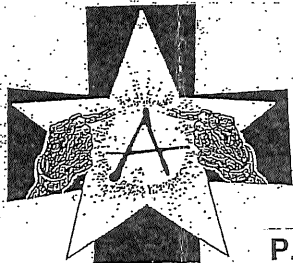


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# Dispatches from a Political Prisoner

September 11, 2001

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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

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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