

"Fed"

The guard stands on his tippy toes. His entire body becomes erect and leans at a slight angle as he screams. It jars everyone, including the prisoners who are not asleep. The words come out garbled, but everyone knows he meant to say "Line up for chow!"

Some prisoners are very hungry and have been ready to eat for an hour. They immediately walk to the door and stand impatiently. Others sluggishly pull their jumpsuits on, while several go to take a piss first. And there are some continuing to play cards or watch TV, workout in

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the bathroom, or give or receive tattoos in the shower area. But everyone eventually makes their way to the door to stand together and wait. There is horseplay to kill the time, including a nut tap that connects. General unsettlement begins to surface. Someone tells a gay joke, which elicits another, then another.

Ten minutes later the guard yells again: "Chow goin' out!" Prisoners slide their masks up one by one. The group of more than one hundred waddles its way out the door that is partially blocked by the guard who makes a half-assed attempt at keeping an accurate count of those who exit.

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A large puddle of muddy water rests at the bottom of the stairs. The group divides into erratic segments to avoid it. The condition of a prisoner's shoes determines whether he goes left, where it is muddier but less wet, or right, where the water is deeper but it is less muddy. A couple of indiscernible prisoners yell through the screened windows of the adjacent dorm as the group passes. They are talking about business, meaning drugs, money, or both.

The group turns the corner to enter the main street, and another group appears on the other side of the street. They are returning to their dorm with sacks in hand.

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One prisoner, supposing that the moment is right, slides his sack inside his jumpsuit and scuttles across the street. He slows his gait to act natural in hopes of blending in with the other group, but he is noticed by a guard in the street who informs him of this fact with a droning "Noooo!" The prisoner returns to his own group amidst comments such as "Dumbass" and "Stupid motherfucker."

Another prisoner assumes an awkward stride to avoid stepping on a huge loogie, then he hawks and spits one of his own to add to the collection that dots the pavement of the entire prison walk.

Several large turkey vultures circle in

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the sky above, one swooping close to the roof of a dorm. Dogwood trees are spaced unevenly on either side of the street. They've been butchered by a labor crew from the day before. They appear to have first been chopped in half, then shaped into cubes. They are boxes on sticks, smattered with pathetic leaves. Purple and yellow lilies are gathered around the bases of the trees. They are over from the heat and their own petal weight, and their heads are lying on the ground.

A prisoner yells "Show me your dick!" through a nearby window to someone he recognizes. The response is a crotch grab and upraised middle finger. The group is

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funneled around a corner by a metal detector.

Each tenth or so prisoner sets it off for reasons no one cares about, including the nearby guard. The group passes the final dormitory - a quarantine - before arriving at their destination. A prisoner calls out through the screen to someone he knows. The one thing prisoners hear, which comes as no surprise, is "I got Corona."

The group steps up onto the sidewalk in front of the Prisoner Dining Room. At the end of the sidewalk, somewhat out of view, is the Health Care Unit. The HCU serves as an insulin dispensary during chow times, but also as a place to do business. A

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prisoner slinks out of the HCU and seizes the opportunity to merge with the arriving group. The guard standing at the entrance to the PDR notices and stops him. An argument ensues about where the prisoner lives and who has already eaten. Meanwhile, a prisoner trailing far behind his own dorm meanders out of the PDR exit and simply walks behind the distracted guard and weaves his way into the newly-arriving dorm as he tucks his sack into his jumpsuit. The group inches its way through the narrow entrance, resembling livestock heaving its way up a ramp. Each prisoner inhales a quick waft of something dead at the

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doorway, probably a mouse or rat.

There is a different stench inside the dining room, and it is permanent. It is the familiar combination of cheap cleaning solution and mildew. The concrete floor is sticky in more than one way. It is stained with various body fluids and the spillage of overcooked vegetable juices. The effect is dark and marbled. A guard leaning on a handrail immediately begins making sexual comments to a prisoner he recognizes in line, to which the prisoner responds in kind. A female guard sits alone at one of the empty tables and stares at the rafters. She looks equally bored and lazy.

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"How ya doin' today, Ms. Shaughnessy?"

a prisoner calls out.

"I'm fuckin' good," she replies,
keeping her eyes locked on nothing.

The humidity intensifies with every
step toward the receiving window. Plastic
lunch sacks are being placed forcefully on
the window's ledge one at a time as each
prisoner takes his and moves on. A guard
stands at the window staring at the sacks
as they're being grabbed. He is watching for
sleight of hand or any irregular movement
that would indicate a prisoner is attempting
to double-up. The sacks are slammed on
the ledge mechanically by an anonymous

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hand, almost angrily. Some prisoners scoop it up with a finesse that can only come from months of practice. Others fumble with their sack and occasionally drop it to the floor, and some pause to inspect the contents to ensure they haven't been shorted. Oftentimes the bologna slides partially out of the sack and drags across the metal ledge, leaving a slimy trail. With sacks in hand, prisoners continue through the yellow rails around corners and toward the exit. Guards sit scattered throughout the PDR. They look tired and disgusted, brightening up only momentarily at the occasional dick joke, gay joke, or coarse

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comment.

Many of the prisoners begin eating their lunch before making it out of the PDR. Several of them go straight for the cookie. IF they slide their meat out of its bag and onto the bread, the bag ends up on the ground. IF mustard is squeezed onto it, the empty packet also ends up on the ground. Some prisoners tuck their sack away and study the movements of the street guards as soon as they exit, calculating the possibility of a crossing and melding into the group of another dorm. A few prisoners recognize someone they know in the group across the street on their way to the PDR. They slow their pace in hopes of meeting up

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before they are noticed and yelled at.

There are trash cans at the corners in the street to mark boundaries for returning groups. They are lined with bags and are intended to be actually used as trash cans as well, but trash is everywhere in the street. There are unidentifiable splashes smashed into the pavement that could be bread, apple chunks, or cockroaches. Many prisoners cut the corners, rendering the trash cans meaningless in two ways. Most guards are too indifferent to say anything, which makes it remarkable when one occasionally yells "Make the corner!" or "Why you cuttin' across my compound!?!"

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Farther up the walk two prisoners notice each other too late to slow-walk and catch up. They conduct their business loudly across the street while a guard kicks at the pavement with the heel of his boot. They use shallow code like "Did your sister send that?" and "I'll be out here with that tonight." A prisoner splits out of the pack and hurries across the street. He assumes a sporting grin as he receives the verdict.

"Nooooo!"