

# THE PATH

THE first few days he'd been getting used to the routine. And now he had learned it. He knew exactly what would happen. Each day it was the same from the time the first bell woke him in the morning, or when he found himself awake in the cold blue shadows of early dawn. Lying on the stiff canvas sheet, feeling the hard small sticks of straw pressing into the mould of his body, on the hammock, he could see the whitewashed ceiling and upper walls becoming faintly visible around the deep-set and barred cell window. He could image exactly the things he would do in the coming day—the getting dressed in the white moleskin trousers, the drab itchy grey flannel shirt, and the tweed coat, grey-green with age.

Then the unlocking of the heavy dull red iron door as the tin bowls of porridge and fried hash were passed in. The first meal eaten alone in the cold whitewashed cube. Then the folding of the sulphury blankets for the morning inspection. And at last the release from the cell into the now noisy wings and corridors of the prison for the day's work. Twenty-seven cells to clean. Being a Housemaid because twenty-seven crimes were being punished—no twenty-eight! Twenty-seven sets of tin bowls to collect, twenty-seven knives and forks and enamel mugs and enamel plates to wash in a bucket of hot water with a little cloth wrapped on the end of a stick. Twenty-seven tables to wipe. Twenty-seven dusty stone walls to sweep, and twenty-seven dropped butts to pick up. Twenty-seven everything. Even twenty-seven stinking bed-pans to clean and wipe. The day's work. He knew exactly what the day's work was.

BUT to-day was Saturday—the first week-end in prison. The routine was different. Less work to do—they clean their own stinking damp pans to-day. The cleaners got out into the big yard as soon as the cells were swept and the dishes washed. The big yard! That was the life! Room to walk, plenty of sunny places to sit and talk, plenty of sky and clouds, blue and white over the grey stones and slate roof. To-day the big yard! He had seen it through the gates in the north wing as he carried the bucket of hot water along that way for his work in the north extension. And now he was lined up with the others in a restless group as the screw checked them off before opening that big barred gate into the yard. Tony, the cleaner working on the row of cells above his, was beside him. He had done a month already and knew his way around. "You stick with me and you'll get that fig alright—this horse will come in sure." Tony liked a bet, even if it was with someone else's tobacco-ration. He'd sit all Saturday under the loudspeaker that filled the big yard with music and race-results from the local radio station. Tobacco was the currency. You could use it to get extra butter, cheese, syrup, or milk. Or you could use it on the horses.

Written for "The Listener"  
by R. HUTCHINS

"O.K., Tony," he said, "Only if you do do it, save me a coupla rolls from yours, will ya? A week without a drag is a long time. Will ya?"  
"Sure." Tony was always sure like that. Specially when it came to horses and pakapoo banks.



"Ten grey stones in that crazy path. What a crazy idea . . ."

The screw grunted the moving order. The hob-nail boots scraped and clashed along the stone floor. The big gates swung open and they passed through on to the steps. And down into the big yard.

IT was square in shape, between the North and East wings, with high walls, on the two outer sides. Most of it was an octagonal asphalt area, from which paths led out like spokes into the grass corners. Seats, just like park benches, were spaced evenly around the hard octagon.

A water tap, growing abruptly out of the asphalt, dripped on to a wet patch near the centre. At the far corner where the outer walls joined, the dull shine of the guard's rifle marked his position in the shadowy stone cage that overlooked the yard. About ten feet in and running parallel to both the outside walls was the high barbed wire erected after the "Kelly gang" successfully blew a hole with smuggled gelignite through the eastern wall. The new stones and concrete-work marked the place in the monotonous pattern of the wall.

It was far too early for the race results. So Tony pointed out some of the more interesting characters to him.

"See that young bloke over on the steps rolling a smoke? Well, he's a lifer—did a woman in down south—and that one next to him? He's doing four years for that Post-office blow-out last year. You remember that guy who got his for

going the Nazi way? There he is walking over there—he always walks fast like that. Jeez, I'd hate to be him, eh?"

THE lifers, the bash-artists, the can-openers, the sexos, the con-men, the burglars, the drunken drivers, deserting seamen, and petty thieves—the whole lot. All around him in the big yard—all looking much alike in the white trousers and grey coats. All this side of the law, some bad, some better, all in the big yard, walking, talking, sitting and smoking. Looking at the lifers you couldn't tell them apart from the others unless you were told. Yet murder was a helluva lot different from ratting a shop in Newmarket. But it didn't show in their faces. No, they all looked just like prisoners—men prisoners. But how did

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they feel about those years to come? Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five — Jesus! Twenty-five years doing the same thing day after day—walking the same short walks from that same small cell, seeing the same stones, the same gate, the same steel bars, hearing that ceaseless jangling of keys—all the same thing day after day after day!

(continued on next page)

## Mothers used it 100 years ago, Mothers use it today!

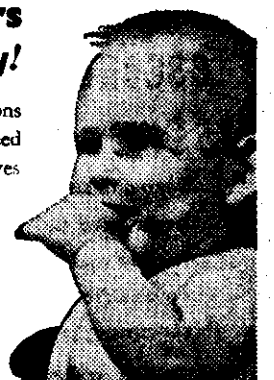
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