First Meeting

by lindahoyland

First Meeting
A life in the Balance

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These characters all belong to the estate of J.R.R. Tolkien. This story was written for pleasure and not for financial gain. Some lines are taken directly from the book.

With special thanks to J for all her help and kindness.

He was weary beyond measure after the battle and the events that preceded it and wanted nothing more than to retire to his tent and fall into an exhausted sleep but now the Wizard was making yet further demands.

"The Steward's son, Lord Faramir lies stricken and close to death within the Houses of Healing," Gandalf told him," One of the oldest of the women who are tending him, reminded me the hands of the King are the hands of a healer, so with you alone lies any hope of recovery.

He hesitated, thinking of Denethor long ago before this younger son was born, his bitter enemy and rival, once it was clear that Ecthelion preferred the counsels of Captain Thorongil over those of his own son, and then Boromir, a brave warrior but fatally flawed by his pride who would have most likely challenged his claim to the throne, which needed to succeed if he were ever to win the hand of his beloved Arwen.

"Come!" Gandalf urged, "It would be most expedient if you saved the life of the only one who yet could stand in your way, though I believe he would welcome your return, though who knows now that he is ruling Steward? Faramir is much loved by the people of Gondor, who would repay you with their gratitude if you saved at least one of their favourite sons."

Aragorn was sorely tempted to point out to the Wizard that if expediency ruled here, as it so often did for Gandalf, the death of a possible rival would serve as well.

"He is a good friend of mine and has been since his youth," Gandalf explained before Aragorn could reply that he would do what he could, adding as if as further bait, The Hobbit Meriadoc and the Lady Eowyn also lie within stricken by the Black Breath."

"I will come." Aragorn said tersely, disliking the attempt to manipulate him as the Wizard should know he would never deny help to any in need. He had come to love the Hobbits dearly and admire their courage and resourcefulness. As for Lady Eowyn, he blamed himself for her current plight, for although he had never encouraged her attentions, maybe if he had found a gentler way of telling her that he could never return her love, she would not have ridden despairingly into battle.

Aragorn, clad simply in a grey cloak, with no other adornment save the green jewel he wore on his breast, went up to the city accompanied by Gandalf, Eomer and Prince Imrahil.

He was greeted enthusiastically by the Hobbit, Pippin, who grasped his hand and greeted him warmly, somewhat to the consternation of the very proper Prince of Dol Amroth, yet the young Hobbit's warmth heartened him and restored his flagging energy.

He had intended to try and save those he knew and loved first but when the healers took him to see Merry, Lady Eowyn and Faramir, he knew that though all three were gravely ill, there was little time left for Faramir and if any hope were to remain for his survival, he must help him now.

In truth he doubted his ability to save any of them, if only Lord Elrond were here with his
In truth he doubted his ability to save any of them, if only Lord Elrond were here with his centuries of skill in the healing arts!

Overwhelmed by weariness and sorrow, he swayed slightly. Eomer, who was beside him, caught his arm and steadied him.

"First you must rest, surely, and at the least eat a little?"

How he loved Eomer at that moment, to be concerned about his welfare, when the life of his only sister hung by a mere thread. He knew then that somehow he must save those that only the hands of the King could succour. He would need athelas though if he were to aid them.

A long conversation with the garrulous Ioreth served only to waste precious moments and confirm that she did not know if athelas was to be had in the Houses, hardly surprising as unless in the hands of the King, it was useful only for curing such minor complaints as women's headaches.

Aragorn shed his cloak and with Eomer's and Imrahil's help also his armour, as he sensed a long and potentially draining night lay ahead. After telling the women who were there tending to the sick to heat water, he washed his hands and went to Faramir's bedside. It seemed that the Steward's son was much loved, as the room seemed full of people, many of whom were weeping.

He would dearly have loved to dismiss them all as healing was hardly a spectator sport and they made his own doubts that he could actually help Faramir intensify as the spectators watched his every move as if expecting some sort of instant miracle, which if it failed to materialise would leave him a laughing stock. He dared not ask them to leave though, for if Faramir were to die, at least they would witness that he played no part in the death of his possible rival.

"I know you will help Lord Faramir, Strider. He is very nice for one of the big folk and I really like him, then you'll help Merry too, I know!" Pippin said trustingly while the others, apart from his companions muttered amongst themselves. His sharp hearing made out such comments as "Whatever is the city coming to when they send for those Northern rangers to tend the sick? He's no right to be near Lord Faramir, who does he think he is as our best healers cannot help our Lord. Has he come to gloat over our loss as there is nothing he could possibly do to help ?" None of it made his task easier.

He unlaced the neck of the young man's sweat soaked nightshirt to examine the wound he was suffering from. It crossed his mind the fever wracked man might be more comfortable without the drenched garment, but with so many women present, it seemed removing it might humiliate him, if he ever awoke to find out, so he merely pulled aside the bandage covering his shoulder to reveal a deep wound to the muscle. He had expected it to be the cause of the fever, yet the wound was clean and already starting to heal, a matter, which puzzled Imrahil greatly given his nephew's condition as he had tended him when he was brought in from the battlefield.

It was clear that Faramir could only be suffering from the Black Breath, which was a deadly condition with little hope of a cure, unless maybe there was some athelas in this place.

The Herb Master entered only to confirm what the garrulous Ioreth had told him, that they did not keep supplies of the herb as it was of little use.

Gandalf demanded that they should search until some be found.

Aragorn took the young man's hand and noted sadly that his pulse was weak and rapid as he struggled to breathe. Dipping a cloth in the freshly heated water, he bathed Faramir's sweat soaked brow.

Gandalf had told him how Faramir had been sent on a near suicide mission by his father with cruel
words that he should have died in Boromir's place his only he returned wounded, Denethor had lost his wits and decided to burn himself on a funeral pyre taking his son with the last minute intervention of Pippin and Gandalf had saved Faramir from being burned alive.

Aragorn suddenly felt overwhelmed with compassion towards this young man whom life had dealt a series of grievous blows. He must have been heartbroken at the loss of his only brother, as from Boromir he had learned they were very close and such grief combined with his father's disdain must have hurt him deeply making him very susceptible to the Black breath when the Nazgul drew near.

Faramir more closely resembled Denethor as Aragorn remembered him in his youth, rather than Boromir. He had the black hair and carven features of those of pure or almost pure, Numenorean lineage. This was the man who if he lived would hold Aragorn's fate in his hands. His supposedly grey eyes were closed and framed by exceptionally long lashes which gave him a very vulnerable look as they served to highlight that for one of his people, he was yet very young. He looked so helpless lying there, another innocent sacrifice in the war ravaging Middle Earth.

"Poor Faramir!" Imrahil lamented, "He always did his duty and fought bravely to defend the country he loved, but he is a man of peace and learning who holds no love for the sword unlike his brother!"

Faramir seemed to be growing weaker by the minute as his laboured breathing slowed. It would take a miracle to save him now.

TBC

_A/N I felt that I needed to tell my own version of this story as it is important to the sequels I have written._

_I was furious that this scene although filmed was never shown as I badly wanted to see it. A still is on my profile page._
Aragorn suddenly dropped on his knees and knelt by Faramir's side. He placed one hand on the sweat soaked brow and clasped the other which lay limply on the coverlet in his own, seeking to somehow connect with the dying man.

"Faramir, Faramir!" he called, "Wake up, come to me!"

Faramir made no reply but was there was just the slightest pressure on Aragorn's hand as if some corner of the sick man's mind responded or was it just wishful thinking on the part of his would be healer?

Aragorn reached out, using the gift of his Line, seeking the younger man's Spirit with his own. He could sense great weariness and despair, a wounded soul that had endured too much and was now willing to embrace death as a welcome release from his grief and pain.

Aragorn felt as if he were trying to hold a drowning man who was being swept away by the current.

He felt such overwhelming compassion for this man of sorrows and found himself willing his own strength into him, an ability he knew he possessed, but which Elrond had warned him was far too dangerous to use, especially without athelas.

Over and over he called Faramir's name as he searched for the lost and wounded spirit to bring him back.

He was oblivious to all else, what had begun, as a favour for the Wizard had become a highly personal quest. He wanted, nay needed to save this man.

He could sense now that here was a man of quality, a man that Gondor needed and that he would need too if he ever became King. He would value this man's friendship and the opportunity to try and make up to him for all he had lost or been denied.

When Boromir died, Faramir should have been named as heir to the Stewardship and Captain General of the Army in his stead but Denethor obviously had prized this younger son so little that even his birthright was denied him as he was still but a Captain.

Aragorn's strength began to wane and he turned grey with weariness to the alarm of his companions. He continued to call Faramir, but now his voice was so faint it seemed that he too was wandering in some dark vale calling for one who was lost.

He looked as if he were about to collapse and Eomer placed a hand on his friend's shoulder to
prevent him from falling.

"Strider!" Pippin exclaimed anxiously, "Are you alright!" Aragorn did not hear he was so locked in the healing trance.

Alarmed, Gandalf shook his protégé, "You must stop this!" he ordered. "You have tried and no man could do more, but to persist, you will risk you own life and you are needed for far greater deeds! Faramir is a worthy man but not so much that you should hazard your own life for him!"

Roused from his trance, Aragorn turned on his mentor, eyes flashing, "I shall do this thing!" he snapped, "And my will not be gainsaid! What I have begun, I will finish!"

Pippin shivered, this was not Strider, the somewhat dour and reticent guide whom he had grown to love once he knew the man's true worth but someone altogether different with his newfound air of authority. He would not like to ever feel the man's wrath directed against himself as he feared he would be seared by the fire in his eyes.

As if there had been no interruption, Aragorn resumed calling Faramir.

Faramir lost in dark dreams and gripped by the fever, which threatened to consume him, was dimly aware that someone was calling him but he was weary, so very weary, that he lacked the will to respond. He longed only for death so that he could be reunited with Boromir; the only person apart from his mother whom he had ever felt truly loved by.

They had been inseparable, best friends as well as brothers and Boromir had always protected his little brother, even though he had never delighted in the arts of warfare any more than Boromir had enjoyed books.

He could hear other voices calling now as a sense of peace enveloped him and he felt he was being drawn towards a tunnel in which a bright light seemed to beckon him to the other side.

"You will never be as good as your brother, yet I would have you both beside me!" That was Denethor's voice, yet what was his father doing here? Was he too no longer amongst the living as this surely was somewhere beyond the circles of this world?

"My dear son! You are so precious, too precious to be here yet!" That surely was his mother's voice; strange he should remember it so well after thirty years.

"Faramir, go back, you are needed by your King, he is a good man and you can trust him. You will always be with me, little brother though you remain on Arda for a while yet!" That voice was Boromir's, Faramir now wanted more than ever to join him as there was no doubt now that they would be reunited in death.

He heard other voices too, those of his loyal men whom he had led out to die at Osgiliath and seen fall all around him.

Aragorn realised he was losing Faramir as the death rattle was now in his throat and once or twice he had stopped breathing completely only to be kept alive by the sheer force of Aragorn's will but it was becoming harder to keep him alive as his own strength waned.

He would have swooned had he not felt steadying hands on his shoulders, supporting him, Eomer's no doubt as he sensed his friend nearby.

A young boy ran into the room pushing towards Aragorn, carrying a cloth, tightly grasped in his hand. "It is kingsfoil, Sir," he said, but not fresh I fear. It must have been culled two weeks ago at least. I hope it will serve, Sir?"
He then caught sight of Faramir and burst into tears.

Pippin hastened to his side and placed a comforting arm around him, "Don't worry, Bergil!" he said, "Strider is very good at almost everything, if anyone can cure, Faramir, he can!"

As if revived by the very presence of the athelas, Aragorn turned to the boy and smiled at him, "It will serve," he said. "The worst is now over. Stay and be comforted!"

He then took two of the dried leaves and breathed on them and then crushed them in his hands. He then cast the leaves into a bowl of steaming water, which stood, on the table by Faramir's bedside and straightaway a living freshness filled the room, filling it with joy.

Aragorn now stood tall and strong as one invigorated and his eyes smiled as he held the bowl in front of Faramir's face and called him again.

Faramir suddenly felt himself being pulled back through the tunnel again and the bright light faded. He tried to reach out towards his mother and brother but they seemed to be moving further and further away from him as he was forced back into the world of the living. Another, unknown hand reached out towards him and he grasped it as an unfamiliar yet compelling voice called his name and the air was filled with a wonderful fragrance.

The voice called his name again and this time he knew who it was that called him, as he had seen him many times in his dreams. It was the heir of Elendil, the long lost King of Gondor and Amor!

Faramir could no longer resist the summons, he wanted to see the King, the man who called him repeatedly and yet he feared to meet the man and offer his heart as his foresight sensed great danger surrounding him.

Would his heart not be broken again by the loss of yet another he loved, for he knew should the King return, an event he had dreamed of and foreseen, he would offer him unquestioning love and fealty as this man, mightier by far than Denethor, would be the long desired saviour of Gondor. Yet how could he not answer the call of his King?"

Aragorn waited, dimly aware of Ioreth chattering in the background. He had kept Faramir alive long enough for some athelas to be found as that herb in his hands alone could cure Faramir of the Black Breath.

Faramir was no longer struggling to breathe and the flush of fever was leaving his cheeks. He should awaken any moment now. Aragorn decided it was best not to tell him yet who he was.

Better to wait until he was stronger when he would decide either to recognise him as King or dismiss him as a Pretender as his ancestor Arvedui had been rejected in the past. From what he knew of Faramir's father and brother, the latter seemed the most likely outcome as the Council would follow his lead when he made his claim to the crown.

Faramir then stirred, slowly opened his eyes and looked at Aragorn who was still bending over him, smiling at him encouragingly.

Faramir first looked dazed, then as his eyes focussed he looked directly at Aragorn with such knowledge and love in his eyes that Aragorn was amazed. He felt even more drawn to this man as a kindred soul, whatever he decided in the future concerning the return of a King to Gondor.

TBC
A/N A big thank you for your reviews. I am delighted by the response to this short story.

In answer to your queries.

I would never leave a story without a proper conclusion, I just have a tendency to forget to add "TBC"!

Aragorn would not refuse to help Faramir. He is just very tired, unsure if he can do anything and annoyed at Gandalf's attempts to manipulate him before he even had chance to answer. He says in the book that he has only come because Gandalf begged him to.

All my stories link with each other and can either be read separately or as one long story.

Boromir does not acknowledge Aragorn as King in the book and Faramir tells Frodo in "The Window on the West" that they had not yet come to the "pinch". He seems to think that Boromir would not accept a King easily.

A Beta reader is someone who checks your story for mistakes before you post it.

I would never think anyone writing a story about this same subject was copying me, as after all the plot is Tolkien's.

I agree everything could not have been fitted into the film but I feel this scene was vital for if Aragorn is not acknowledged as King by the Ruling Steward, he appears to be staging a Coup! Peter Jackson has announced a plan to release deleted scenes in two or three years, so we will just have to keep hoping to finally see this scene.
Faramir whispered through parched lips, "My Lord, you called me. I come. What does the King command?"

Aragorn felt breathless with awe and was so amazed that he almost dropped the bowl he was holding. Hastily, he placed it on the bedside table. However did Faramir know who he was as he had never seen him before?

"Walk no more in the darkness, but awake!" Aragorn told him, holding a glass to his lips so he could drink. "You are weary. Rest awhile and take food and be ready when I return."

His mind was full of questions but now was not the right time to ask them. He needed a long talk with Faramir once he was stronger as he owed it to him to tell him about the last moments of his brother. Also he would like to get to know this younger son of Denethor’s.

"I will, Lord," said Faramir shyly. "For who would lie idle when the King has returned?"

There it was again, the acknowledgement of his claim to kingship. If he were to survive the coming battle he would owe this man a dept of gratitude which could never be repaid as by his acknowledgement the way was now opened for him to become King of the reunited Kingdom of Gondor and Arnor and win the hand of his beloved Arwen.

He grasped Faramir's hand in unspoken thanks and instantly Faramir tried to lift it to his lips to kiss in fealty.

"Farewell then for a while!" said Aragorn. "I must go to others who need me."

With tears in his eyes he bent and kissed Faramir on the brow and turned and left the room but not before telling the Healers to bring a nourishing broth for Faramir and see that he was bathed and that his sweat soaked nightshirt and bed linen were changed to make him more comfortable.

The garrulous Ioreth naturally had to have the last word "King! Did you hear that? What did I say? The hands of a healer I said!"

Aragorn smiled ruefully, so much for his attempt to come into the city unnoticed, as now he was certain all of Minas Tirith would be aware of his coming.

But most importantly, he had saved Faramir and he hoped if the Valar saw him through the coming war that he could rule with this man as his Steward by his side.

Faramir lay gazing after him, his mind filled with conflicting emotions, joy that the long awaited
King had returned combined with horror at his own numerous albeit unavoidable lapses of etiquette.

He shivered as the nightshirt he woe felt cold and damp now that the fever had broken.

Whatever would the King think that he had been unable to stand and bow to him, or would he be insulted that he was wearing only this sweat soaked nightshirt and not his velvet court robes, which he was certain were the correct attire for greeting a King in? He had been taught to wear them when Theoden of Rohan visited his father and this man was a greater King by far.

Then had he addressed him correctly, should he have said Your Majesty?

His musings were interrupted when two young apprentice healers came to bathe him and change his bedding and nightshirt. The Times must be grave indeed if no others could be spared to attend to him, as it was usual for only the most senior healers to tend the ruling family even if only for the most basic nursing needs.

Although he knew he needed their help, being too weak still to do anything for himself, he flushed scarlet when they undressed him, kind and discreet as they were, as he hated being unclothed in front of others. He supposed he should be thankful they had not sent Ioreth or any of the other women who tended the sick here!

"Are you well my Lord Steward?" one of them asked, feeling his forehead for any signs of returning fever.

"Yes, I am well, thank you, but why do you address me thus? Is my father dead?" It seemed that his vision was correct. His father must have fallen in the great battle he knew was coming.

Neither of the young men would look him in the eye as one mumbled. "Yes he is dead, my Lord Steward, I offer my sincere condolences."

"How did he die?" Faramir asked as a clean bandage was wound round his shoulder. The wound throbbed painfully as did his back. His hair felt oddly greasy and uncomfortable but as neither offered to wash it, he said nothing as it was obvious they were hard pressed with so many sick and wounded to care for.

"We do not know. "The chorused in unison almost as if reciting a pre rehearsed script. "We were working here and have not left these Houses for many days. All we know is that you are the Ruling Steward now."

Faramir was puzzled by their reticence as so many must have fallen these past days, they must by now be accustomed to the grim task of telling relatives that their loved ones had fallen.

He felt numb and too weary to press them further. Maybe the tears would come when he was alone, as he had been trained from early childhood to repress his emotions. Even when only five years old he had been told if he wept at his mother's funeral, he would be beaten afterwards. All his life he had striven for his father's approval and now he would never gain it, yet all he could feel was a vague sense of relief.

"Was that really the King just then?" asked the younger looking of the two healers, as if trying to distract him.

"Yes that was indeed our Sovereign Lord, so I shall be the last of my House to bear the office."

He replied in a muffled tone, as a clean nightshirt was drawn over his head. "Gladly do I surrender the White Rod to him."
One of the healers brought him some broth, tucked a cloth under his chin to protect the clean nightshirt and then fed it to him spoonful by spoonful. He felt as if he were a small child again, but then it would have been his nurse or elder brother feeding him. He hated being so helpless but the broth tasted good and at least was clothed now!

Faramir was then left to rest but sleep was slow to come to him as he kept thinking about Boromir, about his father and most of all about the King, who had returned to claim his throne after so long.

The King had said he would return to him in a while. Whatever was he going to say to him? He had not even thanked him for saving his life, another unforgivable breach of etiquette!

He had felt strongly drawn to the man who had looked at him with such kind eyes but he was the mightiest man in Middle Earth and would no doubt be even harder to please than his father!

He then thought of his loyal men who had ridden out beside him to Osgiliath and wondered how many had survived. He could see their faces and hear their screams as the enemy's arrows rained down upon them, whenever he tried to close his eyes.

Finally he fell into an uneasy sleep.

Aragorn was about to leave the Houses and seek out any others that stricken by the Black breath that needed his help. He had sent for the sons of Elrond to come and help him face the magnitude of the task at hand.

Lady Eowyn and Merry had been far easier to awaken than Faramir as he had the athelas to help him rouse them but now he was weary beyond measure for as he had told Merry, he had not slept in a bed since Dunharrow nor eaten since before dawn.

Something made him look into Faramir's room to see how his Steward was faring as the young man had been so very close to death.

He found him alone in his room, tossing in an uneasy sleep. After feeling Faramir's forehead and satisfying himself that the fever had truly left him, Aragorn lightly brushed his fingertips over the restless man's eyelids while making small circles with his thumb on his forehead.

Faramir settled into a deep untroubled sleep almost at once.

Aragorn smiled in satisfaction, he would heal now and regain his strength. He felt protective towards this young man, for had he been allowed to marry when he wished, he could easily have a son of his age by now and any child of his and Arwen's would have raven hair and grey eyes like Faramir and as Faramir had made it clear he accepted him as King, maybe soon he would be blessed with a son of his own.

Quietly he left the room. As soon as Faramir was strong enough, he would visit him and talk to him about his brother and most importantly get to know his future Steward whom he hoped would also be his friend.

The End

A/N You can read about Aragorn telling Faramir of Boromir's death in "Facing the Darkness2 an immediate sequel to this story, also on this Site, which also deals with Merry's recovery.

I have not included Merry and Eowyn in this story as I feel Tolkien deals with both in sufficient depth and Faramir's healing is the most important as he acknowledges Aragorn as King thus ensuring a smooth transfer of power and averting a possible civil war. I do touch on Eowyn's experiences in chapter 30 of "Shadow and Thought".
Tolkien does not tell us whether Eomer remained while Faramir was healed or if he went to wait at Eowyn's bedside.

I promise my readers I have no intention of ever writing slash.

I felt this story had to be written to provide some background to my stories, which explore the friendship which eventually blossoms between Aragorn and Faramir.

I am currently working on a direct sequel to "Shadow and Thought" Called "Burden of Guilt" in which Aragorn risks losing everyone he loves in one day and Faramir's friendship with the King and his very life are threatened.

The new story with feature Aragorn, Faramir, Arwen, Eowyn and Imrahil with brief appearances by other characters too.

A big thank you to all my readers for their support and very kind reviews.

As I finished Shadow and Thought on Aragorn's birthday, I thought I'd finish this story on the day the Ring was destroyed as another significant date in Tolkien's universe.

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