Out of the depths Chapter 1

by lindahoyland

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Chapter 1

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Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Psalm 88.6- The Bible.

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With grateful thanks to Raksha

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Faramir could still hardly believe it. Aragorn was dead. How could he have let it happen, that the King should be cut down before his very eyes? Bitterly, he berated himself for trusting Khan Janab and agreeing that they should visit Harad with only a small escort.

They had been riding through a narrow valley with a steep precipice either side when a band of Haradrim had appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, and ambushed them. Faramir had seen a sword slice across Aragorn's chest and the King fall from his horse, not to the ground, but down into the abyss. They had not even had a chance since their assailants outnumbered them five to one and had harried them fiercely. Faramir had refused to lose his men along with his lord, and ordered them to retreat. Their Rohan-bred horses were swifter than those of their assailants and eventually they had managed to evade their pursuers.

Faramir wished he had fallen with his lord, the man who had saved his life and been father, brother, friend and King to him. He knew he must try to live. Gondor needed him, his wife and children needed him; and young Eldarion would need his protection and instruction. Yet Faramir's heart was surely about to break under the weight of his great grief.

It was growing dark and he had finally ordered his men to rest. He would not, could not sleep

"My lord?" Beregond, the Captain of his Escort, interpreted his thoughts. "You have eaten nothing. Will you not take food and rest?"

"I thank you for your concern, friend, but I need some time alone."

"We understand, my lord. We all loved him too."

Beregond melted back into the shadows.

Faramir felt a sudden overwhelming urge to return to where Aragorn had fallen. Maybe to stand at the spot would help him accept the tragedy. The assassins had long since vanished. He ought at least to be able to tell the Queen where her husband had breathed his last. The moon was bright and his horse had rested and grazed sufficiently to bear him again.

"My lord, are you sure this is wise?" Beregond pleaded, as Faramir saddled Iavas.

Faramir was past caring whether or not his actions made sense. "I will return," he said curtly. "Do not attempt to follow me."

The Steward rode until he reached the site of the ambush and then dismounted. He quickly
realised how their attackers had managed to remain concealed. The sheer drop at the side of the road was an illusion, for a broad ledge ran several feet below the edge. He stood at the side of the road lost in thought. He wanted to weep, but no tears would come, so deep was his anguish.

Then he heard it, a weak cry like some wounded animal, maybe a kitten. Though what a kitten would be doing here, Faramir had no idea. The cry came again, this time, Faramir realised it was no animal. He lowered himself over the ledge.

"Faramir!"

He knew that voice, weak and frail though it sounded! Faramir's heart soared with joy.

In the moonlight, he beheld a shadowy form crawling painfully towards him on all fours and groaning softly in agony.

Faramir dropped to his knees beside the King. Aragorn was alive.

"Help me!" Aragorn whispered.

"I am here, I will not leave you," said the Steward. He was no Healer, but he could tell that the King was seriously wounded. Blood covered his clothing and he appeared so weak that he could scarcely summon the strength to speak. Faramir gently cradled the wounded King in his arms.

"You came!" Aragorn whispered. "Tell Arwen and the children I love them. I love you too, ion nîn."

"You shall tell them yourself," Faramir said firmly. "By the love I bear you, I swear that I shall return you to them!"

"Water!" Aragorn whispered more weakly than ever.

Faramir fortunately had his water skin with him. He uncorked it and held it to Aragorn's parched lips and supported his friend while he swallowed.

Aragorn drank deeply then slumped back in his arms.

Faramir lacked training in the arts of healing, but he had helped care for his men and had tended Aragorn before when his King had been sorely hurt and no other help was available. He knew he must first try to discover how badly his friend was injured. He felt Aragorn's pulse, which he was certain should not be so weak and rapid. He then placed a hand on the King's forehead, which felt clammy with fever. "Where are you hurt, mellon nîn?" he enquired.

Aragorn stared at him with a glassy gaze, making a supreme effort to concentrate. "Sword cut across my chest," he murmured. "Managed to staunch it with my cloak – also hit my head and twisted my ankle-can't stand."

The moonlight fortunately provided sufficient illumination for Faramir to see clearly. He gently pulled aside Aragorn's torn clothing to reveal a deep gash across his lord's chest. Even to an inexperienced eye, it was clear that the wound needed to be thoroughly cleansed and then stitched. Faramir had the means to do neither. He gently felt the flesh surrounding it Much to his alarm it was hot to the touch. The wound was becoming infected. "I will go and fetch help," he said.

"No," muttered Aragorn, grabbing hold of his sleeve. "Don't leave me, so cold!"

The Steward realised he could not leave his friend and lord here alone. What if Aragorn fell over the precipice in his confused state of mind? And if Aragorn were to die here, under strange stars,
with none at his side to offer comfort, Faramir would never forgive himself. He would somehow have to bear Aragorn to safety.

Suddenly, the moon went behind a cloud, plunging the ledge into darkness. It was too perilous to move without light. One false move could easily plunge them both into the abyss beneath them.

Aragorn's teeth started to chatter. The days in Harad were exceedingly hot, but the nights were cold, especially for a sick and wounded man. Faramir unfastened his light cloak, and drew it around Aragorn. He clasped his wounded lord in his arms. "Fear not," he said, "I will not leave you while I draw breath!"

Aragorn sighed then fell into a feverish doze.

Faramir could do nothing, but wait for the dawn and try to offer what warmth and comfort he could to his injured King.

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A faint light was visible in the East. The last few hours had seemed endless for the Steward, cramped on the ledge with his badly injured friend. Aragorn at least still lived. He had woken several times to beg for water, or mutter feverishly while clutching at Faramir's hand, or to feebly lash out at some imagined terror. Within the next hour, it should be light enough to attempt to leave the ledge. But who would give Aragorn the expert care he needed, should they safely rejoin Beregond and his men? Aragorn was their Healer. It had seemed foolish to bring anyone else while they had his great knowledge of the healing arts to guide them. Now, alas, even the King's healing supplies were at the bottom of the cliff. Faramir tried to flex his stiff muscles without disturbing the sleeping King. He knew he must not despair, but hope was fading rapidly.

The Steward's keen hearing suddenly detected the sound of approaching hoof beats. His heart soared. Beregond must have decided to disobey his foolish orders and follow him! He looked up, only to see a scarlet banner decorated with a serpent. The treacherous Haradrim had come to determine that Aragorn was dead. Alas! What fools they had all been! Gondor would lose both her King and her Steward at one fell stroke. He reached for his sword. He could at least die fighting. He would sooner take both Aragorn's life and his own then be put to torment by these murdering cowards!

TBC

_A/N This is a version of a ficlet written for the AA Group Prompt "Deep" which forms the first part of a new two part story. I decided it was time to return to my angst writing roots for a while_.

_If you enjoy drabbles check out my LJ where I am posting some new ones on the subject of "Food and Drink"._

_A Tale of Telcontar._
Out of the depths They that watch for the morning

Chapter Notes

Out of the depths

My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. - Psalm 130.6

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Faramir rose, albeit with some stiffness, and stood astride his wounded king, sword bared and ready.

"Lord Faramir, we come in peace!"

The Steward recognised Khan Janab in the grey early morning light. The First Khan of all Harad was peering cautiously over the cliff.

"Do you think I will believe you after what your men have done to my lord!" Faramir retorted. He thought bitterly of all that Gondor suffered from the Haradrim in the Ring War: all the men and good comrades whom the Haradrim killed, not to mention the arrow that felled him. Since then, though, relations had improved and the ambassador from Harad to Gondor had even become a good friend of his, but how could he trust the Khan after all that had happened this day?

"You have every right to be angry, Lord Faramir," said Janab calmly. "They are not my men, though, but followers of my kinsman, who would overthrow me as First Khan. Some of my warriors encountered them yesterday and brought them to me, where they were made to reveal their wicked acts against your lord. They sought to provoke war between our peoples. They have seen their last sunrise. We rode in all haste with my personal physician to see if King Elessar yet lived. See, Lord Faramir, our weapons are sheathed; we seek only to aid you. By guest-right and treaty we are bound to assure your safety. At least, let my healer see if he can aid your King! Behold, your men are with us!" he gestured behind him. Beregond came forward together with several of his men.

"He speaks the truth," said Beregond. "When your horse returned without you last night, we set out to search for you and encountered the Khan and his men who were looking for the King."

"I will permit the healer to come down," said Faramir, though he kept his hand on his sword.

An old, but surprisingly agile man with a long white beard clambered down the slope.

"I am Talib, physician to Janab the Glorious, Greatest of Khans, and his father before him," he
said in heavily accented Westron. "Tell me what you know of your lord's hurts."

"My lord was conscious when I found him," answered Faramir, hoping this robed elder was the true physician he claimed to be. "He told me he had been stunned when he fell, but he seemed lucid until fever overcame him. I think a wound on his chest caused the fever. I have given him water and tried to keep him warm."

The healer knelt beside the unconscious Aragorn and swiftly examined him. "He is a very strong man. He should live with proper care," he pronounced. "Our glorious Khan has made camp nearby. We will take your lord there, and I will tend his wounds."

Faramir's heart soared. His stiffness and weariness no longer troubled him.

Janab's men swiftly constructed a litter. Faramir watched anxiously as they secured ropes around Aragorn and carefully raised him to the surface. Janab offered him a horse, but he chose instead to walk alongside Aragorn as they carried him for about a half a league.

The Khan's men carried Aragorn inside the second largest of the tents and laid him on a pile of sheepskins, then covered him with a silken sheet. Aragorn moaned softly, but did not open his eyes.

"Would you care for refreshment, Lord Faramir?" asked Janab, with the hospitality typical of his people.

"Later, thank you, my Khan, I do not wish to leave my King's side," said Faramir, though in truth he was very thirsty.

"You can drink some sherbet tea and remain with him," said Janab, gesturing for a servant to bring some. "I will leave Talib now to tend your lord."

Faramir hastily swallowed the refreshing drink. He knelt beside Aragorn while the healer cut away his ruined shirt and tunic and gently removed the makeshift bandages to reveal a deep and ugly gash across his chest. When Talik began to clean and stitch the wound, Aragorn started to struggle and cry out.

"Easy now, the healer is trying to aid you," Faramir soothed, clasping Aragorn's restless hands in his own. "I am beside you, you are safe now."

"That should do," said Talib, rubbing salves and a generous amount of honey across the gash, and wrapping a bandage around it. "Our warriors' blades are smeared with a venom that induces fever, but the fact you gave your lord water and kept him warm has saved his life. The fever should gradually abate. I need to take refreshment now. Our illustrious lord has offered the use of his own body servants to wash and clothe your King in fresh garments while I am gone."

"Thank you," said Faramir, "but I would prefer to tend my King myself together with my captain, if you could send for him. I would be grateful if you could provide some clean garments for my lord." Knowing Aragorn as he did, Faramir was sure the King would be far from happy to have strangers change his clothing and gossip about such matters as the whiteness of his skin compared to the Khan's, or the length of his limbs.

Beregond was the first to arrive. "How is the King?" he enquired anxiously.

"The healer has dressed his wound and hopes his fever will break soon," said Faramir. "He needs changing into clean clothing now, if you will assist me?"

"Gladly, my lord," said Beregond, beaming at the good tidings.
The Khan's servants brought a bowl of hot water, cloths, towels, and an assortment of garments. They placed their burdens on the ground, then bowed low and departed.

Faramir and Beregond were relieved to find no other hurts on Aragorn apart from a few bruises. Soothingly telling him what they intended to do, they bathed him and salved his bruises, before clothing him in a pair of loose cotton breeches of the sort favoured by Janab's people to wear beneath their robes. They covered Aragorn with light silken covers and pulled them up to his chin. Aragorn's eyes occasionally flickered open for a few seconds, but he accepted their ministrations without trying to struggle and sipped from a cup of water Faramir held to his lips.

Talib returned, just as Faramir was telling Beregond to seek food and rest with the other men. "You should rest too, my lord," he counselled. "There is little more I can do for your King now, save bathe his brow and coax him to drink whenever he awakens."

"I shall not leave him," Faramir repeated.

Talib smiled wryly. "Perhaps you will be able to coax him to swallow my medicines then?" he said. "I can see that your lord trusts you."

"He is not only my liege, but also my friend," explained Faramir. "He has saved my life on more than one occasion."

Together they sat keeping vigil at Aragorn's bedside, bathing his brow and coaxing him to drink draughts of water and healing herbal infusions.

"The wound is draining now," said Talib several hours later, applying more honey to it. "The fever is abating. You should rest, Lord Faramir, you are so weary, you can scarcely keep your eyes open."

Faramir was about to protest when Aragorn opened his eyes and looked at him with recognition. "Where am I?" he enquired. "I remember men with swords then falling and pain everywhere. My mind reached out to you. Then you were there. I think I slept. Faramir, what ails you? You look pale!"

"You were attacked by some Southron rebels," Faramir explained clasping his lord's hand. "You fell over the cliff edge. I feared that you were lost. I felt compelled to seek you once we had evaded our pursuers. That must have been when your mind reached out me, though I feared I could only tell your lady where you had fallen when I found you. To my joy you lived, but I could not raise you to the surface. Khan Janab came to our aid at dawn, bringing a healer with him. You are safe now, and will soon be well again." Supporting Aragorn's head, he held a drink to his lips. Aragorn drank deeply, and then fell into a deep sleep.

"He will recover now," said Talib, tucking the covers more securely round his patient. He called to the servants, who entered carrying more sheepskins. Swiftly they made up a bed for Faramir beside his lord's. Another servant brought Faramir a plate of what tasted like mutton stew, together with more of the sherbet tea. The Steward found he was surprisingly hungry now. As soon as he had eaten, he fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

"How do our guests fare?" Janab entered the tent and enquired of Talib who remained keeping watch.

"The Lord Elessar's fever has broken," said the healer. "The Lord Faramir is resting. They should be fit to ride home ere the next full moon."

"I have come to admire these Men of Gondor," said Janab.
"Indeed, most noble Khan," said Talib. "Their loyalty to each other runs very deep. The lord Faramir loves his King as deeply as a son loves his father and even his servants are deeply devoted to their lord."

Janab regarded the sleepers noting how even in slumber, Faramir had his hand stretched out towards Aragorn as if to protect him "Did you know, Talib, that Lord Faramir's father ruled Gondor before Lord Elessar?" he enquired.

"No, my Khan," I did not."

"Most wondrous that the King allowed Lord Faramir not only to live, but to marry and beget heirs while holding high office. Even more wondrous is how Lord Faramir repays that trust. Would that my kinsmen were so loyal!" Janab murmured more to himself than Talib. "Care for them well!" he ordered and strode from the tent.

Talib checked Aragorn's pulse again and content that his patient was on the mend settled himself on a cushion softly humming the words of an old ballad. "Statesman, yet friend to truth! of soul sincere, In action faithful, and in honour clear; Who broke no promise, serv'd no private end, Who gain'd no title, and who lost no friend."

The End

A/n. The "old ballad" is actually taken from a poem by Alexander Pope.

This is an extended version of a prompt story "Deep" written for the AA Group.

A big thank you to everyone who reviewed.

I hope to post more of Coastal Tales soon and embark on a sequel to "Time to Reap".

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!