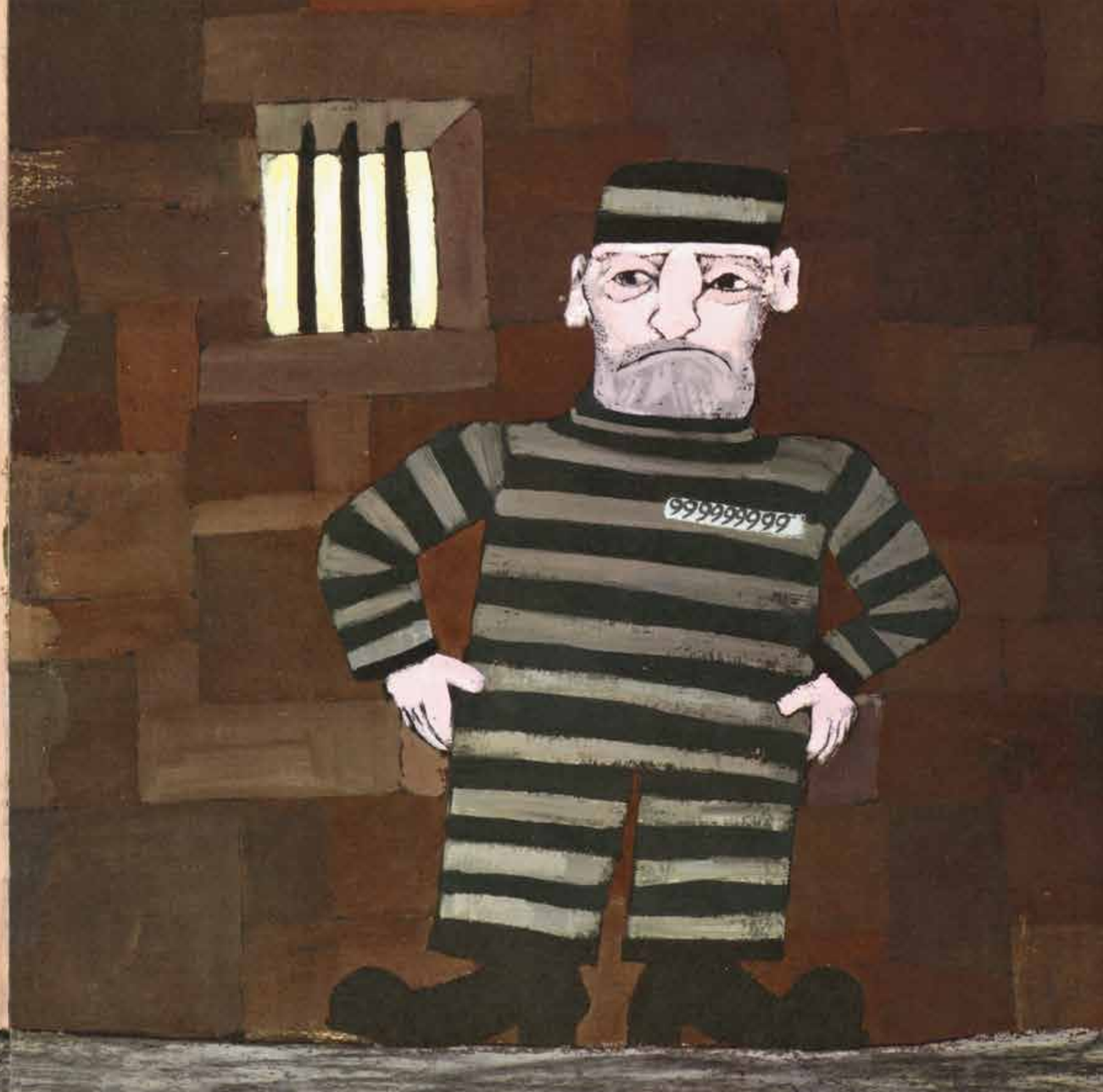


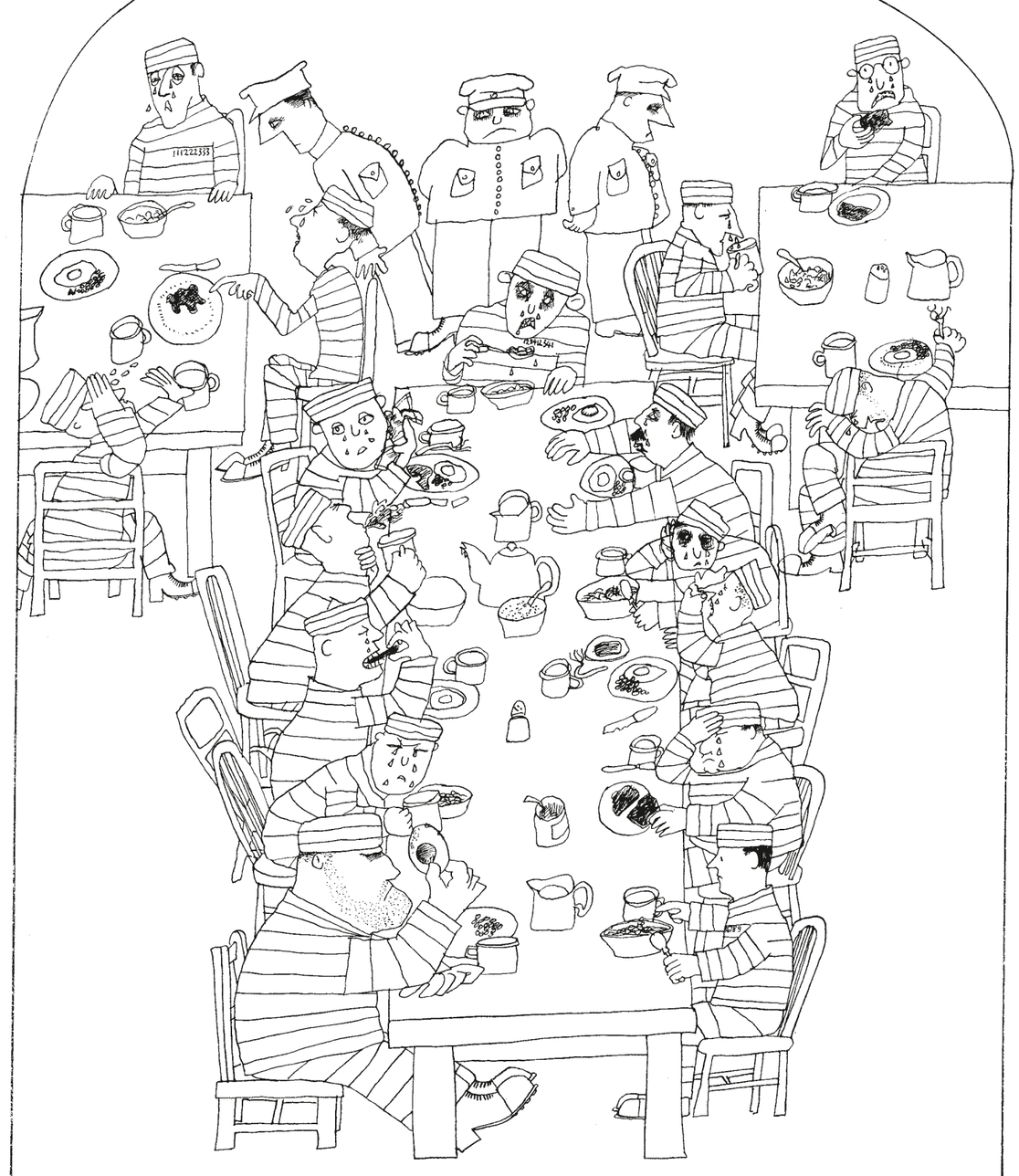
MR BENN 123456789

DAVID McKEE

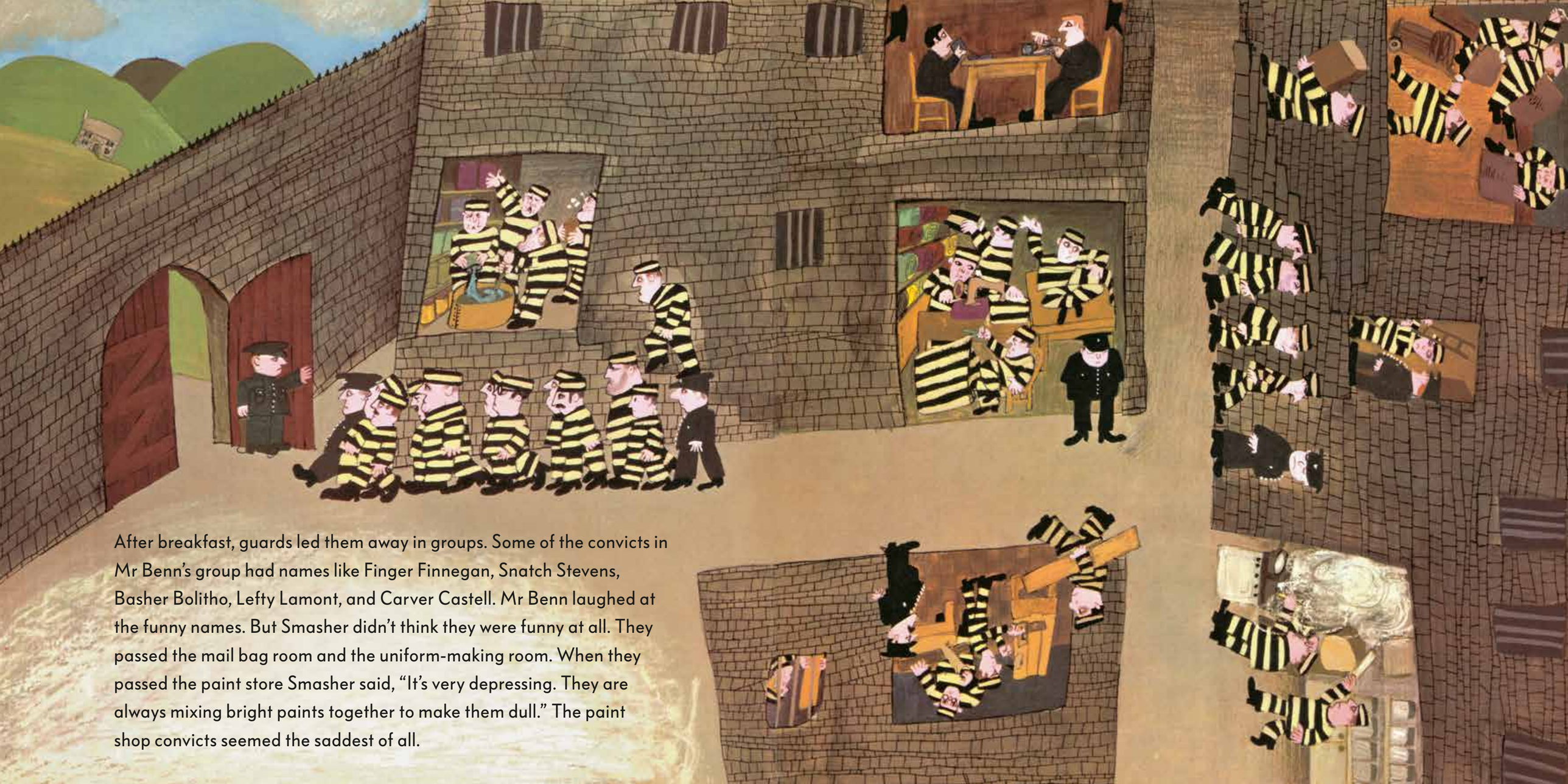
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A noise behind Mr Benn made him turn round. There stood a huge convict. “Hello,” said Mr Benn.
“Who are you?”
“Smasher Lagru,” said the man. “I’m the boss around here.”
“Is it because of you that all those men are crying?” asked Mr Benn.
“No,” said Smasher.
“Then why?” asked Mr Benn again. “I can see how anyone who was shut up in here would be unhappy. But what could make grown men cry?”
“It’s this place. You can’t help it. You’ll see,” said Smasher.





Just then a bell rang. “Breakfast time,” said Smasher.
“Good,” said Mr Benn. “I’m starving.”
“Well it won’t be fit to eat,” said the big convict. “It’s as horrible as everything else here.”
Everywhere, doors were clanging open. Mr Benn and Smasher Lagru went with the other convicts to breakfast.
The cornflakes were soggy, the sugar was bitter, the coffee was cold, the toast was burnt, and the eggs were hard.
“It’s the same day after day. There’s plenty of food – but it’s never cooked right. It’s all part of the gloom,” said Smasher.
“So’re the interior decorations,” added Mr Benn, looking at the dark greyish paint everywhere. Smasher nodded.
“In the morning we all do our various jobs: some convicts sew mail bags, some mend boots, some make uniforms, and so on. We go to the quarry to break rocks. In the afternoon we all clean our cells, then we have our exercise, a walk round the yard outside.”
All around them prisoners cried over their food, making it taste worse than ever.



After breakfast, guards led them away in groups. Some of the convicts in Mr Benn's group had names like Finger Finnegan, Snatch Stevens, Basher Bolitho, Lefty Lamont, and Carver Castell. Mr Benn laughed at the funny names. But Smasher didn't think they were funny at all. They passed the mail bag room and the uniform-making room. When they passed the paint store Smasher said, "It's very depressing. They are always mixing bright paints together to make them dull." The paint shop convicts seemed the saddest of all.

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