

Please hear what I'm not saying...

Don't be fooled by me.
Please don't be fooled by the face I wear,
For I wear a mask, 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 game and coolness my name;
That the water is 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 my mask,
My ever-varying and ever-concealing mask.
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.
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 or need.
Only you can wipe away from my eyes
The blank stare of the living dead.

Only you can call me to aliveness.
Each time you are 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 understanding,
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 release me from my shadow-world of panic
And uncertainty.
You alone can release me from my lonely prison.
So 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 humans,
I am irrational.
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,
My only hope.
Please try to beat down these walls with firm hands,
But gentle hands.

Who am I, you may wonder?
I am someone you know very well,
For I am every man you meet, and
I am every woman you meet.

Charles C. Finn
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