

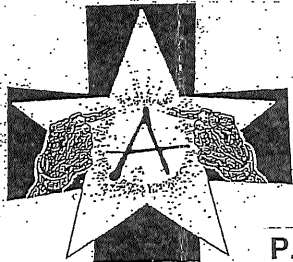
True Leap

OPPORTUNITIES
IN COMMUNICATIONS

Dispatches
from a
Political Prisoner

September 11, 2001

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P.O. BOX 7187,
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Marilyn Buck



Marilyn Buck

Political Prisoner Marilyn Buck was an anti-racist activist as a teenager, and was originally from Texas, she organized against the Vietnam War as a College Student. She supported the Black Liberation Movement, and was convicted for the procuring of ammunition for the Black Liberation Army.

After being granted a furlough following 4 years completed on a 10-year sentence, she went underground for the next 8 years, and was recaptured in 1985, on a charge of conspiring to blow up government buildings and aiding Assata Shakur's escape from prison; she was at this time given an 80-year sentence.

Marilyn has found poetry the ideal political prisoner's form of expression, and has been awarded three prizes by the PEN Prison Writing Program, including a 1st Prize for poetry in 2001.

incommunica'dō (in-k-, -ah'-)
a. Without means of communication,
(of prisoner) in solitary confinement.
[Sp. (-amu-)]

For more information about Marilyn, visit
www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/marilynbuck

i step out.
a four o'clock unfolding, fuchsia in the shading light
back into the routine prisoner's plight

December 2001

This poem appeared in Joy James, editor, *Imprisoned Intellectuals:
America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and
Rebellion*, March 2003

before
morning-slow
I move
Julan hollers
 come come see
 the world trade center's
 exploding

she's not serious
no one would make that up
 would they?
 maybe
live on TV
 video mantra
 replay: plane crash
 replay: collapse
 slow motion, dying morning

no not a made-for-TV movie
not a disaster film
not Hollywood special effects
 one tower falls
 the other follows

do chickens come home to roost?
enormity crashes
 dazed disbelief
 (chickens won't roost here again
 pigeons either)

I, a political prisoner, can
conceive why
but comprehension is not complicity
 I look around me
 I know nothing
 I know too much
there is no answer in death
 nor in dying

I know

soon others will die
dark smoke spreads
cinders of wrath rise
the eagle's talons flex
hungry for revenge

(eyes locked on the shocking scene
a Muslim sister whispers
they will blame the Muslims)

I know

many will feed the eagle
the Palestinians?

(Palestinians are always suspect)
Muslims? Arabs?
many will die red upon the land

I can't comprehend

men who commit suicide
taking civilians with them
(a u.s. postal worker
Columbine high school boys
a man at McDonalds
all-American suicide killers)

civilians

used as warheads

I shudder and walk away
from death
to my cell

Bich Kim runs in

*if there's a world war three
they will shoot all the prisoners, won't they?*

I shake my head

I don't think so

but you, political prisoners

pools beneath the door

i hunker under the winding sheet

does she stop talking
or do i descend?
i don't remember

shift change

shift change

guards come and go
officials pass by peering
into our crypt-cages
taking notes, verifying

Monday, September 24

the captain appears

we may release you today after 2:00

2:00 comes and goes

the shift changes

i wait and wonder: will other politicals be released today

i wait

hope is the moment's thief

don't wait!

at last: *Buck roll out*

i leap a jack-in-the-box

ready

ready

the metal key clangs just before the 4:00 count

i gasp relief

and hurry through before the gates slam

shut and i am left below

Eurydice whom Orpheus glimpsed

a moment soon

ashes ashes they all fall
down dark flashes
cherry splashes on concrete
Babel towers collapse in crying heaps
a curtain rises gray
covers gladiators draped across the stage

i wake cold-throated
what time is it?
my limbs locked
beneath a concrete rockslide
is this my tomb falling on me?

my chest is piled rock-heavy
bodies rise from the shallows of my breath
graze my eyes and flee
across the desert scape
shadow prints dissipate
am i awake?

the Cyclops stabs my eye
i must be awake
i wrap a scratchy towel
around my face
i escape electric night
into sightlessness

a ghost voice wails
what time is it?
A deep male boom
1:24, go to sleep
no, turn on the radio, talk to me
no! no! please no, my eyes blink
inside their blind
little Brueghel men dance
wooden-shoe notes
ruthless on my sleep
sound streams woman's babble

like you, won't they?
I hope not
(question marks
the corners of my mouth:
what do I know
about the fine-print)

I turn to sweep the floor
find rhythms of the ordinary

The Order: 9 AM PDT

a tap
I turn
a guard
come with me

I won't return today

I stand before the captain
we must lock you up
for your own safety
(not for my safety)
you're intelligent you know why

I speculate, no
not for my safety
you must be locked up
just for your safety

I am
stripped naked
ID card confiscated
everything taken
I need my glasses!
keep the glasses

I keep a neutral face
handcuffed behind the back
clad in bile yellow for isolation
and flip-flops

I keep outrage
wrapped within my fists
I swallow anger
metal clangs swallow sound
the concrete cocoon swallows me

The "SHU": Special Housing Unit

"there was an old woman
she lived in a shoe"
what did she do?

9/11 *no prisoner may speak to you
you may not speak to any prisoner*
9/12 overheard voices
*there are terrorists here
who are the terrorists?*
silence, everyone behind her door listens
9/14 a legal call
small relief: it's political -- Washington --
not something i did
9/17 no more calls
no visits
no mail
until further notice

incommunicado
i hang from a winding string
winding in this cocoon
i breathe deep
the air isn't good here

me too

let me out first

voices reach through the metal doors
food traps clank
handcuffs click
one by one women are led
to wire cages
joy rings louder than the chains

i wait
no guard comes
i break silence
you didn't ask me
disembodied denial echoes through the walls
you can't go with the others
wait
not my decision
i will miss the sundrops

"Perchance to Dream"

night comes
i fall exhausted into sleep
i dream of Dresden Hanoi Baghdad
whistles scream
walls fall apart
in waves
Dali deserts
watches tick
waterdrip
dream shift:
swords of steel glint against the sky
a swarm and puff
dark blood drops
bituminous birds bank
spread-eagled free fall

clanging keys, slamming metal traps
shift change
daylight creeps inside
i rise: i must seek cycles
inside
without clocks or mirrors
without all but i

The Weekend

a glacier, daylight advances
imperceptibly
a plank of light teeters
on the edge of board-faced windows
travels obliquely across
then it's gone
warmth fades fast

the food trap opens
cold eggs the color of our clothes
plunk – weekend brunch
i swallow in silence

silence flees before sudden cacophony
two women beat plastic bowls on metal doors
we want rec we want rec
the sun is out we want out
my head is wrapped in metallic clanger
bang bang bang
i stay silent
i bite my lip

hours pass: shift change 2:00
the sun drops fast behind the wall
finally: *who wants recreation?*
I do

(from outside the walls Susan yells
you are not alone)
i breathe deeper

Sunday i get a radio: KPFA lifeline
Sikhs dead, detainees disappeared
political prisoners buried deeper
incommunicado

i remember another September 11: Chile '73
more than 3,000 dead
tortured assassinated disappeared
a CIA-supported coup
(the WTC bombers not-yet-born)
many people there still mourn
let us mourn all the dead
and the soon-to-die

i worry about the prisoners
isolation sucks at the spirit

i am furious: inferred association
held hostage in place of men
with u.s. weapons and CIA training
an infernal joke
the puppet masters laugh

i laugh to stay sane
before i explode in irony's flame

we are hostages
to blood-thirsty oil men
ready to splatter deserts
with daisy-cutters
their collateral damage
dead mothers and children
dead mother earth
dead daisies

(hasn't this happened before?
u.s. cavalry and smallpox blankets
special forces and blanket bombing)

(Susan is back
she taps on the wall: *you are not alone*)

i walk around the edges
how many walk on edges?
what edges do the Palestinians walk?

cold radiates whitewashed
walls press against my edges
suspend animation
no butterflies to break out
no silken thread to weave sweet dreams

panic rises in my throat
thick white choking cold
so cold

i swing hope on a thread
a transparent sliver it crashes
against the cinderblocks
i drop
frozen chrysalis
cold into a coffin box

Night

i lay down on suspect blankets
a Cyclops light pins me
onto the metal cot
an altar for vengeful gods
metal restraints for hands and feet
"just in case"

the suicide cell has ghosts
desperate women
have lain here chained four-pointed
to command composure
sacrificed to your visions
through the glass starkly
through a burqa window

i don't want to think of i
i meditate
i think of other politicals
behind wires and walls
i remember the assaulted
the accidental
the collaterally damaged
killed, corrected, coerced
i remember: the u.s. funds the fundamentalists
Muslims Christians Zionists
self-righteous missiles
of mayhem and retribution

i remember Afghani women held hostage
inside indigo cocoons
cells smaller than a confessional box

my veil is this cell
i will put on no other
except the veil of sleep

the light, damn the light
the Cyclops spies
i toss between the tomb-thick walls
how long will this go on?
will my bones break
into ice shards or will they desiccate
stranded in this cell

at last i doze
till dawn the Cyclops watches