



Head of the Family, Eighteen

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At eighteen, I reached the hospital gate,
still someone's frightened, unprepared son,
and left it carrying a different weight.

My father's final hour was already done.
My mother held me hard against her arm.
They looked to me as though I were the one.

I had to keep my grandmother calm
and guide her through the crowd that spoke his name
while swallowing each shiver of alarm.

The man who gave our family shape and name
was gone, and every relative watched me stand
while priests and mourners called the gods by name.

No one had taught the boy how to command
a grief that could not fit inside his chest.
They simply placed the family in his hand
and called him head before he could find rest.

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