Through all the Changing Scenes of Life

by lindahoyland

Notes

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Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.

For God preserves the souls of those
who on his truth depend;
to them and their posterity
his blessing shall descend. – Nahum Tate (1652-1715)

Aragorn had always known this day would come, for all mortal creatures must die in the natural order of things. Yet as the years passed, sometimes it had seemed that Roheryn would always be there.

The King had ceased to ride the old horse in public several years ago. At first he had been stabled just outside the City, but Aragorn had been concerned that Roheryn would be lonely as the horse
was used to company. Éowyn had outstanding stables, the finest outside Rohan with lush paddocks at Emyn Arnen. She had begged the honour of caring for such a venerable horse in his old age.

So Roheryn had gone to live with Faramir and Éowyn where he enjoyed a pleasant sheltered paddock and stable. The King would always take him an apple when he visited and be greeted with an eager neigh. He would caress the old stallion and be nuzzled affectionately in return. Then Aragorn would speak softly to him of the many adventures they had shared and they would take a gentle trot together. He knew some might deem him foolish, but he always felt there existed a deep understanding between them. On many occasions when they had wandered the wilds together, Roheryn had been his sole companion and Aragorn had often found himself confiding his hopes and dreams to his faithful steed.

A message had arrived that morning from Faramir and Éowyn telling the King that Roheryn was dying.

"You should go and make your farewell," Arwen urged him.

"I would like to, but what of the trade delegation from Dale? They would be gravely insulted if I failed to meet them on account of a horse!"

"I shall deal with them," Arwen said firmly. "Roheryn is no ordinary horse. I knew that when I chose him for you. As for the merchants, I shall tell them that you have urgent matters that you must debate with your Steward."

"Could any man have a more understanding lady? Thank you, vanimelda." Aragorn embraced her. She held him tightly for a moment then urged him to depart with all haste.

With a heavy heart Aragorn made his way to the stables where he ordered Mithernil to be saddled. Mithernil was a spirited, though good-natured stallion and Aragorn was fond of the handsome grey, but he was not Roheryn. He doubted any other could fill the special place Roheryn held in his heart. Perhaps it was because the stallion had been a gift from his beloved lady before they were wed, or because they had been through so much together. Roheryn had staunchly accompanied his master even along the dread Paths of the Dead and to the Black Gate and never flinched from the task.

Aragorn urged Mithernil forward hoping fervently that he would reach Roheryn in time. Fortunately it was a fine autumn day and there were no delays along the road.

He reached Emyn Arnen about noon. A servant hastened out to meet him. "Lord Faramir and Lady Éowyn are out in the lower paddocks, my lord," he said without waiting to be asked. "Shall I tend your mount, sire?"

Aragorn thanked him and handed him Mithernil's reins. He hurried the short distance to the fair meadows where Éowyn kept her aging horses. The Steward and his Lady were both kneeling on the grass beside Roheryn, who lay there.

Faramir got to his feet and hastened to greet his lord. "Éowyn found him like this morning when she rose early to see how a mare about to foal was faring," he said. "He had collapsed and was unable to get up."

"I fear he is dying," said Éowyn, also getting to her feet. Her eyes were red rimmed and her greying locks hung limply around her face. "I've seen this happen many times. I don't think he is in pain, but he will not last the day. I'm glad you have got here in time."
"Would you like to be alone with Roheryn?" Faramir asked.

Aragorn nodded, unable to trust himself to speak. He sank down beside the great horse. Roheryn lifted his head a few inches with a mighty effort and whinnied feebly. Aragorn placed his hand on the mighty head. Éowyn judged correctly that the horse was not in pain, but he was indeed dying. Aragorn could sense that Roheryn's life force was swiftly ebbing away. His time had come and it would be cruel to try to delay his passing. The only healing he could offer was to ease his old friend's final hours.

He began to sing softly to Roheryn, an old lullaby that his mother had often sung him to sleep with. He had sung on his travels many times to remind him of home and those he loved. He knew not how long he knelt there singing, his arm draped around the dying horse. Roheryn nuzzled against him. The horse's breathing grew fainter and then he was gone.

"May you run forever free beyond the circles of the world, my friend," Aragorn whispered.

A great sense of desolation swept over the King. It seemed that not only Roheryn had died, but part of his past. He had ridden Roheryn on his last visit to his mother and to the Pelennor where Halbarad had fallen. He had waved goodbye to Master Elrond and to Frodo from astride the mighty horse. Now Roheryn was gone too. Time had passed and was passing. Éowyn's golden tresses had greyed and even Faramir's raven hair was streaked with silver. They were all growing old; he was growing old. He was not afraid to receive Eru's gift but there was so much yet that he needed to achieve! He looked again at Roheryn. Only a few days ago, the mighty horse had been full of life, but now there was no breath in him. Tears streamed down the King's face.

He did not hear the footsteps approaching, but suddenly there was another beside him and comforting arms around him.

"I am sorry," he said.

"Why should you not weep for a friend?" said Faramir. "Roheryn was a prince amongst horses."

Aragorn wept afresh.

"Éowyn suggested that we bury Roheryn here," said Faramir once his lord's tears were spent. "My Rangers have offered to dig his grave."

"This is a fine resting place for him," said Aragorn. "Will Éowyn not mind her paddock being dug up, though?"

"The grass will grow all the richer with such a steed beneath it," said Faramir.

"I should like to assist them to dig the grave," said Aragorn. "I have found that labour can blunt the edge of grief."

"Come and take refreshment, first, mellon nîn" said Faramir. "You cannot have eaten or drunk for hours."

Aragorn conceded to his Steward's plea. He had little appetite but he was thirsty and he knew he needed to wash his face before facing the world again.

An equally red eyed Éowyn was waiting for them and the table was laid with a simple but tasty meal. At first Aragorn nibbled at the food to please his hostess, but as he ate the tender fillet of lamb served with vegetables from Éowyn's kitchen garden, his appetite returned.

A group of Rangers were already assembled with spades when Aragorn and Faramir went back
outside. The men set to work with a will.

"He was a fine horse," said one.

"I brought my little ones to see him," said another. "I thought they should see the great horse that bore our King in the battle to defeat the Dark Lord. My grandsire fought that day and told me how Roheryn never faltered. We shall not look on his like again!"

No we shall not, Aragorn thought sadly, though he was a little comforted that Roheryn's memory would endure amongst his people. He thanked the men and rewarded them well for their efforts.

"Thank you for your kindness, my friends," Aragorn said to Faramir and Êowyn. "It is time I went home to my lady. This has been a day I have long dreaded."

"Please bide with us a little longer, and take a glass of wine and a honey cake with Faramir," said Êowyn. "You should not return home without refreshment."

"Arwen will be expecting me back," said Aragorn.

"Please, mellon nín," said Faramir. "We would do ill to send you home until you have sampled Êowyn's damson wine."

Out of curtsey to the Steward and his lady, Aragorn followed Faramir back inside where a servant brought refreshments.

Éowyn excused herself. "I need to tend my horses," she said.

Aragorn and Faramir sipped the wine and spoke of Roheryn and other horses they had known.

"There are times when I wish I were of Rohir royal blood," said Aragorn. "Then I could ride one of the Mearas and we could grow old together."

"Not even the Mearas have the blessing of a Númenorean life span," said Faramir.

"Is it such a blessing?" Aragorn mused. "Sometimes it seems that time stands almost still for us, while those we love, both man and beast, quickly age and die."

Just then a servant entered and said, "The Lady Êowyn requests your presence outside, my lords."

"Come," said Faramir. For the first time that day, he sounded cheerful.

Aragorn followed his Steward outside. The sun was sinking over the western horizon, bathing Emyn Arnen in a golden glow. Êowyn appeared along the path, which led from the higher paddocks, leading a foal and a grey mare.

"We intended him as a birthday gift for you, but it seemed fitting that you should meet him today," said Faramir.

Aragorn regarded the spindly-legged foal curiously. He wondered if sorrow was addling his wits as the young horse had a look of Roheryn about him. He had the same long neck and powerful chest and his ears were the same shape.

"Meet Rana," said Êowyn. "Your Roheryn remained frisky into his old age and last year caught me unawares by jumping over the fence into the paddock where my best brood mare was grazing. How an old horse leapt so high, I'll never know, but Roheryn was no ordinary horse. Rana is the result."
For the first time that day, Aragorn smiled. Life was full of heartbreak, but there was also hope and new life. Man and beast together were much like the seasons. Old leaves must fall in autumn to enable the new buds sprout forth in springtime.

*A/n Mithernil = Grey Prince, Rana = Wanderer*

*This was written for the Teitho "Heartbreak" contest where it was placed first.*

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