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Whoever you are holding me now in hand

Walt Whitman

Whoever you are holding me now in hand,
Without one thing all will be useless,
I give you fair warning before you attempt me further,
I am not what you supposed, but far different.

Who is he that would become my follower?
Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?
The way is suspicious the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,
You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect
 to be your sole and exclusive standard,
Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to
 the lives around you would have to be abandon'd,
Therefore release me now before troubling yourself any
 further, let go your hand from my shoulders,
Put me down and depart on your way.

Or else by stealth in some wood for trial,
Or back of a rock in the open air,
(For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in
 company,
And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn,
 or dead,)
But just possibly with you on a high hill, first watching
 lest any person for miles around approach unawares,

Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon
 your hip,
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
For thus merely touching you is enough, is best,
And thus touching you would I silently sleep
 and be carried eternally.

But these leaves conning you con at peril,
For these leaves and me you will not understand,
They will elude you at first and still more afterwards,
 I will certainly elude you,
Even while you think you had unquestionably
 caught me, behold!

Already you see I have escaped from you.
For it is not for what I have put into it that I have
written this book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it,
Nor do those know me best who admire me and
vauntingly praise me,
Nor will the candidates for my love (unless at most
a very few) prove victorious,
Nor will my poems do good only, they will do just as
much evil, perhaps more,
For all is useless without that which you may guess at
many times and not hit, that which I hinted at;
Therefore release me and depart on your way.

Homosexuals and the American Tradition

By Lyn Pedersen, Associate Editor, ONE

Americans often regard the concept of liberty as an American invention, conceived in 1620 and fully matured by 1776, after which there was little new to be said on the subject.

Perhaps this naive view of a theme that has actually run all through the world's history can throw fresh light on a basic contradiction in American tradition — a contradiction of great importance to homosexuals. American history has revolved about the constant struggle between liberty and repression — yet, the notion of liberty is so basic to American thinking that its opponents must disguise their attacks and pretend to be defenders of liberty, while its actual defenders must seek constant redefinition of the concept to rescue it from the jingoists.

America has outgrown previous repressive periods. But the increasing complexity and compactness of American life and above all our emergence as a nation committed to the notion of saving the world (whether or not the world approves) have encouraged restrictive forces in all aspects of our life. The spread of governmental authority, militarization, McCarthyism and the paranoia of a nation up against an implacable enemy threaten to swamp the basic propensity for individualism and liberty.

Intimidation has gone a long way. But the intimidated often react with new assertions of the libertarian spirit. Americans recall that their greatest liberal upsurges came fullblown out of periods quite as repressive as this. And some elements in the current situation show a growth of freedoms.

One particular authoritarianism, the Puritan bias, has been famous in American tradition. The Puritan notion that the faithful have a duty to