

BREAKFAST

waking up all those mornings in the drunk tank,
busted lower lip, loose tooth, head whirling in
a cacophony that is not yours,
and those strange bodies there in rags, quiet
now in their madness, stuck within the walls, no
glory, nothing but a stopped-up toilet and
somebody else's
law.

and there was always one voice, a loud voice:
"BREAKFAST!"

you usually didn't want it
but if you did
before you could get to your legs
the cell door was slammed
shut.

now each morning it's like a slow-motion
dream, I find my slippers, put them on,
do the bathroom bit, then walk down the
stairway to the whirling of fur bodies, I am
the feeder, the god, I clean the bowls, open
the cans and talk to them and they get excited,
make their sounds.
I put the bowls down and each cat moves toward
its bowl, then I refill the water bowl, then
look down, all five of them are eating
peacefully.

I walk back up the stairway to the bedroom
where my wife is still asleep, I crawl beneath
the sheets with her, place my back to the sun
and am soon asleep again.
you have to die a few times before you
live.

—Charles Bukowski
San Pedro, CA