

Nárië 19th

Dearest Éowyn,

this time I am using the ink from a squid I caught in one of the crevices during low tide, so do not wonder about the smell. Right now I am sitting at the mouth of a small cave overlooking the sea, not far from the village Emru sent me to. There are some ships out there. One looks like a merchant vessel but 'tis far out, two seem to be local fishermen, and another, only a mile or so away beyond the undeeps. Despite its dark sails it appears to be one of the small, swift ships they use for patrolling the coasts around Pelargir. It lets fly no colours or displays any other token by which I could be convinced of its identity. I can only hope 'tis a friendly vessel. It arrived this morning, and has been cruising past the village ever since as if searching for something. So hopefully 'tis one of the ships Elessar or Imrahil sent out to find me. When it is completely dark I will try and reach it. They are likely to anchor somewhere for the night because the coast is very dangerous around here.

It surprises me that apparently they have not spotted Al-Jahmîr's ship yet which lies in a narrow bay to the other side of the village, while his men are roaming the vicinity, still hunting me. There have been some near misses, and truth is I do not think I will be able to evade them much longer. The local population is aiding them, thus getting close to a boat or even leaving the place again on the land way was impossible. Fortunately the weather has improved, as has my health, so that I was able to spend the past few days mostly outside. So I do not have much of a choice but to try and reach this ship, or get caught. And what the latter would imply I do not want to imagine.

Again I am amazed how Aiglos managed to find me. I have hardly stayed at one place for a few hours lately – in fact I have been on the move ever since I left Emru's house. That was ... let me think ... five days ago. We had some strong storms with heavy rainfall down here (they seem to have moved north by now and delayed Elessar's setting out). Emru insisted that I stayed at his place. Well, he did not have to insist much, really. There was no way I could have moved on the day after he found me, for during the night my temperature rose dramatically. He said it was a good sign, and that this way I would get rid of the cold I had contracted much swifter, but I felt miserable, also because I expected Al-Jahmîr's men to show up any moment.

Which they did, in the evening. Luckily Emru was outside to look after his flock, and he spotted the hunters. I do not know what he told them to prevent them from searching the house, but after a while they left, taking another of his sheep. The next day they came again. Emru had seen them from the top of the hill his house is built against and came in time to warn me. He hid me underneath a large pile of wool from this year's shearing. The strong smell and the fact I was wearing some of the shepherd's clothes must have confused their dog, otherwise I cannot explain that it did not scent me.

After that they did not visit us again. Emru kept an eye on their doings, however, and informed me they were staying nearby, obviously convinced I was still hiding in the vicinity. To my surprise I recovered fairly swiftly from the fever and the cold, the recovery aided by Emru's medicine. I had told him of how I had ended up in this rather dismal situation and who the dog-maimers were (his dog has recovered, too). Thus he also learned my identity, but it did not impress him in any way. Indeed, when I was feeling well enough to rise again, and somehow the conversation drifted to his stolen sheep for which I offered him recompense upon my return home, he said, with a grin, that if I wanted to repay him in any way, I could take over some of the chores about the house while he was out looking after the flock. Which I did. I am really good at combing wool now.

I left him on the 14th, when night had fallen, and managed to get past the hunters, although my flight must have been marked for soon I was being pursued again. I made my way northward where the village Emru had mentioned lay. There I hoped to find a ship and a passage home. I reached the small settlement on the evening of the 15th, only to find that Al-Jahmîr had not been idle while his men had been searching for me in the wilderness. He had sent the rest of his underlings ashore to inform the people of the dangerous murderer who

was on the loose in the region, and thus, with the help of some coins scattered into the right hands and by instilling fear into the people who would not be corrupted, had managed to secure the population's support. Almost everybody seems on the lookout for me, also encouraged by the generous price he put on my head. The people here are poor. As soon as I drew near to the village, I was in trouble. I did not manage to find Emru's brother, either, who might have helped me, and for the past days I have indeed become some kind of criminal, stealing food whenever there is an opportunity. I reckon I must thank Boromir and Túrin and Maradir for giving me such a good training at that during our childhood.

Speaking of childhood pranks, again I was delighted by your account of the boys. Delighted, and grieved at the same time. I have missed so much of their growing up already. All those wonderful moments you described to me – I should have been there as well, and I curse Al-Jahmir for causing me to miss them. If I am not mistaken about the ship, in a few days I may return, and the boys will look at the stranger and perhaps even be afraid. This thought troubles me deeply. I recall the last time I returned home after a long journey (though not nearly as long or as dark as this one) and Elboron did not recognise me and would not come near me for some time. What will he say now when he sees me? And what will you say, I wonder? I think I should warn you, for there is little handsomeness left. Two days ago I spotted my reflection in a pool left by the tide and hardly recognised myself – it has been a long time since last I have seen myself in a mirror. These past months have left traces, I fear.

'Tis getting dark, and the squid-ink is nearly spent. I am going to eat the rest of my watermelon now, entrust the message to Aiglos when he has finished the fish I have given him (he seems to eat almost anything, really), and then set out to try and reach the mysterious ship. Wish me luck, melda! I need it more than ever tonight, for I expect the race to become a very hot one. I know not what else to say. I cannot foresee how things will turn out, yet it would be a cruel fate should we have endured all this for nothing. And I still have a promise to keep which I shall not forget. Nor shall I forget how much I love you, you and the children. Tell them that when a strange wild-looking man appears at their home, they need not be afraid. 'Tis someone who has journeyed long to be with them again.

*Love always,
Faramir*