

Through the Wire

by

Charlotte Hill O'Neal

I heard the tambourine tinkle of the shackles before my eyes met their faces,
one
with the cool calm demeanor of Malcolm
the other,
with the bob and weave energy of Ali

I was astonished by their ram rod stature as they crouched
with backs to that slit in the doorway,
in easy grace and Zen composure
in a dance like, practiced motion,
that served for easier release of the cold steel handcuffs binding them

or
was that steel hot and fiery,
powering and releasing electrified surges of *Shango* energy
to
pumped up cut muscles and solar powered minds
and
to fingers
leaving sweat trails of wisdom on dog eared law books,
searching for *'that'*
that others might have missed

And
their strength shone through the heavy mesh wire separating us

Wire that achieved the exact opposite of intended purpose
failing to dim the brilliance of their spirits
as they stood there,
let loose from their bonds,
tall and relaxed and smiling in greeting
that
changed that tiny walled space of confinement
into
an Airy Room
a
Living Room

a
Sitting Room
a
Front Room
(or whatever you like to call it),
filled with light
and ferns
and fragrant incense
and herb smoke
and crowded book shelves
and internet pings
and soft jazz purring
and wet splashes of laughter out by the pool
(with its Panther tiled bottom)

The prison doors seemed open and wide
and surely, I felt,
at any moment
wooden trays full of hot tea and fresh brewed coffee
or
maybe mango juice with crushed ice and mint leaves,
would appear,
to refresh our palates
and
dampen the light sweat on our fingertips
that touched and scraped at the wire

And meanwhile,
we stumble and bump into each others words
and
enjoyment of the four-way conversation,
nicking and flecking and cutting right through years
of
'not knowing' each other
but
'knowing' still
and
acknowledging and making *real*
that notion that a Panther meets no *stranger* down paths of shared existence,
only
brother-sister-comrades...

and Universe,
and
a unique *sameness* under it all

And
the wire opens
like soft paper flower petals
bright with visions of dusty roads and crackling cornfield sounds
and
migrating animal feet
and
parting clouds off Kilimanjaro
that we (Pete and me), see with our eyes
through
their dreams
through
our eyes,
visions that have been kept jarred up tightly, for years

And
they (Herman and Alfred),
screw the lid off slowly...
finally...themselves...

At last
catching the sharp pungent aroma of three decades of bottled up dreams
and
tamped down tears
and
plumped up hope
and
wild wet laughter,
finally released with a rocket engine
WHOOSH!!!!!!
of
FREEDOM
flying right out that heavy metal wire

And
the wire becomes a curtain woven of hand corded soft fleece
snagging and unraveling slowly...
carefully...
untangling nightmares of confinement
unraveling...
undoing...
and
it moves lightly (that curtain)
and sways
and shivers
under the force of their dreams
of
FREEDOM realized...
at last

*This poem was written in March 2008, after a first time visit to Brother Alfred Woodfox
and Brother Herman Wallace, political prisoners who have been locked down unjustly
for more than 36 years, 30 of those years spent in solitary confinement.
This poem is dedicated to them, their strength and perseverance and their FREEDOM!*