



The smell of shit has subsided.

And I think that fact – how quickly the body acclimates to a repulsive environment – angers me more than the shit itself...

Mr Musakanya warned me about the *shit room*. But I didn't take him seriously. He said they funnel the sewerage directly into the room – a pipe through the wall – letting it fill up like a bathtub, or a ditch after the coffin has been lowered...

Is that Mr Musonda's voice?

Mr Musonda? Mr–Mr– MR MUSONDA!

IT'S ME. MR SHAMWANA. IT'S ME... Edward.

It's pitch black in here, but I just *know* it's Mr Musonda. All those hours spent together in the living room, I can recognize that high-pitched laugh from a mile away.

I start banging on the wall with my palm (at the same time hoping the *Inswa* forgive me for this, and spare me through the night) to warn Mr Musonda.

BE CAREFUL MY FRIEND. THE GUARDS ARE NEARBY.

Mr Musonda's laugh is getting louder and louder, so I stop banging and stand as still as possible.

There's an inswa burrowing its way into my lower back, working its way in like a screwdriver.

But I must be pindrop silent.

It's picking apart my nerves, trying to nest within my blackened flesh, maybe laying its eggs so they can attack the remaining layers of flesh. Is this how I'll die? Death by Inswa?

No no no no. To cave and scream wouldn't make any sense... beyond being cowardly, it WOULD NOT MAKE SENSE. They stripped me to a naked, brittle pulp, threw me in human feces, and taunted me with the smell of *nshima*...

What's a single, blind inswa to me?

His laugh is right outside the room. But I now realize it's the guards he's laughing with...

I bang my head against the wall beside me. I need confirmation that I'm awake.

I feel a warm, thick liquid drip from my forehead down to my nose. Yes, I'm awake. It's not empirical evidence – fit for the courtroom – but it's a decent sign. Besides... this is the greatest warmth I've felt in mont-days? Twelve hours...?

However long I've been in here.

"Mr Shamwana, are you there?"

It's definitely Mr Musonda! He's come to save me! I whisper through the crevice in the wall, making sure the guards beside him can't hear: "Mr Musonda... are you planning my escape?"

HAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAGHAGAGAJHAHAGAA

The guards erupt in laughter. Mr Musonda's voice the loudest...

"Eddie... would you like to hear a joke?"

They laugh, then laugh some more.

"What do you call a worthless old man who's been imprisoned, stripped of all his pride, and ugly as a hog?"

"Ed-ward jack-shit ShamwanahahahaHAHAHAHAhahahahijaishjhahaaahah--"

I wake up from the best sleep I've had so far in here, and feel my chest constricting.

It's like a metal coat hanger has been unraveled, wrapped around my nipples and back, then tightened and released every few seconds.

Seconds. One second. Two seconds. Three seconds. I now treasure the unit of seconds.

Every other unit is too large to keep track of; too abstract and removed from the body.

Every 5 seconds I blink, which might seem pointless when there's nothing to see... but I'm practicing for when I can see my sons again.

Every 8 seconds, I separate my big and second toe on each foot to make sure they're still intact. They feel like separate entities now... but nonetheless, still intact.

Every 20 seconds, 22 seconds, 30 seconds? ARRGHGHGHGGG, the unit's getting too large again. Every *once in a while*, I try to lick my lips. I'm now entirely out of saliva, and the action feels simultaneously like rubbing sandpaper on my lips, and pulling back the skin on the corner of a fingernail...

This issue of perceiving time occupies 90% of my limited brainpower.

Say I've been in here for only 12 hours.. that means I've still got a long way to go until they return me to Valentine and the other men. Now, say I've been here for 4 days... surely, then, they have no intention of ever letting me out.

In that case, I ought to make peace with the Inswa burrowing into my back... they must think I'm already a corpse, and that it's their duty to decompose me.. they're only carrying out nature's

obligations. “For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.” It’s Mr Musonda who’s disobeying nature’s plan. They brainwashed him! Those CHIKALAS must have brainwashed him! How could they call themselves Christians, patrons, men of god!? How could they...ARGHHHHHHHHH! LET ME OUT. GET ME OUT OF HERE.

LORD.

Please.

*Author’s note: Perhaps this is what my grandfather’s diary would’ve looked like.*