

LETTER TO FRODO

~~Dearest Frodo~~

Scratch.

~~My dear friend~~

Scratch.

Fro-- The pen caught and a large ink blot spread over the single syllable written. Uttering a growl filled with frustration, Boromir snatched up the sheet of paper and crumpled it into a ball. He threw it over his shoulder without looking. It rolled into a corner, where a small pile of similar paper balls already cluttered the floor.

When Aragorn first suggested he write a letter, it had sounded like such a good solution, but putting it into practice? That was sheer foolishness! Boromir, never one for writing from the heart—though if he were told, Faramir would not agree and cite the earnest missives Boromir had sent during his long years in exile—found it impossible to start his letter.

By my honor, I cannot even decide on the proper salutation! How was he ever going to be able to commit his deepest sorrow and regret to the page?

Boromir shoved his chair backward and went to stand at the open window, taking a deep, calming breath. It was a hot summer's day, not long after his return to Minas Tirith, and the sun was a molten gold ball in a deep blue sky. Not a single cloud marked the wide expanse. He could see all the way across the Pelennor and the Anduin, into faraway Ithilien. The farm fields surrounding the city were deserted, the day too warm for the farmers to work their crops at this hour. In a short while, Boromir knew, once the sun sank behind the mountains, those fields would be swarming with men, women, even children, and they would water the soil, tear up weeds, prune seedlings.

The whiteness of the city sprawling before him hurt his eyes and he turned back into the shadowy room. Inside the house, it was warm as well, though being out of the sun helped. A soft puff of air through the window brought a moment's relief, and the sheets of paper on the desk whispered an instant. It was as if they begged Boromir to return and try again.

Boromir sighed. He pulled a kerchief from the sleeve of his tunic and wiped his brow. There was chilled wine in a decanter, next to a pair of silver goblets. He poured himself some and drank deeply.

Perhaps he should give up this futile attempt; doubtless there were more practical things he could be doing with his time. What use was writing his thoughts in a letter to Frodo? The hobbit had departed across the sea; he was gone. He was as unable to read Boromir's written plea as he could hear a spoken one. And even if that were not so, would he forgive?

But no. Boromir was not one to give up easily. Especially not in this regard. Besides, he needed to get some matters off his chest if he were ever to carry on. How could he be a reliable vassal to Aragorn and rule Dunland in name of his king if he allowed himself to remain burdened with remorse?

He sat himself down behind the desk again, picked up the pen, dipped it into the ink and drew a new sheet of paper from the pile.

"Dear Frodo,

Long have I yearned to tell you this, yet never did I dare seek you out. And now, I have learned it is too late. You are gone from Middle-earth, gone forever, and I will never have the chance to beg your pardon. Yet, I find I must..."

Once he had the first few lines down, Boromir discovered it grew ever easier to continue. He wrote and wrote, never once looking at the words that flowed from his pen, yet continuing to put down whatever his heart told him to. It was not until he could barely see the page that he realized the sun had set and dusk was approaching.

He signed the last sheet, simply writing down his name, and sealed the letter with his sigil. While the wax dried, he studied the stamp for a moment. It had been such a long time since he had used his personal mark...

A knock on the door startled him from his reverie. One of the servants entered and gave a respectful bow.

"My lord, Lady Eowyn would like to know if you will join her and the Lord Steward for supper tonight, or if you wish to dine in your chambers."

Boromir stoppered the ink bottle. "Please tell my lady and my brother that I will be with them shortly." He put the sealed envelope inside his tunic, not quite certain what to do with the letter.

oOo

Boromir soon wondered if he had not made a mistake in agreeing to dine with his brother's family. He barely tasted the roast on his plate, and although Faramir tried to enlist his input in ideas for further restoring Ithilien, he found himself incapable of concentrating. The letter weighed heavily in his pocket, and he still had no idea what he should do with it.

After the meal was done and the table was being cleared, Faramir preceded Boromir to his study. They sat down beside the cold hearth, the weather too mild for a fire, even during the cool of evening. Faramir offered Boromir a goblet filled with a dark liquid.

"Eomer sent me a casket of their wicked barley drink," he explained. "I do not care for the taste much, but you look as if you could use something stronger than wine. Please, brother, tell me, what burden lies on your mind?"

Boromir took a sip of the liquid that burned down his throat. He put down the goblet and pulled out the letter. "This," he said. "Now that I wrote it, I do not know what to do with it."

Faramir took the envelope and glanced at the addressee. He gave a nod. "I see." He pondered for a moment, tapping the letter against his palm. "Come, Boromir. I think I may have just the solution."

Boromir followed his brother, who walked out of the citadel and down to the stables.

"Saddle my horse, and my brother's," Faramir told the sleepy stableman that came scurrying forward as soon as they entered.

"Aye, my lord." He suppressed a yawn. "Should I also ready the horses for your guard?"

"No," Faramir said. "We will not be taking an escort."

"Where are we going?" Boromir asked once the groom had run off to see to their mounts. He was unsure what his brother was planning. "We cannot ride to the Undying Lands."

Faramir chuckled. "Aye, that we cannot. We will go to the river."

Boromir frowned. To the Anduin? What good would that do?

A few minutes later Barangol trotted after Faramir's horse along the darkened streets of the city and through the gates down to the Great Gate. Eager for a ride, Barangol danced

impatiently and Boromir leaned forward to stroke his horse's neck while Faramir exchanged a few words with the guards. The heavy door swung open, letting them out.

The Pelennor spread out before them, bleached of color and covered with strangely shaped shadows in the light of the moon and stars. The sky was as clear at night as it had been during the day and resembled a dark velvet covered with diamonds. The air was cooler outside the gates, the evening breeze blowing unhindered by walls and alleys. The darkness smelled of newly churned earth and night blooms. There was hardly a sound, except for the chirping of crickets and the muted tones of some flute music that drifted over the city walls. A few flickering pinpoints of light dotted the fields, indicating farm houses where cooking fires burned.

They followed the road to Osgiliath at a slow trot. There was no need for haste, and though the road was smoothly paved, the darkness made riding a cautious business. They would not want to hurt their horses.

Two hours later, they reached the ruined city. The rubble had been cleared away, and everywhere Boromir looked, he saw scaffolding, stacks of newly cut stones and piles of sand for preparing mortar.

"You are rebuilding Osgiliath," he said softly.

Faramir grinned. "Aye. We started last summer." The smile faded. "It will be many years, though, before she is restored."

"No matter," Boromir said firmly. "She *is* being rebuilt, that is what is important."

Faramir steered his horse to the bridge. The Anduin resembled a sparkling ribbon of silver beneath the moon, her waters murmuring softly. Faramir dismounted beside the abutment, close to the water's edge, and gestured for Boromir to do the same. Boromir tied Barangol's reins to a nearby tree, uncertain why his brother had brought him here, or how the Anduin could be of aid in his predicament of an undeliverable letter.

Faramir took a few things from his saddlebags and, while Boromir watched, began collecting tufts of dry, yellowed grass. He knelt beside the pile and set to work. A few minutes later, thin tendrils of smoke rose from the pile of grass. Faramir added a few sticks and flames began to lick at the wood.

"You have not lost your skill," Boromir commented, kneeling beside his brother.

Faramir chortled. "One never knows when such knowledge might be called upon." He sat back on his heels. "Take out your letter, brother."

Boromir drew the envelope from his tunic, still not sure what Faramir had in mind.

"I found," his brother said softly in answer to the unspoken question, "that letters like yours are best burned once they have been written. You may not be able to tell Frodo in person what you wrote in your missive, but perhaps some of the spirit of your words will reach him still. Burn the letter and scatter the ashes in the Anduin; the river will take them to sea."

"Does it really help?" Boromir asked. It seemed such an unavailing method.

"Aye."

Boromir glanced at his brother. Faramir's face, cloaked in shadows and lit with the flickering of the small fire, was serious. He had sounded as if he spoke from experience. Boromir decided not ask.

Instead, he cautiously pulled a burning twig from the fire. Shielding the flame with his hand, he walked right up to the edge of the river, and held the glowing tip to the envelope. An instant later, the thick paper caught and a bright orange flame burst from the corner. Mesmerized, Boromir watched the fire slowly consume his letter to Frodo. Slivers of paper flaked away to drift in the breeze, some burning until the river water extinguished them. It was not long before Boromir found his fingers in danger of being singed. He held on to the envelope as long as he dared, but had to let go at the last. The flames swallowed the last scrap of paper before it reached the river.

Boromir sighed and was surprised to find his eyes were moist.

"Here." Faramir rested a hand on his shoulder.

Boromir gave a start; he had forgotten his brother's presence. Faramir offered him a mug of steaming tea, prepared on the small fire while Boromir had burnt his letter.

"You have done all you can," Faramir continued. "The rest is in the hands of the spirits."

They rode back in silence. There was no evidence that Boromir had ever written the letter. Except in his mind; there he knew. He found that the burden weighed not as heavy on his shoulders any longer. Tomorrow, he thought while the walls of Minas Tirith grew ever nearer, he would begin the preparations for his departure to Dunland.

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