

DUCKLOW'S

# THE MASKS I WEAR

I FIRST READ THIS ANONYMOUS PROSE WHEN I WAS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL. IT STRUCK ME THEN AS PROFOUND.

TODAY IT SEEMS MORE SENTIMENTAL THAT I REMEMBERED. HOWEVER, IT DOES WELL SUMMARIZE SOME OF THE ANGST THAT MANY PEOPLE CARRY AROUND AND MANY PEOPLE BRING TO COUNSELLING.

YOU MAY DISCOVER SOME INSIGHT AS YOU READ THIS. THE MOST OBVIOUS TO ME IS THAT IT IS HEALING TO BE "SEEN" AND LISTENED TO. SOMETIMES, THESE GRACES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

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 be smooth but my surface is my mask, my ever-varying and ever-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 weaknesses and fear exposing them. That's why I frantically create my masks to hide behind. They're nonchalant, sophisticated facades 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, and if it's followed by love. It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself from my own self-built prison walls. I dislike hiding; honestly, I dislike the superficial game I'm playing, the superficial phony game. I'd really like to be genuine and me. But I need your help, your hand to hold, even though my masks would tell you otherwise. That glance from you is the

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only thing that assures 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 you'll think less of me, 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 you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my desperate, pretending game, with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within. So begins the parade of masks, the glittering but empty parade of masks, and my life becomes a front. I idly chatter to you in suave tones of surface talk. I tell you everything that's 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. Hear what I'd like to say but what I cannot say.

It will not be easy for you, long felt inadequacies make my defenses strong. The nearer you approach me the blinder I may strike back. Despite what books say of people, I am irrational; I fight against the very thing that I cry out for.

You wonder who I am. You shouldn't, for I am every man and every woman you meet. Don't be fooled by me. At least not by the mask I wear.

(Author unknown and published in a number of books and on the web.)