

COLD MEMORIES

"Boromir! Boromir!" Faramir's frantic cries filtered through Boromir's dreams. He woke just in time to see his younger brother hurtle into his room and jump onto the bed.

"Whoa, little brother. Slow down. You are running as if chased by a large band of Orcs!" Boromir pushed himself up onto his elbows, his mood wavering between amusement and brotherly concern. "You know how Father feels about us running in the house."

For a moment, Faramir looked abashed, and he cast a quick glance over his shoulder, as if fearing to see Orcs pursuing him -- or perhaps their father's disapproving glare. Then, dismissing the issue, he turned back to his brother and tugged on Boromir's arm.

"Come, Boromir! Come and see!"

Boromir threw back the covers, shivering when the chill air hit his bare legs. The hearth was cold, the fire burnt down to black embers during the night.

"Look." Faramir had already reached the window and was tugging aside the heavy drapes. The light that streamed in had a strange, pearly quality. "Boromir, what *is* that?"

Boromir did not bother with his robe but hastened over to the window, curiosity getting the better of him. Once he looked out across the courtyard below where the withered tree stood with drooping limbs, it took him several seconds to realize what he was seeing.

He smiled in reassurance at his sibling. "There's nothing wrong, little brother. It has snowed!"

"Snow?" Faramir repeated, his voice filling with wonder. "Like on the mountains?"

"Exactly. Go put your breeches and shirt on," Boromir told the younger child, "and I will show you how much fun snow can be."

"Have you played in the snow before?" Faramir asked. He gave his sibling a revering look that made the older boy feel rather smart and knowledgeable, despite what Master Golion, their lore teacher, always said about him. "It is so white!"

Boromir laughed. "'Tis true!" The entire courtyard -- the flagstone paths, the grass, the White Tree -- everything was covered with a layer of white, fluffy crystals. Even as they watched, a few last flakes drifted down from the gray clouds overhead.

"I did see snow before, once, when I was about your age," he continued. "I think it was the winter after you were born, when it was very cold, that there was snow on the ground one day. Father showed me how to make a snowman. Mother gave it one of her scarves to wear, and Father borrowed a watchman's helm." He giggled. "The guard was quite put out when he discovered his helmet missing!"

"Snowman?" Faramir muttered, but Boromir had already turned away from the window and was hopping around on one leg, trying to pull his breeches onto the other.

"Don't forget to put on your winter cloak," he instructed as Faramir left to get dressed. "It will be cold outside."

oOo

A short time later the two boys slipped out of the front door. The white carpet that covered everything was unblemished. While they gaped, awed by the chill splendor before them, the clouds overhead broke open and a beam of golden sunlight streamed down. The snow lit up in a million sparkling stars.

Open-mouthed, Faramir stared in wonder at the glittering world. "'Tis beautiful," he whispered.

Boromir snorted. All of a sudden, startling Faramir out of his rapture, something streaked through the air and thudded against the White Tree. Clumps of snow fell off its branches.

"What was that?" Faramir asked.

"A snowball," Boromir said. "Here, I'll show you how to make one." He scooped up a handful of loose flakes and squeezed them into a tight ball of ice. "See?"

The ball came flying at Faramir. Before he could catch it, it hit him on the shoulder, bursting apart and leaving a white stain on his cloak. Boromir grinned. "Now you try and hit me!" He darted down the steps and ran across the courtyard. For long moments, the clear trail of boot tracks distracted Faramir. Then Boromir called him again.

Within minutes, snow was flying everywhere. Crisscrossing boys' tracks marred the spotless white carpet in the courtyard. The two brothers were laughing, trying to fling as many snowballs as possible at each other, while at the same time ducking the missiles directed at them. Age gave Boromir an advantage but Faramir quickly picked up the skill

and cheered every time he scored a hit.

From the corner of his eye, he noticed the large door swing open. Faramir filled with disappointment, convinced it was Mistress Hûbeth coming to take them inside for breakfast and spoil their fun. In a sudden desire for disobedience and not quite ready to leave the cold wonder in the courtyard, he aimed the snowball he held in his hands at the cloaked figure that stepped out. But as the ball left his hand, he realized his mistake. Horror-struck, he watched as the icy pellet sailed through the air and landed against his father's chest.

For a moment, time stopped. A few yards away, at the foot of the stairs, Boromir cast Faramir a look of silent rebuke before he turned toward the steward. "Beg pardon, Father," he said quickly. "Faramir did not mean to hit you. It was an accident, I am sure."

Denethor brushed the snow from his clothes. "No, it was not."

Faramir held his breath. Would his father be cross? Ever since Mother died, he had been so grim and sad, quick to anger, slow to laugh.

Much to his relief, however, the steward's mouth twitched. "That was very well aimed, Faramir," he commented. "If you master the bow and arrow just as well, you will become quite an accomplished archer."

Faramir's cheeks colored with pleasure at the rare and unexpected praise. "Thank you, Father."

The steward gave an absent nod, and gazed out across the courtyard, his mind seeming to have wandered to other places.

"Father?" Faramir ventured, emboldened with the commendation on his marksmanship.

The steward gave a start, as if he had forgotten his sons were with him. "Yes?"

"Boromir says you and he made Mother a snowman once. Will you show me how make one too?"

A shadow crossed over the steward's face and he closed his eyes briefly. Faramir instantly regretted his words and wished he could take them back. He feared his father's rare mellow disposition would vanish and he dreaded the rebuttal sure to come.

But the steward surprised his sons again. His features softened. "I have some time before the council meeting." He closed the door behind him and descended the stairs. "I will

show you. If you and Boromir will help me."

oOo

By nightfall, the snow had thawed, revealing once more the flagstones and the yellowed winter grass. The snowman, sculpted with such joint effort, was but a shapeless pile of ice too stubborn to melt. Yet the memory of that day remained with Faramir for many years to come, and forever snow would hold a special place in his heart.

Disclaimer: This story is based on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. The characters, settings, places, and languages used in this work are the property of the Tolkien Estate, Tolkien Enterprises, and possibly New Line Cinema, except for original characters who belong to the author. The story is meant for entertainment purposes only and no copyright infringement was intended.