

Umbar, Narquelië 24th, Fourth Age 11

*Khorazîr, Lord of Khiblat Pharazôn to Lady Éowyn of Ithilien, greetings!*

*Dear Éowyn,*

*first of all my apologies for the long delay. I have been owing you this letter and an account of my granddaughter's birth for a long time. The past months have been very eventful, which I hope may serve as a minor and wholly inappropriate excuse, at least.*

*I hope you and your family are well. How are the twins faring? I bet they have grown a lot during the past months. Do they still look as alike as they did at their birth? And Elboron? Does he still enjoy visiting the horses in the mornings? He must be delighted to have his father back to share all the things he enjoys with him. How is your husband, by the way? Although he endured much as Al-Jahmîr's prisoner, I daresay he recovered swiftly once he was reunited with you.*

*Please convey my thanks to him for his long letter from Cermië relating the tale of his escape. I was thrilled to read how he finally managed to defy the Umbarian. A pity your King did not manage to catch him. Like your husband and King Elessar, I do not believe he has perished, either. That would be too easy an end. He seems to have vanished, yet I fear he will rise again to trouble us - unless we catch him first.*

*As your husband asked for a detailed account of the proceedings here in Umbar, I have included a second letter. I am sure all the political upheavals would only distress or bore you, so take my advice and leave them to him to deal with, as is his duty. And speaking of duty, he must have been very busy of late, spending time in trials and organising the hunt for Al-Jahmîr, as well as seeing to matters of his own fief. Do remind him that he has got a wife and family to look after, too, in case he should forget. And if he does, also remind him that there is a certain Haradan who is going to have a serious word with him should he receive any complaints about neglect from the Lady of Ithilien!*

*To describe the situation here in short: since there are still no reliable tidings of Marek Al-Jahmîr's whereabouts, his sons have become increasingly nervous. The strict surveillance Gondor has put them under has only added to their stress. Secretly they have been looking for ways to improve their lot, even approaching the desert tribes which for decades have been their enemies for help with offers of gold and pearls, slaves and salt. Other noble families in the city await their downfall to take over their place. Thus the situation has become even more unstable than it used*

to be for some years. All sides are interested in altering this confused and highly dangerous state, for trade with the North, as I am sure you have noticed in Gondor, is suffering considerable damage.

But enough of this now. I am keeping my eyes and ears open for signs of Al-Jahmîr, as your King has asked. Moreover, in the past months I have been travelling frequently between Umbar and Khiblat Pharazôn to check on Aravôr, Melike and little Hanneh.

And of her I shall tell you now. She was born a week later than the set date. Nevertheless the birth went without complications. Melike had her mother and many relatives to help her. I think the birth was more difficult for Aravôr and myself and the other menfolk not allowed to enter Melike's chamber until all was over. I felt strongly reminded of the births of my sons. Needless to say I was highly nervous and worried, too well recalling how Dereja never recovered from Aravôr's birth. For the lad the many hours of idle waiting were even worse. But in the end all went well, and in the early evening of the 8th of Cermië little Hanneh was born.

She is named after Melike's maternal grandmother who was a famous desert-raider during her youth. Indeed she is a strong, lively child, with dark hair and eyes like jet, and with the bronzeish skin of her mother's kin. Should Aravôr ever have wished for a son as his firstborn, this wish vanished when first he beheld his daughter and took her in his arms. I have never seen him so proud and elated before. The only thing that marred the moment for me was the fact that his own mother and brother could not be there to share it with us. Hanneh takes great interest in her surroundings, and smiles a lot, especially when people sing to her.

The greatest surprise, however, came when Narejde saw and held the baby for the first time. She had been away much during Melike's pregnancy, taking over some of Aravôr's duties such as patrolling the borders of our realm so that he could spend more time with his wife. She was not present at Hanneh's birth, and I think she stayed away on purpose. Even though she would never admit it, I assume the fact Melike was with child troubled her. It reminded her of her own pregnancy. You know that she is not one to show emotion easily. But when Hanneh was put into her arms she started to shake slightly and all but burst into tears. I had never seen her so emotional before. She was unwilling to talk about what had happened afterwards when I confronted her about it and told her of my assumptions concerning the reason for her reaction. Indeed she grew angry and rebuked me for meddling in her past which was not my concern. So for a while I let the matter rest.

I had not told her about Azrahil yet, mostly because I had seen her only little and the time never seemed right. She left for the border the following day, and I did not see her for another month. Upon her return, however, I broached the subject again, risking her wrath. I asked her if she had ever considered the possibility that her own child might have survived and live still. Her reaction

was pretended indifference. She said that if the child indeed lived, it would be grown up now and in no need of a mother it had never known. I remembered from your husband's accounts how Azrahil had seemed interested in meeting his mother, also because he had severed the ties to his father's kin. During our conversation, Narejde grew suspicious of my interest in the matter and my guarded remarks. She knew I was withholding some important information from her. So finally I told her about Azrahil.

At first she seemed shocked, but the longer she listened to my account, the more she appeared to accept and even appreciate the possibility that the child that had been taken from her still lived, and that moreover it had recently proven its quality by aiding another person despite a high personal risk. The fact it was a boy instead of a girl irritated her, however. She said she recalled holding the baby before it was taken away, and that it had indeed been a girl. Then again she had been feverish and very tired, she admitted. Anyway, the following day she left again, to seek out Zinizigûr of whom rumours told that she had returned to the South. She must have found the healer, obviously, and Zinizigûr seems to have confirmed my account, for about a fortnight ago I received a message from Narejde saying she is willing to meet with Azrahil.

So, should the young man still abide at Dol Arandur, please tell him he is officially invited to Khiblat Pharazôn for the Midwinter-feast. I am aware that travelling down here is dangerous for him, so the decision is up to him. Narejde may change her mind still, but personally I believe 'tis all to the best that the two should meet. I would like to meet him, too, after all I have heard of him.

I must end now. There is some commotion on the street below, and I would like to check what is going on. One cannot be too careful in this place. I look forward to your account of what has passed at your home. My regards to your husband, your children and your friends, Túrin in particular. Aravôr, Melike and Hanneh send greetings as well, as does Narejde. Pity the children are too small still to undertake long journeys.

Khorazîr