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ARF

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When the MDOC Yells "CHOW!" (← bold font)

Penitentiary rules early in the morning telling me this and that...
As I shuffle along this desperate path following stultified men;
all racing and off with their horses to eat.

Now being watched in the Strange Circus by squawking radios ^{jangling} keys;
their adversarial eyes attuned to the last string of nerves.

While asking for menu options that aren't really choices: "A sub,"
says one, or "No gravy on mine," adds another.

Sign on wall reads: "Two drinks ONLY! That means
one water — ONLY!" A friendly prison greeting.

Move up, take one plastic tray, cup, spoon-like fork;
find yourself a plastic seat.

Over there, open spot at the next dirty table,
wipe it down kitchen-worker; keep it moving—next man!

Recoil in horror at the sloppy portioned out food;
not very appealing. Overcooked, undercooked, burnt,
hard, raw, soft, mush—antagonistic adverbs apply.

Looks bland to the critical eyes, add salt.

Tastes bland to the talented tongue, add hope.

Some chew fast like eager dogs, eye-ing other trays for more.

While others try to enjoy sad events lingering aromas for company.

As tablemates come and go in the Prison Machine—next man!

Buying, selling, trading... "What have you got? Give me!
You owe! Ha ha ha." Misery in love.

Before hearing: "Times up, you're done! Get up, out you go.

No stealing! Empty your pockets!" says the uniformed binder of rules.

So you take one last chew, chug of drink, wipe mouth,
discard a plastic tray, and head on back to your

State-issued plastic life, chow's over.