

Jacob Barrett #11123024
3405 Deer Park Dr. S.E.
Salem Oregon 97310

Time to Feed the Animals

“Time to feed the animals!” a guard barks as the pod door opens. I hear that at least twice a day when the officers bring our meals. It’s a reminder of exactly how they look at me. I am an animal in a cage. I start to internalize the belief that this is my existence. If they see me as an animal I must be. The food is stacked in neat rows on large open metal racks. Each tray is a light yellow plastic with a shit brown lid. The supervising officer opens tray slots with a set of heavy brass keys as each officer takes up a job and begins to hand out trays to the animals as the food ports open.

“Refused,” the sergeant opening trays slots says as he passes one cell.

“I didn’t refuse,” the inmate responds.

“Refused,” the sergeant says as he passes another prisoners cell.

“Fuck you pig,” that prisoner spits at him. The first inmate begins kicking his door and other prisoner start to yell with him in tandem.

This routine plays out every meal. The guards come in and simply walk by cells and deny prisoners food. Sometimes they hand out a tray with no food on it. We call them “ghost trays”. Their targets are usually someone who has pissed one officer or another off. I watch guys being denied food for three or four days at a time. Many of them are mentally ill and the guards are just being sadistic. They put it down in the paperwork that the prisoner is acting aggressive and wasn’t able to be fed safely.

“I didn’t get a tray,” I tell the guard as he walks by my cell.

“You were sitting on your bunk,” he tells me, “if you aren’t standing at your door before we come in I take that to mean you don’t want to eat.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” I ask him. “I’m standing right here. I want to eat.” I was sitting on my bunk when they came in but was standing by the door as they started to open tray ports. He must have seen me sitting for a second too long. That was the game. He didn’t have to do it. I was standing right there at the door waiting.

“If you aren’t ready when we come in,” the guard says in a boilerplate speech, “I interpret that to mean you don’t want to eat.”

“I’m telling you now I want to eat,” I inform him.

“Refused,” he says in a smart ass voice.

“You fucking punk ass bitch,” I yell at him. He stops walks back toward my cell and looks at me coldly.