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When Frank Abagnale was sentenced to "only" one year of prison in Perpignan's "House of Arrest," he probably thought the term was short. But he was clueless how long even six months would seem in such a place.

Alone in a totally dark cell that was too small for him to stand up, the American con artist was transported back to the 17th century. He describes the place in *Catch Me If You Can*:

There was no light switch. There was no light in the cell. There was, in fact, nothing in the cell but a bucket. No bed, no toilet, no wash basin, no drain, nothing. Just the bucket. The cell was not a cell, actually, it was a hole, a raised dungeon perhaps five feet wide, five feet high and five feet deep, with a ceiling and door of steel and a floor and walls of stone. (Catch Me, page 226)

A sentence to Perpignan's prison was not meant to rehabilitate anyone. It was meant as punishment for a crime.

Six feet tall, and 210 pounds, Abagnale slept curled up on the cold floor of his new crypt. He ate bread and drank water which guards delivered at irregular times. Sometimes he didn't eat for an entire day. He never showered. Twice he managed to stand in the stream of water as another inmate hosed out his cell which reeked from unemptied buckets of his own waste.

He put-up with deplorable conditions because human beings have the capacity to adapt. Abagnale:

The bucket was my latrine. I was not given any toilet paper, nor was the bucket removed after use. I soon adapted to the stench, but after a few days the bucket overflowed and I had to move around and sleep in my own fecal matter. I was too numbed, in body and spirit, to be revolted. (Catch Me, page 230)

Humans have the capacity to adapt, but such conditions are breeding grounds for disease:

Lice and other insects small enough to gain admittance to the fetid cell nested in my body hair and feasted on my flesh. I developed sores from my scratching and these became infected from contact with the always present filth. My body soon became a mass of scabs, a living petri dish for the culture of myriad forms of bacteria. In the cramped confines of the hole, shrouded in blackness, I lost my sense of balance and fell often as I attempted to move about, stretch myself or perform simple exercises, nicking or bruising myself against the rough walls or the hard floor and further adding to my wounds. (Catch Me, page 231)

To keep from going insane, Abagnale would conjure up all sorts of images in his mind: He was an airline pilot again, or a famous surgeon. Perhaps he was a noted author, or a Nobel Prize winner. But the fantasies only lasted for awhile, and Frank never left his cell until he was released halfway through his sentence.

No one would have recognized the smelly, gaunt, and bearded man with the unkept long hair on Abagnale's last day in the House of Arrest. All of his many female conquests would have been repulsed by the man who saw his cell for the first time on the day of his release. Even he was stunned:

I was appalled and sickened as I looked around. The walls were moist and crusted with slimy mold. The ceiling, too, glistened with moisture. The floor was filthy with excrement, and the bucket, unemptied for some time, teemed with maggots. The odious worms were also slithering around the floor. (Catch Me, page 239)

After he cleaned himself up and ate some real food (which, of course, made him sick), Frank learned his fate. He would be prosecuted by the next government waiting to try him for his crimes.

This time, he was going to Sweden.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/IMPRISONED-IN-PERPIGNAN-Catch-Me-If-You-Can>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/IMPRISONED-IN-PERPIGNAN-Catch-Me-If-You-Can>