

*Dearest Éowyn,*

*I have just received your letter, and your account shocked me deeply. I am greatly relieved you and the children are unhurt, and moreover were successful in catching the cursed spy. Praised be our cat! I shall never complain again when she sets free furry creatures in our house. I hope you rewarded her fittingly for her timely interference. This takes a great weight off my heart, believe me. I have been worrying day and night that something evil might befall you or the little ones, and last night I hardly slept, so when Aiglos arrived around dawn I was already – or still – awake.*

*Despite my relief, however, your revelations dealt a blow to me. 'Tis difficult to believe that people we trusted completely have betrayed us – and for what reasons! Money, and a life in ease and comfort! And for that Amlaith was ready to slay innocent babies. It was his luck I was not there to deal with him! I recall when he first applied for a position amongst the rangers. Mablung was reluctant to accept him, saying he was too young. But I persuaded him to give the lad a chance, because he was clever and ambitious, and promised to become a skilled and reliable ranger or guard one day. You know, the day I set out on this doomed ride to the City, Amlaith even wished me a safe journey, and I was grateful for this, because he seemed to really care. The snake! He knew of course what awaited me, and yet he waved me farewell with a smile. How could I have misjudged him so completely?*

*And Mariel, who has looked after Elboron since he was born, and who I trusted entirely with you and the children ... Did she not realise that the little ones she cares about so deeply (for in this I believe her) might get hurt? Did Elboron's tears when he cried for his Horsey not arouse her guilty conscience? You mentioned there must be another spy about. Find him or her! It seems there is hardly anybody we can trust anymore. I – later, someone is coming!*



*Éowyn,*

*I am not sure how to continue this. In fact I dread to write on, but you must know what befell here, and why this may be the last letter you will receive from me – should you receive it at all. Aiglos is away hunting or resting, and I do not know if he is going to return in time for me to entrust the message to him.*

*Early this morning, apparently about the same time when I got your letter, Al-Jahmír received tidings of how the attempt to assassinate you and the children had failed. He had me brought to him shortly afterwards. One glance at his face and the deadly glow in his eyes told me I was in trouble. My suspicion about what had caused his fell mood was soon confirmed when he told me of the events at home – although his account was slightly different from yours. I expected him to erupt in rage, but he remained terribly calm and controlled. Almost matter of factly he told me that he was going to alter his plan now: instead of tormenting me with tidings of your death, he would reverse the situation, and notify you of mine.*

*My water-rations are cancelled, I am locked in my room, and the guards are under strict orders not to interfere. I do not think they shall, for they fear their master's wrath, and rightly so. In his great mercy, he has provided me with one chance to escape a slow and painful death: he has given me a dagger. But, Éowyn, how can I use it and still keep the promise? I have hidden it where I will not be able to reach it when ... when things get worse.*

*For I do not want to give up hope that there is way to survive this. Perhaps if Azrabil returns in time and manages to convince his uncle that he needs me alive to survive himself ... My own words did not do much good*

during the long debate we had this morning, although maybe he just did not want to listen to reason because he was still under shock from the tidings. But then again would Azrahil help me, his enemy? And if he decided to, could he reach me in time, and without arousing his uncle's or the guards' suspicion?

The other faint glimmer of hope is that Al-Jahmîr has devised this as a kind of cruel test and twisted way of punishing me. Perhaps he wants to see how much pain I am willing and able to endure, and is going to interfere ere the poison actually kills me. Perhaps he is going to change his mind about killing me once he has calmed down a little and begun to think again.

Or perhaps he is going to stay adamant, and Azrahil is not going to return in time. I try not to lose hope, and yet ... I can feel the poison at work already. Soon the pain is going to be so strong that I will not be able to write anymore. So I must use what time I have left. But what shall I write? There is so much I would like to tell you still. You and the children, who are my sun at day and my stars at night. How can I thank you for the time I was allowed to spend with you, and the great gift you have made me with your unfailing love and friendship, your unceasing support, and of course the births of our sons which cost you so much strength, and pain, and labour? Without you, my life would have been incomplete, and my days darker and without purpose. You filled them with joy and laughter and beauty, and I thank you for every moment.

So please forgive me that I may not be able to keep my promise to you and the children, and that I cause you so much pain now. It was never my intend, you know this. I am aware of how this will be a deep blow to you, but, melda, you must promise me that you will not allow grief or despair to conquer you. You, the wild shieldmaiden from the North who was never really tamed, and never conquered. You have so much to enjoy and look forward to. You will watch the boys grow up: you will set the stirrups for Elboron when he rides his first pony; you will scold the twins when they return from an expedition into the garden that ended in the pond; you will teach them how to cheat at archery, and the history and language of your people and of mine; you will discover that Peregrin has an excellent singing voice and will make a great bard one day, and that Meriadoc's skill with horses exceeds that of the most famous horsebreeder of Rohan; you will watch with eyes shining with pride when our firstborn comes of age and takes his place in council; you will be even prouder when the boys marry and found families of their own; and you will sit in the garden with a host of grandchildren playing about you, questioning you about the time when you were a girl, and how it came to pass you achieved the greatest deed of all during the War.

I can see you do all this, and have a blessed, fulfilled life until you pass away, peaceful and content, at a very old age. Promise me you will see to it that things happen that way. Do not surrender to the shadow, Éowyn. For then Al-Jahmîr will have won. I know you will beat him, with your own wit and strength, and with the help of our friends. 'Tis a great consolation to me to know you are surrounded by people who care for you deeply, and who would do their utmost to aid and support you. Give my sincerest thanks to them all, and my apologies to Maradir for I still owe him a letter, and to Elessar, for quitting my office without his leave.

The sun has just come forth from behind the clouds, and sky and sea are aglow in the brightest colours. Still no sign of Aiglos, only white seabirds sailing in the breeze. 'Tis a sight of utter, breathtaking beauty. I wish you were here to behold it, too. I miss you so much, it hurts even more than the poison. Perhaps this is what grieves me the most about my situation: that it was not granted to me to see you once more. Should it be my fate to die today, know that my last thoughts will be with you and the children who have my undying love.

I can hardly hold the pencil anymore, and my concentration is waning. So I shall close now. Know that I shall be with you forever, even though I may not return to you in person. Think of me when you watch our children play, but promise me not to grieve too much. I want you to live happily. Please make this wish come true. I will never cease to love you!

Faramir

*To the Lady of Ithilien, greetings!*

*I happened to find your husband's letter. He was not able to send it off. I thought I should inform you that the poison did not kill him - not quite. I do not know what gave him the strength of will to endure what he did. I assume it must be his love for you. Hope, then, that his will and his love are not going to fail him in the days to come, for they alone are keeping him alive right now.*

*His body has been sorely affected by the poison, we cannot tell yet how much. He refused to use the dagger to end the pain. Somehow he managed to endure it until unconsciousness set in. Enemy or no, I cannot help admire him for this.*

*When we found him at first we thought he was dead, but then discovered that he was still breathing faintly. No one can tell if he is going to survive, although we are interested in keeping him with us - even my master has changed his mind about this. So we are doing what we can to heal him.*

*However, do not forget that your husband is still our hostage, and that any attempt at rescuing him, or attacking us, is going to make his death certain. If you wish, I will keep you informed about his condition.*

*Azrahil*