

The Mask That Hides

Don't be fooled by me. Don't be fooled by the face I wear. I wear a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off, and none of them are me.

I give the impression that I'm secure; that all is sunny and unruffled within as well as without; that confidence is my name and coolness is my game; that the water's calm and I need no one. But don't believe me...please.

My surface may seem smooth, but my surface is a mask. Beneath dwells the real me in confusion, in fear, in aloneness-but I hide this.

I panic at the thought of my weakness and frantically create a mask to hide behind, to shield me from the glance that knows.

Yet such a glance is precisely my salvation. I know it. If it's followed by acceptance and by love, it is the only thing that will assure of what I can't assure myself, that I am worth something.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare, I'm afraid to.

So I play my game, my desperate game, with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within. So begins the parade of masks, and my life becomes a front.

I idly chatter to you...surface and top-of-the-head talk, saying nothings of what's crying within me. 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 cannot say.

I dislike hiding...honestly.

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 that's the last thing I seem to want.

each time you're kind and gentle and encouraging, each time you try to understand me because you care, my heart grows wings--very small wings, very feeble wings, but wings. With your sensitivity and sympathy, and your power of understanding, you can breathe life into me. I want you to know that.

You can help me to be creator of the person that is me, if you choose to. You can break down the wall and release me from behind my mask, my shadow world of panic and uncertainty, from my lonely self. Don't pass me by.

I may fight against the very help I need. But try to beat down those walls with gentle hands of love and sympathy...firm but gentle hands, for a child is sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder. I may be every man and woman you will meet.