The Prison Cell
by Mahmoud Darwish (1941 – 2008)
Translated by Ben Bennani

It is possible...
It is possible at least sometimes...
It is possible especially now
To ride a horse
Inside a prison cell
And run away...

It is possible for prison walls
To disappear,
For the cell to become a distant land
Without frontiers:

What did you do with the walls?
I gave them back to the rocks.
And what did you do with the ceiling?
I turned it into a saddle.
And your chain?
I turned it into a pencil.

The prison guard got angry.
He put an end to my dialogue.
He said he didn't care for poetry,
And bolted the door of my cell.

He came back to see me
In the morning,
He shouted at me:

Where did all this water come from?
I brought it from the Nile.
And the trees?
From the orchards of Damascus.
And the music?
From my heartbeat.

The prison guard got mad;
He put an end to my dialogue.
He said he didn't like my poetry,
And bolted the door of my cell.

But he returned in the evening:

Where did this moon come from?
From the nights of Baghdad.
And the wine?
From the vineyards of Algiers.
And this freedom?
From the chain you tied me with last night.

The prison guard grew so sad...
He begged me to give him back
His freedom.

OPPRESSION

Langston Hughes

NOW DREAMS
ARE NOT AVAILABLE
TO THE DREAMERS,
NOR SONGS
TO THE SINGERS.

IN SOME LANDS
DARK NIGHT
AND COLD STEEL
PREVAIL
BUT THE DREAM
WILL COME BACK,
AND THE SONG
BREAK
ITS JAIL.

CHOOSE
By Carl Sandburg

THE single clenched fist lifted and ready,
Or the open asking hand held out and waiting.
Choose:
For we meet by one or the other.

Afternoon in School/The Last Lesson
By D.H. Lawrence

When will the bell ring, and end this weariness?
How long have they tugged the leash, and strained apart
My pack of unruly hounds: I cannot start
Them again on a quarry of knowledge they hate to hunt,
I can haul them and urge them no more.
No more can I endure to bear the brunt
Of the books that lie out on the desks: a full three score
Of several insults of blotted pages and scrawl
Of slovenly work that they have offered me.
I am sick, and tired more than any thrall
Upon the woodstacks working weariedly.

And shall I take
The last dear fuel and heap it on my soul
Till I rouse my will like a fire to consume
Their dross of indifference, and burn the scroll
Of their insults in punishment? - I will not!
I will not waste myself to embers for them,
Not all for them shall the fires of my life be hot,
For myself a heap of ashes of weariness, till sleep
Shall have raked the embers clear: I will keep
Some of my strength for myself, for if I should sell
It all for them, I should hate them -
- I will sit and wait for the bell.
For the young who want to
by Marge Piercy

Talent is what they say you have after the novel is published and favorably reviewed. Beforehand what you have is a tedious delusion, a hobby like knitting.

Work is what you have done after the play is produced and the audience claps. Before that friends keep asking when you are planning to go out and get a job.

Genius is what they know you had after the third volume of remarkable poems. Earlier they accuse you of withdrawing, ask why you don't have a baby, call you a bum.

The reason people want M.F.A.’s, take workshops with fancy names when all you can really learn is a few techniques, typing instructions and somebody else’s mannerisms

is that every artist lacks a license to hang on the wall like your optician, your vet proving you may be a clumsy sadist whose fillings fall into the stew but you’re certified a dentist.

The real writer is one who really writes. Talent is an invention like phlogiston after the fact of fire. Work is its own cure. You have to like it better than being loved.

The Powwow at the End of the World
by Sherman Alexie

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam and topples it. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters burst each successive dam downriver from the Grand Coulee. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters find their way to the mouth of the Columbia River as it enters the Pacific and causes all of it to rise. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the first drop of floodwater is swallowed by that salmon waiting in the Pacific. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon swims upstream, through the mouth of the Columbia and then past the flooded cities, broken dams and abandoned reactors of Hanford. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon swims through the mouth of the Spokane River as it meets the Columbia, then upstream, until it arrives in the shallows of a secret bay on the reservation where I wait alone.

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon leaps into the night air above the water, throws a lightning bolt at the brush near my feet, and starts the fire which will lead all of the lost Indians home. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after we Indians have gathered around the fire with that salmon who has three stories it must tell before sunrise: one story will teach us how to pray; another story will make us laugh for hours; the third story will give us reason to dance. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world.