

ORANGEY CONVICTED BABYMEN RECEIVING MANDATORY DAILY NOURISHMENT

By Jim Meirose

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WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor/author HOWIE GOOD writes: Because it's got rhythm, a kind of Joycean jive, Finnegans Wake without Finnegans, Kafka's paranoia filling the void – oh sure, the trial's over, the punishment already handed down, if just beginning to be physically and psychically suffered by the “orangey convicted babymen” shuffling through the dinginess of some lower stratum of bureaucratic hell, where there are rules for every little thing, rules that represent the arbitrary exercise of state power, the arbitrariness only partially disguised by the rules being quantified in feet and inches and explicated in nauseating detail by our relentless narrator, whose name, title, even gender are never revealed, who is not so much the sadistic warden of uncounted prison movies as the imperative voice of a generic authority, the authority of law, religion, the military, family, media, school, the interlocking institutions of society that enclose us in ideology, an ideology that commands us to think and act in socially approved ways, to stand where we are told to stand, to eat what we are told to eat – an ideology that infantilizes us, renders us “babymen,” malleable, amenable, fit only to live the life we are given, incapable of creating a free and autonomous life of our own, unwilling to even try.*

Orangey Convicted Babymen Receiving Mandatory Daily Nourishment

(842 words)

Class, sit quiet, and learn this; that In each and every generic maximum security regional punishment center across our entire heartland, down in each chow hall, at the start of each mealtime, file one by one, and three by five, lines of the same exact hungry orangey convicted babymen—each the identical copy of the one each follows, in a perfectly straight line, identically spaced, each gripping identically empty spotlessly clean low mileage cheap tin trays, each held out front at precisely belly button level, with the midpoint of each tray touching the central bellybutton marker of each hungry orangey convicted babyman exactly, thus ensuring, in true OCD manner, that when the tray is perfectly centered, each hungry orangey convicted babyman takes exactly one step forward every thirty seconds, just as the priest, once a year, enters the holy of holies someplace to see—no, sorry, my God forbids me to utter the name of what lies within the holy of holies. And no one can follow. No one not ever—so, back to here; each of these cited orangey convicted babyman, when reaching the near terminus of the gleamingly smooth-faced tray loading slideway slick serving-surface, turns and places the tray sidewise on said servingly slick serving-surface. The right edge of each tray must be exactly five inches from the left edge of the preceding orangey convicted babyman’s tray. Then—number One to be served steps forward approaching the first sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who forks between three and four ounces of leatherthick protein onto the tray, sliding number One to the second sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who spoons three quarters cup of soggy steaming starch onto the tray, sliding number One to the third sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who forks one thin

slice of semistale bread onto the tray, sliding number One to the fourth sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who spoons out a steaming dripping mass of boiled black edible vegetation onto the tray, sliding number One to the fifth sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who pops a small Styrofoam cup off one of several dozen tall stacks, fills the cup from a spout on a blanklabeled filthencrusted machine to the side, presses a lever filling the cup with an unknown dark liquid, and places the cup splashily onto the tray, sliding number One to the sixth and last sternfaced guiltypled-serverman, who pulls a small pudding cup and a granny smith from a deep icy bowl off beside, sending number One out the back into the preordained path of least resistance, to the first available dining-room-hall hard smooth steely-seat in the center of a vast brightlit steely-concrete-walled grey empty space—and everything, everything, oh, it might seem unbelievable, but yes, absolutely everything from the uh—number One to be served steps forward out the back but all then must be repeated back front, but each time incrementing number One to number Two, and then number Two to number Three, et-ceteranooney, looping and incrementing and again and again numbers Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight Nine, Ten Eleven Twelve Thirteen, Fourteen Fifteen Sixteen Seventeen Eighteen Nineteen Twenty Twenty-one, Twenty-two Twenty-three Twenty-four Twenty-five Twenty-six—eh eh, and for the next ten or twenty or more orangey convicted babymen shuffling up by the sextet of guiltypled-servermen, all up to roughly on-following orangey convicted babymen Forty, Forty-five, Forty-six, Fifty, eh; meal fifty measures at three point three ounces of protein, one-half cup of starch, one bread item, four point nine-nine cups of boiled black edible vegetation, one half full beverage, one pudding cup, and one granny smith; now throw that up next to meal fifty-one, measuring at three point six ounces of protein, one-quarter cup of starch, one bread item, four point eight cups of boiled black edible vegetation, one three-quarters full beverage, one pudding cup, and one granny smith; now

throw both those up next to meal fifty-two measuring at three point three ounces of protein, one-third cup of starch, one bread item, five cups of boiled black edible vegetation, one full to the top beverage, one pudding cup, and one granny smith; and so on, and so forth, racking up the statistical proof 'cross that gleamingly huge dry slickly smooth whiteboard across there that, after ten years of study and tons of secondhand supercomputer timesharing expense, the calculations prove that no two, no three, no five hundred and not even no infinitely superfar-out big fat impossibly long assed number of meals, are ever no ever no ever the same—uh—so, nowalone, the lunchmeals gone under, the tables set empty, with everyone gone. The room where the table set empty's empty, as well. The house where the tables and room both set empty's not, but may as well be, because what God has created with power to think this through, and that through, and anything at all through, and do not do, yes, must without exception follow some big overarching fundamental rule, whatever it may be making ever step of this rule mandatory—and it will be done three times each day without failure or failing at all—God willing. So, class.

Any questions?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Most all my work these days comes very easily. Of course, in some basic way I have to have the route ahead down before hitting the gas - meaning the scene, the setting, the characters, etc - and once I feel ready, I hit the gas, and off we go. As far as influences, I know that I have them, they're necessary while building your chops, but now I dont think what I do is affected by any. It's more like I've got to where the writing "muscle" is free and strong enough that what comes onto the page is nothing more than what's been percolating inside my head all along. Through the years all technical obstacles have dropped away. When I turn on the tap, and the way forward's clear, I open the tap, head down, and it flows onto the page quite effortlessly. When done and looking back, I'm am*

always surprised at what has come out. And these days with minor edits only required.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Jim Meirose's short work has appeared in numerous venues (including Fleas On The Dog—Issue 5-Fiction) and his published novels include 'Le Overgivers au Club de la Resurrection' (Mannequin House), 'Understanding Franklin Thompson' (JEF Press) and 'Sunday Dinner with Father Dwyer' (Optional Books). Info at www.jimmeirose.com*

EDITOR'S BIO: *Howie Good is the author most recently of 'Stick Figure Opera: 99 100 Prose Poems' from Cajun Mutt Press. He co-edits the online journals Unbroken and Unlost. We've published his fiction in Issue 2 and Issue 5.(see Archives).*