The Mask of a Mourning Son
I walk the aisle of frozen peas
And offer up the pleasant squeeze
Of hands that reach to comfort me,
Performing normal, flawlessly.
I thank them for the flowers sent,
The casseroles, the sentiment,
I nod at “He is rest, at peace,”
And wait for their advice to cease.
This is the mask, the civilized veneer,
That keeps the neighbors comfortable and near.

But oh, beneath this steady, quiet breath
I’m raging at the calculus of death.
They told us “rare”—a word for gems or gold,
For stories of the lucky and bold.
But “rare” in blood is just a cruel die cast,
A lottery where he was picked out last.
To be the exception in a textbook’s page,
To be the anomaly, fuels the age
Of anger burning hot behind my eyes
While I recite the polite and practiced lies.

You see a son who’s healing, moving on
Who accepts that the father is now gone.
But underneath the skin, the starch, the tie,
I am screaming at a god who won’t reply.
I am tracing paths of lymph and rogue mutation,
Lost in a violent, silent frustration.
I hate the rarity that marked his name,
I hate that life continues on the same.

I wear the mask so you don’t have to see
The hollow, howling, broken parts of me.
I smile the grin people talk about
To keep the grief within, and pity out.