My Dearest Friends,

I have some things to tell you, but I cannot do it in person. You will not understand.

You do not understand, now.

No, you don't.

You can't, why would you? What could ever happen to any of you to make you feel this way? Nothing, because if anything threatened you in any way I would be there, standing between you and the pain.

I didn't mean that to sound that way. I know you all did everything you could imagine, and then some, to help me while I carried the burden. And I know you're all terribly concerned about me. I'm grateful, truly I am.

It's just that you can't understand this unless you've felt it, I think. The only person to whom I could
relate is Sméagol, and he's gone. He had to go. Sometimes I think I would have preferred to fall with him. But then I would have missed so much – Aragorn's coronation, and coming home – I never would have seen any of you dear hobbits again, and I would never have been able to forgive myself for that. But now that I'm tired, I begin to feel like Sméagol again: thin, stretched, exhausted all the time but never able to rest.

I wonder sometimes if Sauron felt like this. He was without It for so long, he must have hurt. Apart from being evil, I mean. Sometimes I wonder if his heart was really in it, or if what he did was the only path open to him, because all he could see was the Ring. That's how it was for me at the end. Could he have done anything differently at all?

I suppose Bilbo must feel the way I do, to an extent, he's always tired. But he gave up the Ring of his own accord, and he used it with pity and kindness, so it's left him be. He is tired, but he has peace, in his own way. I don't have peace.

You all have peace here, or you will have. Sam, you have Rose, and little Elanor. And there will be a little Frodo, and a Goldilocks, and more; I cannot see clearly, but I know you will have a large, happy family. Merry and Pippin, you will, of course, find your loves, and your families and homes. You will be happy. You are now, I know, but you will be happier.

Allow me to find my peace. Please, my dearest friends, let me go alone this time. You conspired against my leaving once, for which I am forever grateful, but now it is time for me to move on. I –

Rose stopped reading. "That's all there is."

Sam took the letter from her and looked it over before handing it to Merry and Pippin. For a long time they were all silent.

"His handwriting's shaky." Merry pointed to the lower portion of the letter, where Frodo's normally bold hand seemed to have wandered a little over the page. "And the ink is smudged, look. He must have cried."

Rose nodded. "I found the letter scrunched up behind the bookcase. I suppose he must have forgotten it was there."

Sam took the letter from Pippin, smoothing it out with his hands as if he could somehow rid it of all the residual creases. Tears were shining in his eyes.

"I suppose he couldn't get the words right." Pippin's voice shook, and Merry put an arm about his shoulders comfortingly. "He couldn't find a way to tell us he was going."

Sam nodded, putting the letter down tenderly on Frodo's desk and reaching for his wife's hand, which he clutched tightly. "He didn't need to."

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