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Midnight Musings on My Father's Death

My dad is dead.

The words echo in my head, cutting through John Lennon's "How Do You Sleep"
(a fitting soundtrack to my insomnia tonight).

How proud he would be of his little girl, his Mithril, holding up like that mythical metal since the news of his death this morning. Not that I haven't cried. I have. But I won't allow myself to wallow in my grief. There's too much to do.

"Industrious grieving," the chaplain called it, my ability to compartmentalize to manage all the details that must be addressed. No one knows better than I that I should be the one out there dealing with this. Silmarion has been a wreck, barely holding together on the phone, and Gwynnie... Well, let's just say that neither of my sisters really have the temperament to be objective under the circumstances. And Joseph and Mark didn't even really know our dad, so it would be unfair to put it on them.

Our mother will martyr herself to shepherd them through this painful terrain with a fatalism born of decades of maneuvering countless crises and a grim determination to weather whatever comes. — Not that she'll go quietly. Mom is not one to suffer others' shortcomings silently, and to be honest, there's no love lost for her at her ex-husband's passing. But she'll make sure her children survive this latest blow.

My dad is dead.

And here I sit, on a steel bunk, with nothing but my broken-record thoughts to keep me company.

I spent most of the day on the phone, directing Silmarien as best I could, breaking tasks into lists, into steps for her to take before my next call, calming and comforting her when she grew overwhelmed or upset. I sent an email to every person on my contacts, requesting donations to help my sister pay for our father's final arrangements. I spoke with my counselor and unit manager, starting the process that will allow me to attend the memorial service via video conference. I even went to work, tapping my social resources in search of financial assistance for my family.

Some might say I've been productive, but I feel impotent, frustrated by my inability to actually accomplish the things that need to get done. If only I were out there...

But I'm not. I'm in prison.

And my dad is dead.

It's 2 a.m. He's been dead for over 24 hours, and it has been a very long day. I'm exhausted, but I can't sleep.

There's only one thing left to do for now, but I can't bring myself to do it. I can't make myself write his obituary. How can I memorialize a man who was such a mystery to me? Both god and devil, protector and punisher, father and monster who invoked in me both extremes of adoration and terror? How can I write of the ropes of love and trauma binding me to him despite over twenty years of estrangement? How can I explain that I cannot see myself without the lenses of his vision coloring my perception?

My dad is dead, and my world has tilted at his loss, spinning out of its orbit as its gravitational tether has snapped.

But still there are things to do, details to attend. Life to live.

My dad is dead, and I have an obituary to write.