Coastal Tales

by lindahoyland

Notes

I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying. - Sea Fever

�� " John Masefield
I must go down to the sea again

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With grateful thanks to Raksha

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Aragorn frowned deeply at the letter he was perusing.

"What troubles you, my love?” Arwen enquired.

"There is more trouble in the coastal regions," Aragorn said grimly. "Last week there was a riot in Linhir in favour of restoring the Stewards' rule. Three people were injured; and a child almost trampled by the crowd. This week a group of farmers have refused to pay their taxes asking why should they pay tithes to a King they do not know if he really exists or not!"

"Maybe it is time you paid the coastal towns a visit?" Arwen suggested.

"We went to Dol Amroth when Lothiriel married Éomer," Aragorn protested.

"And how long were we there? All of three days, I recall. You had to hurry back to quell an Easterling attack on the borders."

"I cannot be everywhere at once!" Aragorn retorted.

"You have managed to visit realms outside your own borders," Arwen pointed out. "Why not investigate to the coastal towns while the Council is not in session and everyone is preoccupied with harvest? After the Council debate tomorrow, they will not meet again for several weeks. I would imagine you could visit most of the coastal towns and pay a call on Prince Imrahil within less than a fortnight."

Aragorn looked thoughtful. The idea of leaving Minas Tirith for a while during the heat of summer was most appealing. "It would be a gruelling trip for you, vanimelda," he said after a moment's pause." And what about Eldarion?"

"I think it would be better if you took Faramir with you," said the Queen. "Let the people see that their King and Steward support one another. That would do more to quash future rebellions than any amount of decrees!"

"I would be glad of Faramir's company, but I will miss you so, my love!" said Aragorn.

"I shall miss you too," said Arwen, "but someone has to care for Minas Tirith while you are away! Eldarion is too young to travel for days on horseback, and I do not wish to leave him. You and Faramir can travel swiftly and light."

"I bless the day I insisted you should have the same rights as Faramir and Imrahil to rule in my place,” said Aragorn.
"I have had far more experience than all three of you together," Arwen said rather smugly, thinking how she had been Lady of Imladris for the last five centuries. Presiding over the minor grievances of the citizens of Minas Tirith for two weeks would be as nothing to allocating places at table for stubborn Dwarves forced by chance to dine with arrogant Noldor.

"I fear we must postpone the hunting trip we were planning," Aragorn told his Steward as they walked back to their apartments after the Council Meeting. "The coastal towns require my presence."

Faramir swallowed hard, trying to conceal his disappointment. "Please convey my warmest greetings to my Uncle should you visit him," he said.

"No, I cannot do that," said Aragorn solemnly, "not when there is a far more appropriate man to do so!"

"And who might that be?" The hurt in Faramir's eyes was evident.

"Why his nephew, of course!" said Aragorn, grinning. "We leave in a week's time, which should allow you to visit your lady first. That is: assuming you want to come with me?"

His eyes alight with joy; Faramir hugged his friend and King.

A week later, soon after sunrise, Aragorn and Faramir met at the Great Gate, together with their escort of six Tower Guards and six men of the White Company; and prepared to depart. They carried little apart from changes of clothing and gifts for the dignitaries who would be their hosts.

Although the King and Queen had made their farewells in private, Arwen had come to watch her husband ride away. It was not a duty she relished; but at least this time Estel did not ride to war. "Take good care of my husband, Faramir," she said to the Steward. "I trust you to protect him from danger."

"I shall guard him with my life, my lady," said Faramir.

"We shall return soon," Aragorn promised his wife. "Then I shall take you and Eldarion to Ithilien for the harvest celebrations. Until then, farewell, and may the Valar protect you!"

"May the stars light your path!"

Aragorn gave the signal and with Faramir at his side, they rode away, the horses' hooves echoing on the stone in the early morning stillness.

Arwen stood gazing after them; knowing that much could happen in two weeks, brief though the time was in the lives of Men.

_A/N This is a version of a ficlet written for the AA Group Prompt "Travel" which forms the first chapter of a new series of adventures for Aragorn and Faramir as they tour the coast. The events take place two years after "A Time to Reap"_
And judgement is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.- Isaiah 59.14 – The Bible

With thanks to Raksha

At Faramir’s insistence, Aragorn sent two guards on ahead when they arrived at Linhir. After some debate the King and Steward had decided to first visit the troubled region, and then make their way along the coast, visiting the towns and villages until they reached Dol Amroth where they planned to spend a few days with Prince Imrahil before returning home.

The guards soon came back with a report that the tax rebels were to being punished that very day in the town square, but everything was under control as the Lord of Lamedon’s retainers were preventing any trouble.

“We will enter the town quietly,” said Aragorn. “I should like to see how young Lord Mardil keeps order.”

“Is that wise?” cautioned Faramir. “I know the young man is loyal, but his late father’s supporters may be behind the disturbances. Maybe we should wait until later?”

“If there is trouble in my realm, I need to understand exactly what is wrong,” Aragorn insisted. “It is not as if our wives and children are with us. We are warriors who can protect ourselves.”

Pulling their hoods around their faces, the small group rode into Linhir. The entire population appeared to be assembled before the pillory. A battered and bloodied man was being dragged to the side by two burly retainers, while two more dragged a young man, seemingly just come of age to take his place. The first man was roughly shoved onto a heap of rotten vegetables at the side.

A soldier beat a solemn roll on a drum and a man richly dressed in heavily embroidered brocade stepped forward. “Bring the second prisoner forward!” he cried. “Hador son of Valacar, you are charged with refusing to pay your taxes and your punishment is to stand for an hour in the pillory where you will be whipped with twenty five lashes while the good townsfolk may throw what they please at you!”

“The taxes ain’t fair!” the young man protested sullenly. “Why should we toil all day, and then go hungry, all on account of some King that we don’t even know is real, or but a figment of old tales?”

“Prepare him!” said Brandir roughly. Two soldiers secured the boy in the pillory, while a third drew his dagger and cut the lad’s shirt from his back. A burly man brandishing a whip came
forward, cracking it menacingly.

“That man cannot be Lord Mardil,” said Faramir. “Mardil is not yet one and twenty, while this man is at least fifty!”

“You must be a stranger to these parts,” said a man who had overheard the Steward’s remark. “Lord Mardil is away fighting on the borders of Harad. He has left his Steward, Brandir in charge in his place. Lord Mardil is a nice enough lad, but his steward...” He spat upon the ground.

Suddenly a woman appeared from amongst the crowd and threw herself in front of the boy. She thrust a leather bag towards Brandir. “I have the taxes owed, my lord,” she said. “Please take the money and spare my son! My husband is in no fit state to work,” she gestured towards the man lying on the rubbish. “If my son cannot work either, the harvest will be spoiled and we will starve!”

Brandir smiled and reached for the money, which he pocketed, pushing the woman aside. He smiled grimly. “The debt is paid, but the punishment still stands!” He gestured with the man with the whip to proceed. The whip cracked and swished through the air. The youth screamed in pain. His mother collapsed sobbing at Brandir’s feet. The steward ignored her.

“Hold! That is enough!” Aragorn stepped forward with Faramir beside him. The guards formed a protective cluster around their King.

“And who might you be?” Brandir enquired haughtily.

“Your King, Aragorn Elessar Telcontar,” said Aragorn, drawing Andúril and showing the renowned blade to the assembly. “The man has paid his debts, so under the law he goes free. And even had he not paid his debts; the punishment is hard labour, not flogging.”

Brandir shrugged. “Very well, my lord,” he said bowing low. “Since those that rioted could not be found, we sought to make an example of these three to maintain order.”

“And what sort of justice is that?” demanded Faramir.

“And who might you be?” asked Brandir.

“I am Lord Faramir, Steward of Gondor and loyal servant of the King,” said Faramir.

“It was much better when your father ruled, lad,” said a very old woman from amongst the crowd cried. “Taxes were much lower then!”

”Let it be known that I will countenance no dissent in my name! My fealty is to King Elessar,” Faramir replied sternly.

“Good people,” cried Aragorn, turning to address them. “I know times are hard, but the tithes are needed to rebuild our land, and see that none go hungry.”

“Tithe indeed!” sniffed the old woman. “The tax has trebled at your command!” The rest of the crowd murmured their agreement.

A sudden realisation dawned on Aragorn. Mardil’s Steward was taxing the people at extortionate rates, and blaming the King for the increases, while he pocketed the money himself. He turned to face Brandir, but the man was trying to slip away amidst the throng, while his men had already made good their escape. “Seize him!” he called the guards, who hurried to carry out his orders.

“Good people, I shall endeavour to right the wrongs done to you!” Aragorn promised.
A handful cheered, while the majority looked indifferent. The King turned to the woman who had tried to protect her son, who was helping her bloodied husband off the rubbish heap, assisted by the lad, whose back was disfigured by an angry weal. "Mistress, permit me to aid your kinsfolk," said Aragorn. "I am a healer."

"I can look after my own well enough, lord," said the woman. "We don’t need no help."

Aragorn looked at her for a long moment. "I will send officials from the City to take charge here," he said. "Any overpaid taxes will be returned to you. "With that, he turned and walked away.

After finding a suitable escort of former soldiers to escort Brandir to the City for trial, Aragorn departed the town. A handful of children regarded him curiously, while two women and one old man said thank you. Otherwise the people watched him leave in silence. Heavy of heart, he rode onwards.

"You have done your best," said Faramir, bringing his mount alongside Aragorn’s. "I fear some people cannot recognise a pearl before their very eyes."

"It is as much my fault as theirs," Aragorn said morosely. "I should have taken more heed of what was happening in my realm."

"Next time you come this way they will strew your path with flowers," said Faramir.

"I wonder," said the King, urging Roheryn forward.

_A/N._

*Mardil is mentioned in “Web of Treason”. He is the young son of one of the lords who plotted against Aragorn, who was allowed to keep his lands as he was serving as a loyal soldier to the King at the time.*

*I am pleased to be continuing posting my stories here again. I've been taking a break to complete a challenge which required me to write 31 prompts for “Back to Middle Earth Month”. You can read them on my LJ (Link on my profile page).*
I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;  
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The August sun beat down remorselessly upon the small group of riders travelling along the coastal road. Aragorn and Faramir had long since removed their cloaks, and given their guards permission to do likewise, but they were still sweltering in the heat of the afternoon.

The constant glimpses of the sea from the road only served to make matters worse. After the troubles in Linhir and their frosty reception, they were not greatly looking forward to the rest of their trip. Still, duty demanded that Aragorn visit all parts of his realm while at least Prince Imrahil would welcome them.

“We are not due to arrive in Belfalas until nightfall,” said Aragorn. “Maybe we could rest awhile?”

“Looking at the sea without being able to bathe in it would only make me hotter,” sighed Faramir, who rode alongside his lord.

Aragorn echoed his Steward’s sigh. Even if they were not both naturally reticent men, a king could hardly bathe in full view of every passing subject. The royal dignity had to be maintained at all times.

The party rode onwards until they approached a curve in the road. A little way ahead some trees promised much welcome shade.

“Look!” exclaimed Faramir. “That secluded cove would be perfect for a quick swim. The currents are not dangerous in these parts and we could not be observed from the road.”

Aragorn surveyed their surroundings. Faramir was right. A narrow path led down to the beach, while the trees screened the road. He called the company to a halt. ”Rest the horses awhile beneath the shade of the trees,” he said. “Lord Faramir and I wish to refresh ourselves in the
water. Take it in turns to see no one approaches.” The King dismounted from Roheryn, handing the stallion's reins to the nearest guard. He paused only to grab a towel and change of linens from his pack, before he hastened down the track leading to the sea with Faramir.

As soon as they set foot on the beach, the two men joyfully pulled off their boots and stockings. The sand felt delightfully cool beneath their feet. The salty tang of the air and aroma of seaweed immediately refreshed their spirits. Leaving a trail of scattered garments in their wake, they undressed down to their drawers and plunged into the inviting waves.

“This is bliss!” Aragorn exclaimed as he immersed himself. He felt as free as the gulls that circled overhead.

“Mmm,” was Faramir's only reply.

The two swam until they felt cooled and refreshed. Reluctantly, they left the water and then started to gather up their clothing.

“I have never known you fail to fold your garments before when going swimming!” Aragorn remarked.

“Obviously your bad influence has rubbed off on me!” Faramir retorted. He dried himself and donned his breeches. Skillfully, he dodged a playful blow from his sovereign.

“You were simply too hot to care!” Aragorn laughed while he pulled his shirt over his head. “If only we could stay here on the beach a while longer, but it would be irresponsible to leave the men waiting “

“We could always tell them to come and swim too if they wish,” said Faramir. “The horses would enjoy the water as well.”

“As ever you are wise, mellon nín!” Aragorn grinned. Without bothering to don his boots and stockings, he went to call to the guards.

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An hour or so later, the once peaceful cove was filled with men and horses frolicking in the waves. A little apart from them two figures lay drowsing in the sun. Faramir lazily opened his eyes and dug his toes deeper in the warm sand. He studied the position of the sun. It was not yet starting to sink over the horizon, so they could linger here a little longer. Belfalas could wait. The sea had gladdened his heart and he felt far more confident that they would be made welcome. He closed his eyes again and went back to sleep beside his softly snoring lord.

A/N. I am happy to be able to resume posting this story, which I assure you I’ve no intend of abandoning. You can see Whitewave’s delightful illustrations for this chapter on my LJ, link on my profile page.

If you enjoy drabbles, I post these regularly on LJ. I have several new stories planned as well as continuing this one.
Out of the mouths of babes

Chapter Notes

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Out of the mouths of Babes –Psalm 8.2

With thanks to Virtuella

Much to their relief, Aragorn and Faramir were cordially received in Belfalas, at least by its leading citizens. They arrived just before sunset and were warmly greeted by the town dignitaries who had turned out in force to welcome them, as had a handful the common folk.

They were served a delicious meal of freshly caught local fish after which they gladly retired after a day of travelling in the heat. The next morning they rose early and attended a meeting with the reeve and the local landowners at which taxes, trade tariffs and the progress made since the Ring War were discussed. Aragorn and Faramir were satisfied that all appeared to be in good order.

“You are invited to visit our school this afternoon, my lords,” said the reeve, as the meeting concluded. ”We are immensely proud of our children’s progress there. We are even able to employ two teachers, one for the older children and one for the younger. They have been eagerly preparing for your visit. This evening we have a State Banquet in your honour where you will be able to sample the diverse variety of seafood that our fishermen catch.”

“We will look forward to it,” Aragorn said politely.

“I will visit the older children,” Faramir said to Aragorn once the reeve had left. “I think I can endure badly recited Quenya poetry better than you can!”

“Surely it will not be that bad?” Aragorn replied. “I will enjoy meeting the children.”

“Wait and see,” was all that Faramir would say.

After a hearty meal and many long and tedious speeches from the leading townsfolk welcoming their honoured guests, Aragorn and Faramir felt almost too full to move. A nap would have been most welcome, but duty demanded that they visit the school. After loosening their belts and taking a short walk in the bracing sea air, they made their way towards the school.

Aragorn was taken to a schoolroom full of young children. All had been scrubbed until they almost glowed and were wearing their best clothes. He overheard the schoolmistress exhorting them to be ‘very good indeed’ just before he entered. The teacher beamed with pride as she introduced her young charges, who greeted their King very respectfully with bows and curtseys. Their expressions, though, suggested they were unimpressed by their illustrious visitor.

“Let us show our Lord King just how much we have learned,” said the schoolmistress.
A girl, who looked to be the oldest pupil in the class, rose to her feet and recited a short poem in perfect but expressionless Quenya.

Aragorn thanked her politely all the while thinking he would tell Faramir that the young children also learned to bore visitors with badly recited poetry!

A freckle-faced boy then recited all the Kings of Gondor and the dates of their reigns, followed by a tiny girl who listed all the Stewards, after which a boy with light brown hair recited the battles fought during the recent war. Another, slightly older, girl listed all the heroes of the war and their great deeds.

Aragorn tried hard to look interested, his face wearing an expression learned during long and tedious Council meetings. The difference here was that he loved children, and was determined not to hurt their feelings. He desperately tried to stifle a yawn.

“You must be very proud of the children, mistress, they know their lessons well,” the King said hastily before another child could start reciting a long list of names and dates.

“We are greatly honoured to have you visit us, my Lord King,” beamed the teacher. “The children know their geography well too and are looking forward to telling you all the rivers and cities of Gondor.”

Aragorn suppressed a groan and braced himself for another very tedious recitation. The children looked just as bored as he was. They were extremely good, though, and sat still, albeit with blank expressions. Only one little girl, who appeared to be the youngest in the class, was fidgeting and playing with her scarlet ribbon adorned dark pigtails.

“You’re not a King!” the little girl said suddenly.

A collective gasp echoed around the room. The teacher looked as if she might faint and feared to be executed any moment.

“Why do you think that? “ Aragorn asked the child mildly.

“Because you look like everyone else, and you don’t wear a crown,” said the child in a tone of utter conviction. “Everyone knows that kings wear crowns!”

Aragorn burst out laughing. “Do you have a father?” he asked the child when his mirth had subsided.

“Yes,” said the little girl.

“What does your adar do for a living?”

“He is a fisherman,” said the child proudly. “He catches lots of fish.”

“So does your adar bring his fishing nets home with him and carry them around at all times?” asked Aragorn.

“Of course not, that would be silly!” the little girl said scornfully. “He leaves his nets in his boat when he is not catching fish!”

“Just like I leave my crown at home when I am not having to carry out my official duties,” Aragorn smiled.

The child nodded sagely. “So what did your adar do?”


“He was the Chieftain of the Northern Kingdom, but he died when I was only two years old, and my mother and I went to live with the Elves. I have an idea. How would you like me to tell you a story about when I was young and the kind of lessons I had to learn?”

“Yes!” chorused the children enthusiastically.

“You had to learn lessons too?” asked the sceptical little girl.

Soon Aragorn was seated happily on the floor with several small children, including the little girl, perched on his lap, and the rest clustered around him listening intently to the King’s account of learning history from the great Glorfindel and the healing arts from Master Elrond, son of Eärendil the Mariner. He told them too of his life as a Ranger and some light hearted tales of the Hobbits. He was just about to start telling them about the Ents, thinking that trees that spoke and moved would appeal to the young, when Faramir entered the room.

After enduring an hour of Quenya poetry, the Steward had come in search of his lord. Faramir was amazed to hear joyful childish laughter coming from the room. The children and their teacher were so engrossed in the King’s stories that they did not even notice him come in.

“I think it is time for me to leave,” said Aragorn, catching sight of Faramir by the door.

The children groaned loudly.

“I promise I will visit your school again next time I come to visit your town,” said Aragorn.

“Maybe I can bring my little boy to meet you all.”

King and Steward returned to their lodging in good spirits. It seemed that the visit to Belfalas was going well.

_A/N. This is an expanded version of a story written for the AA list prompt “Laugh”._
Our people would be honoured if you were to tour our town,” said the reeve as Aragorn and Faramir emerged from the school in Belfalas.

“We should enjoy that,” Aragorn said politely.

“Tonight there will be a banquet in your honour,” the reeve continued. “Our fishermen have supplied the best of their catch. We have many varieties of sea fish as well as crab and lobster for your lordships to enjoy.”

Aragorn smiled. He was especially partial to seafood. “Your words make us hungry!” he said. “My wife will be sorry that she missed such delights.”

“Éowyn is still suspicious of seafood!” Faramir whispered as soon as the two men were alone. “I, too, am looking forward to the banquet. I wish our ladies were beside us, though.”

“So do I, but our children need them more at present,” said Aragorn. “Éldarion is running everywhere at present. Arwen fears his nurse could not catch up with him in time if there were any danger.”

“I wonder how many new words Élestelle will have learned while we are away?” Faramir mused rather wistfully.

“No doubt she will greet you with a nursery song sung in Quenya!” Aragorn teased.

“She is only not quite three yet, but I think she is exceptionally gifted,” Faramir replied. “Of course, I am not impartial!”

“She is clever and advanced for her age,” Aragorn responded. “I wonder what Arwen and Éldarion are doing as we speak?”

“Éowyn will be playing in the garden with Élestelle and Elbeth, I imagine,” said Faramir, as they followed the reeve to their lodging.

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King and Steward, together with their guards and the leading townsfolk processed along winding roads. Many people came out to greet them, some appeared simply curious, while others gaped
Aragorn and Faramir surmised that many of the country folk had little idea of who they were. A few older men, obviously veterans of the war, cheered the King and Steward. Aragorn thought he recognised one or two men who had ridden to the Black Gate with him and paused to speak them.

They rounded a bend in the road. Suddenly, a little girl, holding the hand of a youth of about seventeen summers, came forward to offer a posy of flowers to Aragorn. He reined in Roheryn rather sharply to take the blossoms from her. The great horse stumbled as a mighty hoof caught in a pothole. Aragorn kept his seat, but Roheryn’s flaying hooves caught the youth, who fell backwards with a cry, clutching his arm. Aragorn immediately dismounted, telling a guard to keep hold of Roheryn’s bridle.

“Are you hurt, lad?” he asked the boy anxiously.

“My arm!” the youth groaned.

“You need not concern yourself with these peasants, my lord,” said the reeve. He eyed the boy with obvious distaste.

Aragorn was already kneeling in the dust beside the young man and feeling the injured arm. “I fear your arm is broken,” the King pronounced.

“I will see a healer is summoned, my lord,” said the reeve looking aghast at Aragorn. “The banquet awaits us, my lord.”

“I am a healer,” said Aragorn in a tone that brokered no argument. “I feel responsible for this lad’s accident, and must endeavour to put things right as best I may. Where do you live, lad?” he asked the boy.

The youth cried out with pain.

“We dwell in the cottages yonder with our mother,” said the little girl, finding her voice. She pointed across a field to where a row of small cottages stood. “Mardil is my brother.”

“We will take Mardil home then,” said Aragorn. Faramir dismounted and helped Aragorn to gently lift the youth and set him astride Roheryn. The reeve raised his eyebrows in horror at the King and Steward’s actions.

I fear the feast will have to wait until I have tended this young man,” he told the reeve. “I would be grateful if you would ride ahead and tell the guests that we shall be delayed.”

“And you shall ride with me,” said Faramir to the little girl. “My horse is called Iavas. What is your name?”

“I’m Finnraen,” said the little girl. She looked fearfully at her brother. “Is Mardil going to die? My daddy died.”

“The King will heal your brother,” said Faramir confidently, lifting the child onto his mare and mounting behind her.

The riders soon reached Mardil’s dwelling. At the sound of the approaching horsemen, a thin, shabbily dressed woman came outside. She cried out in dismay when Aragorn and a guard lifted her whey-faced son down from his horse and carefully carried him within. “What has happened?” she cried as Aragorn laid the boy down on the bed. Faramir followed close behind with the little girl while the guards waited outside.
“Your son has broken his arm, Mistress,” said Aragorn, dismissing the guard to wait outside.

“The nice men brought us home after the horse kicked Mardil,” Finnraen added.

“Who are you, master?” asked the woman, hugging her little girl tightly.

“A healer,” Aragorn answered simply. “Can you set water to boil, please?”

The natural authority in Aragorn’s tone made her do as she was bidden without question.

Aragorn hurried back outside to fetch the satchel of healing supplies he always carried with him. After asking the woman for a cup, he measured out a dose of poppy juice and gave it to Mardil. “I need to cut off your shirt to examine your arm properly,” he told the lad once he had drunk the pain killing draught.

“Must you? I have no other!” said the boy in dismay.

“I should be able to mend it if you cut carefully, sir,” said his mother.

“That is soon remedied,” said Faramir, going outside and returning almost immediately with his pack. He rummaged inside it and drew out a clean shirt. “This might be somewhat large, mistress, but it should suffice until we can find a better shirt for your son.”

Mardil’s mother fingered the garment in wonder. ”But this is fine linen, fit for a lord!” she exclaimed.

“No matter, so long as it clothes your son,” said Faramir.

Mardil weakly nodded his agreement as Aragorn took up his dagger and cut the shirt from his body. The boy groaned when the King gently felt his arm. “It is a clean break, which should heal well,” the King pronounced. ”It needs setting though, which I fear will not be pleasant. Have you a neighbour who could look after your daughter, mistress?” He threw some crushed bark from his healing supplies into the pot of water boiling on the fire as he spoke.

“My neighbour would mind her,” said the woman. “Go, Finnraen, and stay with Mistress Elwyn until I call you.”

The little girl hesitated, casting a worried look at her brother.

“Do as mother says,” said Mardil firmly. “I will fare well enough with mother and the healer.” He had regained a little colour as the poppy juice took effect.

As soon as the child had gone, Aragorn checked Mardil’s heartbeat. Once satisfied the boy was strong enough for the gruelling procedure, he asked Faramir and the boy’s mother to hold the lad down while he set the broken bone. He worked swiftly and skilfully, but Mardil was left groaning in agony with sweat pouring from his brow. ”Easy now, lad, the worst is over now,” said Aragorn, tucking the blankets around him and starting to rub the back of his neck, using an Elven healing skill.I am only sorry you should have to suffer this.”

“It was an accident and not your fault,” said Mardil. “Will it heal quickly?”

“Do not concern yourself about anything other than getting well,” said Aragorn. He took the pot from the fire and put it on the hearth to cool. Inside was a thick syrup. “I am going to wrap your arm in a cloth and cover it with this paste,” said the King. “It will set hard to allow the bone to knit. When it falls off in about two months, you will be healed.”
“Two months!” said Mardil in dismay. “My family will starve if I cannot work, my lord!”

Faramir reached inside his tunic and withdrew his purse. He took out several coins and handed them to Mardil’s mother. She gazed at them in astonishment. “I cannot take these! This is more than we earn in a year! You must be lords of great wealth!”

“Take it!” Faramir said calmly. “It is the least we can do. Your son would not lie injured had we not come to this town.”

Mardil groaned again. Aragorn knelt beside the bed holding his hands a few inches over above Mardil’s arm, his features fixed in intense concentration. The boy sighed as the pain eased and closed his eyes. Aragorn then bandaged the arm and coated it with the sticky paste.

Mardil’s mother stared at him with growing recognition. “You are visiting this town? You have the hands that heal? My lord...you cannot be?” she gasped, sinking to her knees.

“He is the King, mother,” said Mardil sleepily. “His horse shied and kicked my arm when Finnraen gave him some flowers.”

“The King, here in my cottage tending my son?” said Mardil’s mother, turning pale.

“It was my responsibility, mistress,” said Aragorn gravely. “Rise and be at ease. We will take our leave now. If you have need of me before I depart on the morrow, please send me word. I believe your son will heal completely within a few weeks, but if he should not, send word to me and I will see that Mardil is treated in the Houses of Healing in Minas Tirith. Farewell!” With that he left the cottage, together with Faramir.

“Well, I never!” said Mardil’s mother. “Whoever would have thought the King would care so much for folk like us?”

“We may not be able to depart tomorrow,” said Aragorn when they rode away towards the long overdue feast. “It matters little, though, so long as I right the wrong I did to that boy!”

“Do not be so hard on yourself,” said Faramir. “It was hardly your fault that Roheryn shied. You are the most responsible man that I know. You care deeply for your people.”

“I try, Faramir, I try,” said Aragorn gravely. “What would I not give now for a simple supper by the fire, but again duty calls.” He glanced back over his shoulder to catch a last glimpse of the cottage before riding resolutely towards the feasting hall.

A/N I was inspired by an article I read about the cottonwood tree for Aragorn’s treatment. I am using artistic licence and assuming the Elves knew of some old world equivalent. This is a longer version of a ficlet written for the prompt “Responsibility” at the AA Group.
These characters all belong to the estate of J.R.R. Tolkien. This story was written for pleasure and not for financial gain.

Who does i’ the wars more than his captain can
Becomes his captain’s captain; - Shakespeare- Antony and Cleopatra – Act 1

With grateful thanks to Raksha and Virtuella.

A Royal Visit to Gondor’s coastal regions was mostly cause for great excitement, Aragorn and Faramir had discovered once they left Linhir. The King and the Steward had no official itinerary, but word soon spread throughout the region that they were on their way.

In many town and villages, they had been greeted by cheering crowds and invited to feast by townsfolk, “It gladdens my heart to see how the people love you,” said Faramir as they left Belfadas to the applause of cheering crowds.

“I visited these regions many years ago,” said Aragorn. “Little did I dare hope to return here one day as King and have the chance to meet people and appreciate the beauty of the ocean.” The King was in a cheerful mood, having learned that young Mardil showed no signs of fever and seemed likely to make a complete recovery.

A small girl presenting flowers to the King interrupted the conversation.

“I picked these just for you, Sir King!” the child announced, holding out a wilted posy.

“Why, thank you!” Aragorn smiled as if the flowers were the finest from the Royal Gardens.

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The next day, the Royal Party crossed into Dol Amroth where they planned to spend a few days with Faramir’s Uncle, Prince Imrahil, but first they planned to visit some of the smaller towns and settlements, starting with a fishing village right by the coast.

Much to the surprise of the King and Steward, not to mention their guards, the streets were almost deserted apart from a handful of young people. Even they appeared somewhat indifferent to their visitors. Stranger still, the streets were festooned with colourful garlands, which suggested some sort of celebration was taking place.

Neither Aragorn nor Faramir had ever sought fame, nor public adoration, but nevertheless found such a cold welcome somewhat disconcerting. Eventually, Faramir could no longer contain his bewilderment and hurt at the insult to his lord. He stopped to greet a young woman who was hurrying by with a strong lad at her side.
“Where is everyone, mistress?” he enquired. “Have your people no wish to see their King?”

“I’m sure I’m glad to meet you, my lords,” said the girl, bobbing a curtsey. “Didn’t you know, though, that it is Captain’s Day when we all celebrate our liberation? Or rather the old people who recall the day do, we just go along to enjoy the feast!”

“I’ve heard the King is a good man,” said the little boy. “But no man can compare with the great Captain!”

“I should like to know more about this Captain,” said Faramir somewhat suspiciously, fearing some threat to Aragorn’s authority.

“Come and join our celebrations then in the Great Hall,” said the woman. “We rarely have visitors in these parts, but you will be most welcome.

The local reeve greeted his visitors pleasantly enough. “Ah, King Elessar and Lord Faramir,” he said. “We are delighted you have come to join in our celebrations to honour of the great Captain who saved our children from being stolen, and enslaved by the wicked Corsairs. I wish you could have met the Captain, my lords. I was but a boy at the time, but I’ll never forget the glimpse I had of him. He looked right kingly. I wish you’d met him, a finer man there never was. Some of us wish he’d have come back. If he’d wanted to be our King and replace Lord Denethor, we’d have welcomed him, begging your pardon, my lords.”

A sudden flash of realisation struck Aragorn and he smiled.

“What could be more important than your visit here?” Faramir protested in a low voice. "Who was this man in any case? A rival claimant to your throne?"

The reeve called for silence and bade them raise their tankards for a toast. “Let us remember the deeds of the mighty Captain Thorongil and drink to his memory!” he cried.

Cheering, the people drank and burst into a rousing song.

“I have just remembered the date,” Aragorn whispered. "Today is the anniversary of the defeat of the corsairs of Umbar. It is my praises that they sing!” He shrugged his shoulders and joined in the song, with the air of polite attention that he had perfected long before Thorongil had ever come here.

Faramir’s frown faded as he realised the truth and a smile of pleasure spread across his features.

"I can see that you're a good man, Lord Elessar," said the reeve, who was more than a little drunk by now. "And if you're half the man that our Captain Thorongil was, you'll be a great king indeed!"

Struggling now to contain their mirth, Aragorn and Faramir tucked into a simple but delicious meal of fried fish washed down with good ale.

“This was Captain Thorongil’s favourite meal,” Aragorn informed Faramir with a twinkle in his eye.

“It was indeed, but how can a lad like you know that?” an old greybeard enquired of Aragorn.

“I know a man who knew the Captain as well as I know myself,” said Aragorn solemnly, causing Faramir to almost choke on his fish.

“I’m sure the reeve would have served something more fitting for fine gentlemen like yourselves,
if you had not come on Captain’s Day,” said the old man.

Aragorn finally swallowed the fish and smiled at the greybeard. “This suits us very well,” he said. “Very well indeed.”

TBC

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