

January 15

I will embrace you, Harriet.
A century and decades more ago it was—
so long that I need have no fear—
I can embrace you now.
I'll name a school uptown for you
and all the children there will listen as I sing
of deeds on freedom's railroad you conducted well.
And if by chance they hear some other tell
how yesterday I tried to hunt you down
I'll simply blame those evil bygone men.
As now we worship freedom too,
come, let me embrace you.

I will embrace you, Martin.
Sufficient time has passed and it is safe;
I can embrace you now.
Perhaps I'll set aside a holiday for you.
Yes, that is what I'll do.
You always preached forgiveness as the way
and so I have decided to forgive myself.
Thus every year we'll mark this reverent day
with borrowed words of struggle and of sorrow.
I can return to making money tomorrow—
as now we worship freedom too.
Come, let me embrace you.

I will embrace you, Malcolm.
Yes, even you I can embrace.
I'll sell those hats emblazoned with your sign
and make a movie of your life
so with our popcorn and our Coke
(perhaps it was intended as a joke?)
we'll watch the children jumping up
to tell us they are you.
How can it harm me if it isn't true?
Of course, the truth would be I had you killed
in that ballroom where we went for our last dance,
or else I stood aside and watched it done—
please raise no quibble where there isn't one—
and I would have to do the honors
once again should duty call.
I know that you will understand
because it never was your style to turn the other cheek.
But time can cure all wounds I've heard it said;

especially since I still live while you are dead
as now we worship freedom too.
Come, let me embrace you.

I will embrace you, Nelson.
You didn't even have to die like all the rest—
though some might think it happened anyway.
There's business to be done; it's for the best;
I can embrace you now.
Forget that from my distant shores I watched
as jailers kept you all those years.
You saw the light before it was too late
and ended up as head of state.
Yet rich and poor stayed mostly in their proper place,
and since to that eternal truth
our honor we have jointly pledged
(as now we worship freedom too)
come, let me embrace you.

Let me embrace you, whoever you may be,
as long as you don't mind the way
we worship golden icons here—
like those who dwell in dope-filled dreams
imagining it must be freedom's door.
It's so much easier than when
I had to hold you dear
with iron chain and leather whip.
But if by chance you do resist
my soft seduction's tawdry spell
I'll simply have to weave my wand
to make you disappear as well,
and then some year when it is safe
denounce the deeds of evil bygone men
as now we worship freedom too.
Come, I will embrace you;
I can embrace you all.

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