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Back Cover: Please listen

Kate Marshall Flaherty

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Return Address:
Spiritan
121 Victoria Park Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
CANADA M4E 3S2
P.M.#40050389

Please listen

When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving me advice,
you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way,
you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something
to solve my problem,
you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen!

All I ask is that you listen.

Don't talk or do — just hear me.

Advice is cheap — 20 cents will get you both
Dear Abby and Billy Graham in the same newspaper.

And I can do for myself: I am not helpless.
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless

When you do something for me that I can
and need to do for myself,
you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

But when you accept as a simple fact
that I feel what I feel, no matter how irrational,
then I can stop trying to convince you
and get about this business of understanding
what's behind this irrational feeling.
And when that's clear, the answers are obvious
and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense
when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works — sometimes —
for some people, because God is mute,
and he doesn't give advice or try to fix things.
God just listens and lets you work it out for yourself.

So please listen, and just hear me.
and if you want to talk,
wait a minute for your turn,
and I will listen to you.

— *Kate Marshall Flaherty, Lay Spiritan*