

Please Hear What I'm Not Saying

Don't be fooled by me
Don't be fooled by the face I wear
For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks,
masks that I'm afraid to take off,
and none of them are me.
Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,
but don't be fooled, for God's sake don't be fooled.
I give you the impression that I'm secure,
that all is sunny and unruffled with me,
within as well as without,
that confidence is my name and coolness my game,
that the water's calm and I'm in command,
and that I need no one.
But don't believe me.
Please.

My surface may seem smooth, but my surface is a mask,
my ever-varying and over-concealing mask.
Beneath lies no smugness, no complacency.
Beneath dwells the real me in confusion, in fear, in aloneness.
But I hide this.
I don't want anybody to know it,

I panic at the thought of my weakness and fear of being exposed.
That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,
a nonchalant, sophisticated facade, to help me pretend,
to shield me from the glance that knows.
But such a glance is precisely my salvation.
My only salvation.
And I know it.

That is if it's followed by acceptance, if it's followed by love.
It's the only thing that can liberate me, from myself,
from my own self-built prison walls,
from the barriers that I so painstakingly erect.
It's the only thing that will assure me of what I can't assure myself,
that I'm really worth something.
But I don't tell you this.
I don't dare.
I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance and love.
I'm afraid you'll think less of me, and that you'll laugh,
and your laugh would kill me.
I'm afraid that deep down I'm nothing, that I'm just no good,
and that you will see this and reject me.
So I play my game, my desperation pretending game,
with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within.
And so begins this parade of masks,
and my life becomes a front.

I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.
I tell you everything that's really nothing.
And nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me.
So when I'm going through my routine do not be fooled by what
I'm saying.
Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying,
what I'd like to be able to say, what for survival I need to say,
but what I can't say.
I dislike hiding.
Honestly.

I dislike the superficial game I'm playing, the superficial,
phony game.
I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous, and me,
but you've got to help me.
You've got to hold out your hand,
even when it's the last thing I seem to want or need.
Only you can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare,
or the breathing dead.
Only you can call me to aliveness.
Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging,
each time you try to understand because you really care,
my heart begins to grow wings, very small wings, very feeble wings,
but wings.
With your sensitivity and sympathy, and your power of under-
standing,
you can breathe life into me.

I want you to know that.
I want you to know how important you are to me, how you can
be a
creator of the person that is me if you choose to.
Please choose to.
You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble,
you alone can remove my mask,
you alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic and
uncertainty,
from my lonely prison.
So do not pass me by.
Please do not pass me by.
It will not be easy for you.
A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls.
The nearer you approach me, the blinder I may strike back.
It's irrational, but despite what the books say about Man, I am
rational.

I fight against the very thing that I cry out for.
But I am told that love is stronger than strong walls,
and in this lies my hope.
Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands,
but with gentle hands,
for a child is very sensitive.
Who am I, you may wonder?
I am someone you know very well.
For I am every man you meet and every woman you meet.

(c) William A.A. Tahl
(A North Alaskan Eskimo)