

"Prison Poker Room" by James M. Valdez # 0096879

What will today bring for me? - Poker, that's for sure. I'm off of work from the Kitchen and I'm about to bust some heads! (It's 4:20 am ~~in~~ in the morning and I gotta get ready by 5am for chow. Hope the pancakes are gonna be good. They were last week, but before that, they were rubbery and tasted hella stale. I'll wash my face, drink a hot cup of coffee, brush my teeth, put on my jeans and blue shirt, put my shoes on, and lay back on my bunk with the T.V. on with the morning news. My cellie's still asleep, for he gets last-minute ready - like "Fireman" ready. He'll get his clothes on and be ready within a minute - once the cell light gets turned on by the cops. Let me count my inventory of stamps. I should be good. I got 15 bucks in stamps, some bars of soap, and a couple bags of coffee to use on the poker table later and maybe get a couple bets on the games going on today. The light's been on (they have control of them) a couple of minutes, and the C.O. just made an announcement to "Get Ready for Chow." My cellie takes a piss and gets dressed as the cell door slides open. I turn off my T.V. and we're off to the chow hall.

Once me and my cellie leave our unit, we walk to the gate where we line up with our friends and about another 120 convicts who are hungry and ready to start their day. A lot of them have to work in the Prison Card Room after we eat Breakfast. So we gotta walk to the chow hall (that's about a half mile from our unit), get in a formed line from the entry door, grab ~~our~~ our breakfast trays and sack lunches (leach), eat, and walk back to the unit once the

guards give us the O.K. to go back to the unit we live in.

Once we're back, I just take my shoes off and lie on my bunk. I turn the T.V. on seeing what my favorite traffic girl looks like. My cellie fixes himself some coffee, puts up the shit sheet up so I can't see him (I'd rather not see him), and he does his thing while I watch T.V. He gets his things ready to go to work. He brings his sack lunch, extra snacks, and his MP3 player. I'm just waiting for the guard to call the Prison Industries' Card Room workers on the intercom to line up for work. They gotta walk to another building. The C.O. calls it. My cellie leaves with an "Alright, Buddy!" and I got the cell to myself until about 2:30 pm - when he gets back. I need to wash a couple of shirts, a few pairs of socks and boxers, and a towel and have it dried with "his" fan before my cellie gets back. I mop my cell floor and polish my sink/toilet with some Ajax. I'll decide not to work out because I'm real tired from busting my ass up in that Kitchen. I'm just gonna watch T.V. and lay up in my bed. I'll listen to some music later from my MP3.

It's 2 pm. and I've just been a bum in my cell. I'm just anxious to play poker. We won't play until after dinner, but I wanna get a few hands in just because I've been waiting all day. Most of the poker players I play with work in the Prison Industries' Card Room. My cellie runs up the tier's stairs that lead up to our cell. I hear that fucker yelling, "Do do Boy!" Yeah, that's me - for I take a lot of shits. I just laugh as he walks in to our cell. He's all hyper and trying to grab his shower stuff and trying to get in the shower. If he lets me know, I'd reserve a shower for him before he gets back from work, but sometimes he'll either use the phone or work out, so I

don't hold a shower for him.

They're gonna deliver Canteen to us in a few minutes. I've put in an order last week Thursday to get it this Thursday. Most of the shit I ordered is not gonna go into my cell. I borrowed about 25 dollars in stamps in exchange for 20 dollars worth of food from the Loan Shark to pay for my buy-ins that I played last week. The only things I will keep that I ordered will be a couple bars of soap, a box of cookies, 3 bags of coffee, and 4AA batteries for my MP3 player. Coffee's really important to me. Surely I'm dependent on it. It gives me extra energy when I'm tired and it keeps me alert.

For this time, I never even ordered any snacks to share between myself and my cellie. My money on my account's going to either the Loan Shark, the store man, or the guys who win on the poker table. I hardly have any food in the house from the Canteen. I've got state issued sack lunches if anything from going to breakfasts, but no Top Rahmen, Oatmeal, cookies, chips, or sodas under my bunk. My cellie is pretty stocked on his extra food. He despises mostly anything that's put into a state issued sack lunch. For him and me, we get extra amounts of money put on our inmate accounts consistently by family. We both work here at the prison, but he has the better job, where he doesn't have to get dirty and greasy at work. I can spend about 110 dollars a month, while he can spend about 150 dollars a month. I get 50 from one sister and 30 from another and the other 30 dollars comes from the kitchen. My cellie gets like 100 from his mom and dad and the other 50 from his job. At his job though - he can make probably ~~another~~ another 50 to his 50 every month if he worked harder. But he's just cruising thru to make the minimum. He doesn't want to break his back or do extra work if he

doesn't have to and he's happy with what he gets on his account every month. He doesn't gamble in here and he stretches his money well. Under the bunk, he has a lot of Canteen. He shares with me most of the time when he's hungry. But it's fucked up - that with all the money I get put on my account, I should have about just as much food under the bunk as him. I got a T.V., an MP3 player, and Norelco electric Razor, soap, shampoo, lotion, laundry detergent, and coffee most of the time, - but hardly any food. I got a couple pairs of sneakers (Reebok & New Balance), Levis jeans, a denim long sleeved shirt and dark blue blanket from the Canteen so far. I'm still trying to accumulate more things from the Canteen like a fan, a watch, a hot pot, and another pair of shoes, but I'll never get all that shit if I keep doing what I'm doing. My cellie deals with my antics probably because he gets more time to himself in the cell while I'm out on the tier playing poker.

"Get ready for chow!, get ready for chow!" is said loudly on the speaker system in my unit. It's a little after 5pm and the doors open. Me and my cellie are dressed and I got a couple of brown paper bags filled with food in my hands. I run to go to the Loan Shark's room and drop them off to him. He asks: "Is it all there?" I tell him, "Yeah!" Everyone on the tier sees that I dropped off those bags and know that I borrowed money when I should've already had it on me from getting the money I get every month. Kind looks embarrassing. Nobody wants to come out their cell to pay another convict for anything - whether it be a debt, drugs, or service. Me and my cellie walk with our friends to chow and they're asking: "You gonna crack ém tonight?" I tell ém, "I'll try", and I start walking towards a sports better who always runs the football and basketball parlay tickets throughout the

year. He sees me and asks: "So - what you like today, James?" I tell this guy "Ray Ray" that I got Golden State vs. Cleveland to win. I tell him that I'll give Cleveland plus +7 to their score since that's what the actual line was. Ray Ray wants Golden State as well, but he says he'll take Cleveland if I give him plus +12 points. I think about it and say: "Okay, I'll give you 12 points. I got Golden State." We fist bump to acknowledge that the bet is on between us. So I drift back in the line for my friends to catch up on me. We walk together up this hill to get to the chow hall. We're almost there. Once we're in the chow hall, we look at all the dinner trays. We got Cheeseburgers and potato salad for sure. My buddies are all ragging on me on how all the burgers look small or on how they're cooked and that it's my fault. I didn't even work today, but I give 'em some excuse like: "I didn't work today!" or "I don't order that shit; It's Khang Dhang's fault - he's the clerk and in charge of that stuff!" We sit at these 2 tables that we (USO's) usually sit at every day and we ~~got~~ eat and laugh and talk shit to each other in between chewing and swallowing our food. The guard calls - "Let's go!", and we walk back to our units still laughing and talking shit to each other. But in my mind, all I'm hoping is that I win playing poker. Maybe not even that, but just hoping that I can last the rest of tier time tonight from 6pm - 8:45 pm.

I get in my cell and I change really quick. I grab 15 dollars in stamps and put them in my pocket. My cellie gets in and I pass him as I run out of the cell really quick. He asks me jokingly: "Where you going?!" He knows where I'm going. I just tell 'em, "I going play!" He just shakes his head and pushes the intercom button to let the C.O. know that he wants the cell door closed. He'll probably watch some T.V., listen to some music, read a book, or meditate. He'll try not to deal too much with the other inmates in here

because he's always saying crazy shit to them and too many of them horseplay a lot and can't keep their hands to themselves.

I walk up to the poker table and say, "Let me get 15 dollars!" My buddy "Raff" - short for Rafael is running the table and looks at me saying, "15 dollars?!" - Like I'm crazy for asking for a bigger amount over 5 dollars, I tell him that I need that amount just in case I lose 5 dollars in one hand and don't have to bother him for more chips while we're playing. He counts me up the chips I asked for while he's shaking his head. A few more people see that I'm about to play, so they grab some money from their cells - whether it be bars of Brand-name soap, bottles of lotion or shampoo, stamps, Rahmen noodles, or bags of coffee. It's dealer's choice, so every player takes turns dealing after a hand is over. There's so many different games. They hardly play Texas Hold 'Em. We usually play with a maximum of 7 players. Practically every player has run a poker table while being locked up, so mostly everyone is pretty skilled in playing.

I've been playing till about 7:30 pm. I'm up about 40 dollars. I took my buy in back, so I put it in my pocket. The betting has been pretty steady for the Blind. It's been like 1 dollar for each player to see the flop. After the flop, it's unlimited betting. Some people are down and they want to try and get their money back. There's a hand that I get into where I have a good hand to start with. I got an ace, a couple of Kings, a Queen, and 2 Jacks. We're playing a game called "Straight or Better" with one flop, one turn card, and one river card. One card can be good for a "four of a kind". People fold because somebody goes "All in". It's an amount of 39 bucks. That's all I got, so I call. It's a Black dude named "Slim". So whoever deals this game turns the flop first. It's a six, a jack, and a seven. I got him beat right now. I got Trip Jacks. The next

card is a King. I still got so much possibilities since I got all high cards. I got Trip Jacks, or Trip Kings and a chance for a "straight" as long as this 10 comes. If it pairs, I'll get a "Boat" (a full house), or if another jack or King comes, I'll get a "four of a kind". The River card's flipped and it's a five. I don't make no 5 card hand for a "Straight".

6 Jack 7
"Flop"

K
"Turn" card

5
"River" card

* Slim has a
"Straight" = 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Slim's Hand

A A 10 10 8 9

James' hand

A K K J J Q

Slim's got a "Straight". He shows his ^{whole} hand. He got a pair of Aces, a pair of 10's, an 8, and a 9. I show everyone my hand and everyone shakes their head. Maybe I had better odds, but I lost the hand. Slim screams, "That's right! - Motherfuckers!" All I can say is "Good Hand" - all salty. I just lost 40 bucks in one hand. I don't even got a minimum wage job. I don't even make that in a month at my Kitchen job. I take my 15 dollars in stamps and buy back in.

- In buying back in, I'll probably lose that and get more money. If I lose so much and able to write about it, I probably lost more money. That was almost 3 years ago, I haven't played in a while now. I did eventually get the fan, watch, hot pot, and shoes that I was trying to accumulate though.