way to the City) and uneventful. So your concerns that something bad might befall us proved unfounded, thankfully. The weather was terrible again, however. It was well you and the little ones did not embark on the journey, too. Even though the sunlight is rather warm already (when the sun is out, that is, which seems seldom enough this spring), the icy northeastern wind has not relented yet. It blew even stronger down Anduin, swirling small snowflakes about us as we crossed the river at Osgiliath, and driving the horses well-nigh crazy. I cannot recall any winter that lasted so long in these southern reaches. Snow in Súlimë – not even the Dark Lord managed to bother us with that!

But the nasty weather and fear for my health were not the sole reasons for our discussions yesterday, were they? You stated your unwillingness for my departure very clearly, and I admit I felt truly bad about setting out this morning. This time of the year is difficult for me as well, with the memories of the Shadow so present even after all these years, and I would rather have remained at home to try and comfort you, and to find comfort myself. When we reached Osgiliath I was reminded far too vividly for my liking of the days I spent there trying to defend it against the hosts of Mordor, in fear and blood and fire and utmost despair. And when we crossed the Pelennor, still bleak and brown with hardly a trace of spring visible in field and meadow, under the shadow of dark clouds laden with more snow, all chatter in the company was hushed of a sudden, as the men recalled their many comrades, friends and kinsmen who lost their lives on these very fields during those desperate days in Súlimë more than a decade ago. So please do not believe that I am unaware of your plight, and please accept my apology for leaving you to fend on your own in these dark times yet again. At least you have the children now to cheer you up, and hopefully fair Anar will win her battle against winter soon, so that spring can finally grace our fair realm.

And surely you will agree that at the moment there are people who need friendly comfort far more than us. Túrin's note asking me to come to the City turned out to be highly understated in comparison to reality, not mentioning how troubled and tired he really feels. Obviously he waited a long time ere finally contacting us and asking for the help we have offered so many times in the past. He said something about not wishing to bother us, knowing how we have problems of our own, but his relief at seeing me was obvious and rather touching.

I know not if he had had word of our coming or had just ridden out to Osgiliath to get away from his troubles at home for a while. However that, after we had crossed the bridge we espied a lone horseman on the causeway, heading towards us with the wind tearing at him and his steed (one of the twain your brother gave him and Visilya at their wedding). I soon recognised Túrin and rode forward to meet him. When I had drawn close enough to see his features I was rather shocked how pale and worried he looked – much worse than in Narvinyë when last we saw him. I thought I even spotted some grey strands in his tousled hair. Contrary to his usual joviality, without a word or greeting he simply rode up to me, leaned over and embraced me.

“Thank you for coming,” he told me softly and earnestly. “And my apologies if my message caused you any trouble at home. I'm aware you'd rather have stayed there. It's that time of the year, I know. So thanks even more.”

I assured him the journey had been no problem at all – yeah, I know, here I stretched the truth a little, but had you seen the look in his eyes ... Ah Éowyn, I am truly worried about him, more than I have never been before – and he used to cause Maradir and me a lot of worry when Túrin was still the irresponsible youth who regularly got himself (and his friends) into trouble. Now I wish he was still the Túrin I grew up with. He has changed so much recently. He is almost too responsible now and seems older than his years. He tries to shoulder the bur-

den of his father's illness and the search for a cure (he refuses to give up), the additional work-load his new office causes, as well as everything else that befalls at home all by himself, to make things easier for his mother and sister and the rest of the family. This is of course laudable, but the price is too high. No wonder Visilya keeps complaining about him. Moreover I am not sure if Lady Amarië really wants him to try and solve everything on his own. I think he underestimates her and his sister's strength. And his father's, too. On the other hand, it may be that he buries himself in work so as to keep himself occupied and not having to think too much about what is happening, and the future. I can rather relate to that, I must admit. It seems an easy solution to problems that look unsolvable, despite of course being no solution at all. I shall make sure to tell him that.

Be that as it may, whatever I can do to help him, I shall – even if the only thing I can offer him should be distraction. Which may be exactly what he needs right now. Although I inquired about his father and the rest of his family, he did not tell me much, preferring to ask about you and the boys. I think he was glad to be able to chat about cheerful things for a change. I have not seen Lord Húrin yet. Tomorrow morning I have an appointment with Elessar and the treasurer to look over Ithilien's taxes from last year, and afterwards I am going to visit Túrin and his family. Perhaps the King would like to accompany me. According to what Túrin said, he has been visiting his father regularly. Húrin seems to be enjoying these visits and the attention Aragorn bestows upon him, and moreover appears to feel better after them. But I am certain I shall learn more about these things tomorrow. This evening I must have another look at the taxes (the joy!), and after that 'tis bed for me. 'Tis quite early in the evening still, nevertheless I do not feel like working too much nor staying up for too long. Which you should not take as a reason for worry. I feel neither ill nor overly tired. Just a bit ... I do not know. Troubled? Grieved? Lonely? But then again 'tis that time of the year ...

Kiss the boys from me, and tell them their Dadi thinks of them, and hopes to see them again soon. Perhaps you can come over with them for the New Year celebrations. Hopefully spring will have arrived by then. Elboron need not worry, you can tell him, for not only our ponds are still frog- and toadless. Some of the ditches on the Pelennor that are touched by little sunlight are still frozen over. So he can rest assured that the creatures have not moved out of the garden. They will come out soon, as soon as it gets warmer and the last snow melts.

Oh, and has there come a message from the South today telling of Azrahil's fate? I cannot help worrying about him, especially after what Khorazir wrote in his last letter concerning certain stirrings on the borders of his realm, and of course this wicked necklace you received for your birthday. Al-Jahmir is still out there, and I begin to fear that Azrahil some way or other ran into his henchmen. Ah, I wish we had swifter ways of communication than having to rely on errand-riders. Pity Lordel and Aiglos are not around at the moment.

I shall close now. The errand-rider is waiting. The twitchy young fellow is determined to set out still despite the cold. At least 'tis not getting dark so early anymore. I wish you a good night, melda, and fairer dreams than you had of late. Think of something happy ere you fall asleep. I shall keep you in my thoughts.

Love,
Faramir