Well, I have finally faced a dark truth about myself that has been haunting me for the last several months, years, even. A truth that has forced me to swallow nearly five centuries of disgust and hatred. The truth is, I've turned into a politician. My god, I cringe even writing it, let alone living it.

My hatred of politics couldn't last. It came from several core views I still hold, a burning hatred of the way the wheel crushes the same people over and over, no matter who is turning it and to what end, but it was a strand of immaturity I clung on to for far longer than I should've. These systems that govern us are, in some ways, a necessity. Even if you disagree with that, you cannot deny that they are an actuality. They exist, and they hold great power over the neglected lives I spent so long tending to. Now that I have become entangled in the wheel, I see now how necessary people who work for good in it are. I used to only see the forgotten, neglected, and discarded lives that fell between the cracks of the bigger picture.

Now I see how much of that suffering can be prevented from up here, how much might've been prevented throughout the course of my life that I chose not to see. I feel sorry for that, and I only hope someone continues the work I used to do, while I take my turn at the top. However long it lasts. There must be people doing good in all places, and I only hope I don't get corrupted up here, and lose sight of a perspective that rarely makes it this far. Even if I still feel revulsion at many aspects of the life I now live.

But my ramblings aside, yes, I am a politician now, like it or not. So far I've found the greatest curse of politics to be the impact of my voice. The things I say are no longer the aimless yammering of some old man in the tavern, an individual you can freely choose to ignore, but the Opinions of an Important Man (I want to throw up even writing that about myself). I am a part of the city, a man involved in diplomacy, in politics, and now everything I say is a part of that. There is a weight to the littlest phrase, to the most offhanded expression, to an ill-timed coughing fit. It is a weight I cannot avoid in this position, but it is exhausting.

I know there is nothing I can do to stop that. I know everything I say is evaluated in that structure, torn apart so the listener can find my

implications, my angle, my tactic. I accept that, and I accept that if I were to say the next portion of my writing is personal, not political, no one would believe me. Hell, it wouldn't even be true, because everything I do is inherently political. So I won't lie, this is political. But it is also personal. It is my true feelings, as unbridled as they can be, born from the life I have truly lived. They're reflected deeply in my politics, because they are the things that make up who I am. I share them openly, and you may choose what to do with them.

I am a dwarf of 531 years old, and I have lived all 531 of those years in Torkord. I don't know how much longer I will live, but I plan on spending the rest of my life here. This place is in my bones, and I hope that someday my bones will be in this place. Every part of who I am has been forged by Torkord, and forged for longer than most dwarves will ever live. While there are other dwarves who have lived as long or longer than I have, they are an incredible rarity. Few have seen Torkord the way I have, have lived and breathed alongside it.

Which brings me to this talk of our history, of tradition, of what Torkord is and who we are as people who carry the legacy of our forefathers, which has caused so much turmoil as of late. A history I lived the way so few others remaining have.

When I was a boy, litches ruled Torkord. When I was an older boy, or perhaps a young man, their reign came to an end. When I was a man, the Fall came, and dashed our world into rubble. When I was an older man, and the dust finally settled from those years of terror, we began to rebuild. When I was well and truly an old man, news came down the mountain of gods walking amongst us, and Il-Arkh-Nazril was built. Now here I am, undeniably elderly, meeting people from four new continents we didn't even dream existed before. I have lived in a place called Torkord my whole life, but that place has been remade many times over within my lifetime.

You say you respect your elders? Love tradition? Embrace your history? Then listen when I, a relic of history through and through, say this: the past you young dwarves idolize is imaginary. The history that is frozen in time to you, a legacy locked in the past that you can look back upon, was the living breathing tapestry of my lifetime. And it was brutal, complex, and ever-changing. It was filled with the good and the bad,

with guilt and pride, with traditions we've maintained and practices we have thrown to the side. You can only see a snapshot of it, but I knew the fullness of it.

I understand the instinct to yearn for the past, I have it too, stronger than almost anyone, I think. My peers are dead. All of them. My best dreams, the ones I never want to wake up from, are of me sitting down with dead dwarves I would've died with years ago if I had only lived my natural lifespan, and eating dinner, talking about a childhood no one else can remember. The past is familiar, familiar is known, comforting, and the future can feel like a precipice you are being pushed off of.

But it is an insult to me to lie about the years I lived through, to pretend they were as simple and smooth as a children's story. They contained beauty, and they contained horror. They were not perfect, and most of all they were not unchanging. The most long standing constant in our history is that, while we are stubborn, yes, we are not brittle. We are resilient. We were made from lava. Lava flows. So do we. We have never been stuck, we have always adapted. Do not insult me and the people I lived with in denying all the complexities we lived, saying we lived one truth that the future will make us stray from.

Even though I yearn for the past, I yearn even more for the future. I will never rid myself of the guilt over our years as slavers, at all I didn't do to help, and I never should. That guilt does not spoil my past, it drives me forward. It tells me that even though I did wrongs I cannot undo, I can use the time I have now to do good in the new horizons that await us.

Some will hear this and say I hate my home, or do not understand it. To those who say that, I ask, who are you to say that to me? I dedicated my life to caring for Torkord and the people who live in it, and so strong was my dedication that a natural lifespan couldn't hold everything I needed to do for my home. I lived hundreds of years past when I should've died because not even death could keep me from my duty to Torkord. I do not regret it, but that was not a blessing, that was a sacrifice I made for the love of my home.

And I love it so much because I understand it. Because I have learned that living in Torkord is like any other craft we continually hone. We take techniques of the past, and mix them with new innovations we create in

order to build on what we built in the past. We see what doesn't work, learn from it, and discard it with grace, while integrating what old practices we still have need of. That's how we build the cities we live in, and that's how we continue to build the nation we love.

I went on a walk down the mountain yesterday, and I saw a young boy being taught to lead a yak by his mother. He was being taught exactly the way I was taught half a millenia ago. Yesterday, I also walked up the mountain, and was taught how to weave a basket by a God. I never could've done that when I was a boy, and it is a gift that both I and that little boy just learning to lead a yak can now.

Torkord is good and bad and beautiful and ugly and it is, most importantly, ours to carry into the future. Please do not forget it.

~Ingrin Luhell