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The Shadow of a Smile

Written by Kachi A. Ozumba

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THE SHADOW OF A SMILE

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The Shadow of a Smile

Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): “Can you describe this?” And I said: “Yes, I can.” And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.

Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem*

The Middle World

New Man

The policeman motioned with the rifle hanging from his shoulder. "This way mister man."

Zuba stepped into the dim corridor. His steps echoed on the pockmarked concrete floor strewn with pieces of broomstick. The yellow walls had a thousand blotches like the albino skin of the policeman. A smoky amalgam of stale sweat, urine, fermenting faeces and desolation hung over the passage.

"You think rich man son no go cell?" the policeman called after him.

The words did not sting this time. Zuba had been lashed with dozens of them during interrogation and had grown calluses against them. He walked down the corridor, staring blankly. Ike followed behind him, his face tight with rage. The imprint of the interrogator's palm was still visible on his cheek.

The smell intensified as they passed the rust-and-dirt-coloured bars of a cell door. Bare-chested men squatted on the floor in the dimness beyond. The words, "New man", floated out; whispered, repeated, passed from mouth to mouth. Bodies began to stir within the cell.

"Idem, they say you suppose get space for your cell for this two," said the albino when they got to the office at

the end of the corridor. He placed a white sheet on the counter before a chubby-faced man in police uniform. Then he studied an almanac on the wall with its photos of gaily-dressed women: NIGERIAN POLICE WIVES ASSOCIATION 2000. The nose-crinkling scent of mosquito coil struggled against the odour oozing from the corridor.

Idem looked down at the sheet. “Hmmmnh, Threatening Violence and Stealing.” He looked up and glanced at Ike’s glowering eyes. Then his gaze settled on the softness of Zuba’s face, at the eyes that seemed to stare back at him from a dizzying distance, and down at the gold cufflink that winked at him from the manicured hand Zuba had placed on the counter. “Undress, undress,” he barked. “Or you want enter cell with your fine-fine dress? Bring your money and valuables too.”

His words must have carried down the corridor. Shouts erupted from the cell:

“If you people dare to come in here without your *cell-sho* we’ll pummel you till you forget your mothers’ names.”

“Make sure you bring your cell-sho or we’ll dip your head into our shit bucket.”

“...We’ll kill you here today...”

Zuba and Ike exchanged glances. The dread they had nursed beneath their calmness, hidden like some venereal disease, broke out in a rash of symptoms. They forgot to feel embarrassed as they stared at each other with gaping eyes and palpitating hearts.

“D-Do you understand what th-they’re saying, Zuba?” Ike’s usually robust voice was whispery.

Zuba smelled the fear in Ike’s breath. He did not trust his own voice. He shook his head. His rigid fingers unbuttoned the striped white shirt he had on over black trousers. None of the detention stories he had read, none of the tales he had heard, had ever spoken of “cell-sho”. He leant towards Idem. “Please, what... what are they saying? What is ‘cell-sho’?”

“Cell-show. You’ll find out soon enough what it is,” Idem replied in perfect English.

“Please, have you any advice for us? We’ve never been in this kind of a situation before.”

Idem’s lips stretched in a sad smile. He shook his head slightly, to himself. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Zuba.”

“OK, Zuba, give me one thousand naira from there to give them,” he motioned with his chin at the wad of money lying on the counter. “That should help take care of things.”

Zuba counted out twenty fifty-naira notes from the wad. The money quivered as he handed it to Idem.

Idem collected the money. “You no remove your trouser?”

Zuba shook his head. “I’m OK.” He ran his hand over his white vest and black trousers. Beside him, Ike had stripped to the black shorts underneath his trousers.

“OK, remove your belt. Belt is not allowed in cell. Some-one fit use it hang himself.”

Zuba unbuckled his belt and pulled it free. He unbuckled his watch; the automatic Seiko stainless steel watch his father had given him four years ago, a month after his eighteenth birthday.

“You people sure you bring all your money?” Idem asked. “They go take everything from you once you enter cell o.”

Ike nodded. Zuba nodded too. He exchanged a glance with Ike as he felt the warmth of the money spread out evenly in the two back pockets of the denim shorts under his trousers. He rubbed the keloid on his face. A spindly wasp hummed before its mud nest behind Idem, at the point where the yellowing ceiling met the yellow walls, the sound in the confined space.

The shouts coming down the corridor had petered out to intermittent calls.

“Zuba, please allow me to manage the situation when we get in there,” Ike said.

“No, Ike. No. Don’t worry. I can manage the situation.”

“I understand this people better than you do. Let me. Trust me.” There was a stubborn streak in Ike’s eye which Zuba knew too well. This was survival, not some official matter.

“OK,” he said.

They signed beneath the list of their belongings then followed Idem as he led the way to the corridor. The jangle of keys, the squeal of rusty hinges, the clang of metal against metal as the iron door swung shut. Zuba and

Ike were in the dark stench of the cell. Four men stared at them. Two of them were seated, their bare backs resting against the wall. The third man was stretched out on the concrete floor. His six-foot body bisected the cell, with his head propped up against one wall and his toes brushing the one opposite. While the fourth man, who had risen from his post before the doorway to allow them to enter, was standing by the door. He was burly and light-skinned, and had jutting cheekbones, bushy hair and beard.

Zuba felt for the secure coolness of the cell wall behind him. His gaze roved from one face to the other. Beside him, Ike stood ramrod still.

The burly light-skinned man took his place again before the entrance, resting his left elbow on the bars of the door.

“You, take—” Idem handed some money to him through the bars. “Make you treat them well.”

Idem walked off.

“What’s this? Two hundred naira?” the prefect barked, after the echo of Idem’s boots had died out in the corridor. He waved the money disdainfully at Zuba and Ike.

Zuba’s heart thumped in his chest as he stared back at the prefect with a blank face.

Ike stepped away from the security of the wall. He stood in the centre of the cell, between the outstretched legs of the other inmates, and looked around like an architect on his building site.

Zuba could hear Ike’s brain cranking behind a fake smile. Say something quick, he commanded Ike in his mind.

“I said, what is this?” the prefect repeated, his voice rising. “Mike,” he called.

The man beside him got up. He was tall and dark, and the contours of his large bones showed clearly through flesh that was stretched too tightly over them. His only clothing was trousers, worn inside out and folded at the hip to keep them from sliding down. The cream pouches of the pockets looked comical against the black fabric. “You see this?” Mike said, pointing at an inscription in chalk on the wall. “CELL-SHOW = N500,” he read out.

“Oh. So this thing is still here,” Ike said. The smile on his face was growing. “I wrote it.”

Zuba’s heart skipped. The buzzing of flies became the only sound in the cell. Ike remained where he was, rocking on his feet while returning the stares of the other inmates. One of them laughed ; Zuba was not sure who. He had just begun to relax, hoping Ike had called the bluff of the inmates, when Mike’s hand rose in a swing while the inmate lying on the floor lunged for Ike’s crotch.

“Ike!” Zuba screamed, and began bawling: “Police! Police! Idem!”

Ike leapt. Mike’s punch missed his face and landed on his shoulder. The hand from below grabbed at his crotch and yanked, transforming his shorts into a skirt.

“What’s happening there?” Idem called as his steps thudded down the corridor. “I say, what’s happening? Where you? Zuba?” He stood before the iron bars.

Ike’s assailants had sat back down on the floor, staring straight ahead. Ike returned to the security of the wall beside Zuba, panting.

“Em... It’s OK now,” Zuba said. He leant to the right and poked his head before the bars to reassure Idem.

“I say I no want any trouble in there. I no want hear any noise again. Otherwise I go throw tear gas in there.” Idem turned and left. His footsteps had barely faded when Mike and his co-assailant came at them again.

Zuba held out his left hand. “OK OK.” He slid his other hand under his trouser and retrieved the wad in one of the back pockets of his shorts.

Mike snapped the money out of Zuba’s hand and counted it. “Thank your Creator,” he said, and wagged a finger at Ike’s face. He took the money to the prefect. “One thousand one hundred naira.”

The prefect collected the money and recounted it. He nodded.

“Won’t you find me something?” a female voice called from outside the cell.

The prefect crumpled a note and flung it towards the cell opposite. A young lady seated behind the bars reached out and picked it. “Bless you,” her voice rang out again.

The prefect turned back to Mike. “Give them seat,” he said.

Mike went over to the old man seated last in the row. “Shift, shift, Papa,” he barked at the man, kicking him twice. “You will still be the last. And if by the end of the

week you're still here without completing your cell-sho we'll give you only standing space." He beckoned at Zuba and Ike. He placed Zuba fourth on the line, and Ike after him. Then he returned and took his place between his co-assailant and the prefect.

Zuba lowered himself to the ground. He could feel the warmth of the man that had just vacated the position. He stretched out his legs before him.

"This people wanted to turn me into a eunuch," Ike muttered beside Zuba, holding together the torn crotch of his shorts. "Thank Heavens I'm wearing a pant underneath. What would I have told my wife?"

Zuba forced a soft chuckle through his lips, thinking it would help Ike feel better. But the expression on Ike's face was still that of shock. It was not an attempt at humour, Ike was just mumbling to himself.

"New man, you in white vest, come here," the prefect said.

"Get up! Get up!" Mike waved at Zuba. "Obasanjo is calling you."

Zuba scrambled to his feet. He had heard that cell prefects were called presidents. But he never thought they actually took a sitting president's name. He stood straight before the prefect. "Mr President sir!"

A smile softened the prefect's features. "What's your name?"

"Zuba."

"What kind of a name is that? Is it Igbo?"

"Yes. Short for Chikezuba."

"What does it mean?"

"The Lord created enough wealth."

"Did He?"

Zuba rubbed his keloid.

"What kind of a lump is that on your forehead? Or is it a scar?"

Zuba snatched his hand off his face. He shook his head and said nothing.

"What happened to your forehead?" the prefect persisted.

"It's from an accident, when I was a child."

"What brought you people here?"

Zuba hesitated. Wasn't it the case that people were sometimes beaten up if they claimed innocence? "A case of stealing."

"What did you steal?"

"They said we stole money, and personal goods, from a family."

"Did you?"

Zuba hesitated again. He shook his head.

The prefect stared long and hard at him. "Well, it happens," he said finally. "Do your people know you're here?"

"No. But I'm sure they'll find us soon."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I just finished from school, still studying."

"So you're one of those who never get tired of school, eh?"

“Why not wear your trouser inside out to save it from dirt, so it will still look clean when you leave?” Mike said.

“It’s OK,” Zuba answered. “I don’t mind looking dirty when leaving.” He paused, then made an attempt at a joke: “Even Obasanjo himself was once in cell.”

The prefect smiled. The inmate beside Mike smiled too, looking so unlike the person that had made for the balls of his fellow man minutes earlier.

The prefect threw his head back and yawned. “You can return to your place,” he said.

Zuba sat back in his position. The floor felt grainy against his palm. He looked around the cell, beginning from the extreme right corner of the opposite wall which he had avoided focusing on since they came in. A dirty metal bucket stood where the two walls met, spewing its foulness into the air like a noxious fountain. The square piece of plank that served as its lid failed to sit well on its bent rim. Flies buzzed around it and in it. The outstretched legs of the elderly man laid in the line were just inches from touching it.

The walls were dank and dotted with dried blood. Chalk and charcoal graffiti stood out in white and black on their dull dirty yellowness: BADBOY BAHODA LIVED HERE, DERICO NWAMAMA WUZ HERE, and the like. They reminded Zuba of his last days in secondary school when some of the students had gone round scribbling such graffiti on walls. The students were mainly the dull ones. He could still recall one of them murmuring to himself as he scratched his name on the hostel wall: “The principal

said I cannot leave an impression on the school, so I will leave one on its walls.”

The graffiti that held prime place on the cell wall was a life-size charcoal portrait of a man’s head and shoulders. The face was angular, with jutting cheekbones and chin. The width of the nose nearly matched the width of the frowning-but-grinning lips; the narrowed eyes gave a thoughtful expression. BUGA IN CELL, said the words beside the drawing. THE GODIAN PROPHET FROM THE HOLYLAND. NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

Zuba rested his chin on his knees. He wondered if his sister, Nonye, and the handyman who sometimes doubled as driver for Ike, were close to locating him. A policeman had waved a gun at them, warned them against following, as he and Ike were being driven away. “Inform Barrister Chigbo,” he had managed to call out to her.

Footsteps thudding down the corridor. Idem appeared at the door and slid three metal plates under the bars. The plates grated against the concrete floor, jarring on Zuba’s nerves.

The prefect picked up a sachet of water from one of the plates and bit it open at one end. His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down as he drank. Mike picked up another one and drank too. The other inmates watched. When the prefect removed the sachet from his lips, only half of the contents remained. He squeezed some water onto his right hand and washed it into the plate. He turned towards the two inmates between Mike and Zuba.

“Okpu-uzu, Chemist, now we have money. I’m sure you people will prefer to wait for Madam Food,” he said.

“Sure,” the ball-grabber answered.

Okpu-uzu... Zuba and Ike exchanged glances. So the ball-grabber was a blacksmith, with hands hardened by handling iron.

The prefect pushed the plates towards Zuba. “Pass them on to that papa. You people will get something better to eat when Madam Food comes.”

Zuba stared into the plates. One was filled with *garri*. The *garri* had not been stirred as was customary; it stood hard and flat in the bowl. There had been an attempt to eke out the okra soup in the second plate. A clear layer of water lay over it. Two half-sachets of water lay on the last plate. Zuba passed the plates on.

The papa took the plates. He was a short, slight man with a sprinkle of grey in his hair. His arms and legs were stocky, and seemed to belong to another body; his movement was lethargic, and the sadness didn’t leave his face even as he swallowed outsized dollops of the *garri* in noisy gulps.

Idem’s voice echoed down the corridor: “Madam, wetin you cook today?”

“Na *ogbono* soup o.”

“Oya, put for me, with two extra meat.”

When footsteps headed down the corridor, people began to stir.

“Madam Food, you have come,” the prefect greeted.

A middle-aged woman stood outside the bars. Her face shone with the warmth of hearths and kitchens. The smell of firewood smoke and condiments trickled into the cell from the wrapper around her waist. The cloth was so faded that the jumping horses on the fabric looked spectral. A heavily laden metal tray with a broad turned-up rim rested on her head like a sombrero.

“Yes o. How are you? How are you all? Are you buying any food today?” She lifted the tray off her head and lowered it to the ground. Smoke-blackened pots, plastic plates, cutlery, a tiny blue bucket and a jerry-can filled its circumference.

“Nwamaka, I hope all is well. You’re quiet today,” she said, casting a glance into the opposite cell.

“I told you I won’t talk to you again.” The clear soprano of the speaker came as a mumble.

Nwamaka. A child is good. The stresses in the name could be placed differently to make it mean: This child is so beautiful. Zuba leant forwards to get a better look at her. She was young; her skin glowed. The floral dress that hugged her, outlining her ample bust, was faded but clean. She looked like she was new. But Zuba knew she wouldn’t be occupying the prime position in her cell if that was the case. Only the cornrows on her head were unkempt. He estimated she was between eighteen and twenty-two. But the way she stared up at Madam Food with Betty Boop eyes, while holding her lips together in a sulk, made her seem no more than twelve.

Madam Food laughed. “Nwamaka my child, please forgive me. I came with something special for you today. Let me quickly serve Peter and his mates then I’ll take my time to serve you specially.”

The pout on Nwamaka’s lips dissolved into a smile. Three older-looking women seated after her leant forwards to stare at Madam Food.

“What’s in your soup today?” the prefect asked.

“It’s dried fish and pork meat. Very sweet.”

“Give us...” he looked back into the cell, “...six plates of food.”

“I don’t—” began Ike.

Zuba nudged him. “My partner and I had lunch a short while ago, we can share a plate.” He was surprised that the prefect included them on his feeding list and did not want to rebuff the gesture. He and Ike had prepared to go without food for the rest of the day. They had taken Coca-Cola and bread, bought from a shop in the police station, after their interrogation, and then swallowed tetracycline capsules obtained from the same shop, to seal off bowel movement – something that had always worked for Zuba whenever he had a runny tummy.

“OK. Bring five plates,” the prefect said.

Madam Food slid the plates of food under the bar along with a bowl of water for washing hands.

“It will be nice if you can come earlier tomorrow,” the prefect said while handing her some money. “I’ve added some extra. And Mother Food, please give your boy tissue

paper, candle and matches to bring for us when he comes to collect the plates.”

“I have heard,” the woman said. She squeezed the notes into a ball and tucked it into her bra.

Slurps and lip-smacking arose around Zuba and Ike. Zuba swallowed the saliva that the stench in the cell had caused to pool in his mouth, and examined the food: a steaming mound of yellow garri and a gelatinous soup with two Maggi-cube sized pieces of meat. He wanted to ask the woman for a fork. But after a glance around, he thought it unwise. He set to work. “Ike don’t leave it all for me o,” he said.

They ate slowly, blowing at hot, soup-moistened balls of garri. Mama-puts, as food hawkers such as Madam Food were called, were reputed to possess certain native skills lost to chefs of expensive restaurants, and the food would have tasted good under different circumstances. But Zuba was discovering the dynamic of taste and cell-smell. With the food’s aroma smothered by the general stench, the garri tasted revolting and the soup’s gooey texture reminded him of mucus.

Mike pushed his clean-licked plates towards the door. His body was covered with sweat. He licked his fingers and rested against the wall.

The other inmates followed suit. Zuba and Ike rushed what was left of their food. “Thank you,” they said to the prefect. Mike took their plate and slid it under the door.

Zuba's buttocks throbbed against the hard floor. He shifted and tried to adjust his legs. A hand clamped down on his thigh.

"Careful! Watch my foot. Don't upset my wound," Chemist said.

Zuba stared down at the foot. Chemist's ankle was twice its normal size. A wound, the size of a fifty kobo coin, festered upon it. Black and glassy-yellow scabs of dried blood and plasma were crusted around the opening.

Zuba's face convulsed. "What happened?"

"They shot me. During interrogation. And said I was trying to run away. The bullet is still in there. They had arrested me from my chemist shop saying I had been treating armed robbers. I know it is the work of my enemies. They have been envious that my shop was making great progress just two years after I completed my apprenticeship."

Zuba examined the swollen ankle. There was no exit wound. If Chemist had been shot during interrogation then he was probably shot at close range – so wouldn't there be an exit wound? Or did it depend on the kind of gun used?

The boy came to collect the used plates, bringing the matches, candle and tissue paper. The prefect tore off a long sheet of tissue and began to twist it with his fingers. When the tissue became a long white cord, he put it aside, tore off another long sheet and began twisting again. He hummed under his breath, and worked with a deliberate slowness as if he wanted the task to last for ever.

Zuba and the other inmates watched each twist of the prefect's fingers.

The prefect pushed himself to his feet. Seven cords of tissue, as well as matches and a candle were clutched in his hands. He took a step forwards and placed the objects at the foot of the opposite wall. He lit the candle, waited for some wax to gather at the base of the flame, then poured the melted wax onto one end of a tissue cord and stuck the cord to the wall. He repeated the process until the seven cords were trailing, bright white, against the dull yellow of the wall. They made the Buga graffiti, inches above, look like a totem in a shrine.

"It's for the smells. Wait till the morning and you'll see," Chemist muttered when he saw the question in Zuba's eyes.

The prefect returned to his post. He sat down and gazed at his handiwork. He gave voice to the song he had been humming, singing in a low husky tone:

Jesus, my rock of ages
The pillar of my life
I run to thee, I shelter in thee
There's nothing the world can do...

The sound of a car halting outside floated into the cell. Doors slammed shut. Zuba sat up. Muffled voices. He strained his ears. Footsteps in the front office.

"Good evening, Sergeant. I'm Barrister Chigbo..."

Zuba exhaled. Warmth spread through his chest.

“...I’m here to see my clients. Two men: Zuba Maduekwe and Ike Okoye, just taken into your custody.”

“Your people have come,” the prefect said, turning to Zuba and Ike.

Zuba nodded. He held his lips between his teeth. Beside him, Ike stared towards the door, a new light in his eyes.

“Only their IPO can allow you to see them,” Idem said.

“Good. There’re here then. We’ll go and get their investigating police officer’s consent.”

“Can you please pass this food on to them?”

Zuba closed his eyes – Nonye!

“No. I have told you, nothing – nothing without their IPO.”

“We’ll be back,” the barrister said.

“It’s almost closing time at the office. You may not get him today.”

“We’ll still try.”

The footsteps started receding.

Zuba jumped to his feet. “Barrister!”

“Zuba, are you OK?”

“Zuba!” Nonye’s voice rang out, thick, sagging under the weight of her anguish.

“Nonye—” Zuba began.

“One more word and I’ll throw tear gas into that cell,” Idem shouted.

Zuba’s lips found each other again.

“Just hold on, Zuba. We’ll get you people out soon. We’ll be back,” Barrister Chigbo shouted.

Car doors slammed shut and the engine coughed to life. The car drove off.

Zuba clung to the sound of the receding car, following it far into the distance until not even the faintest hum could be heard. He sat down, pulled his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. He stared at the wall in front of him. The Buga graffiti stared back, thoughtful, wondering with him when his people would be back. Zuba rubbed his keloid. He looked up at the darkening patch of sky visible through the tiny window.

“They’ll be back tomorrow morning.” Ike said.

“I guess so.” Zuba bowed his head till it rested on his knees. He rubbed his keloid against the callused skin. When he lifted his head few minutes later, Buga had faded into the darkness.

The sixty-watt bulb hanging from the ceiling came on, casting an oily light.

Mike yawned loudly. He stood up and headed for the slop bucket. His pee hummed against the metal. He returned to his position and stretched out on the floor. Other inmates followed. Chemist pushed himself up with difficulty and hopped to the bucket. He stood on one leg as he peed, breathing heavily. Zuba was the last to head for the bucket after Ike. He expected to be hit by a pungent stench, but the smell that rose to his nostrils was weak – wasn’t too bad. Was there a relationship between light and smell? Do smells go to sleep at night?

He returned to his position and lay on his back. He had

never been able to sleep on his back. As kids, he and his brother, Chu, had tried sleeping on their backs with their legs together and their arms by their sides, after they had seen Yul Brynner lying that way in *The King and I*. They had called it the Royal Sleeping Posture. They had not succeeded, but now he had to succeed. He wouldn't rest his belly, his cheek on the dirty floor.

The bulb went off. In the blackness, Zuba realized that a radio had been blaring at the front office somewhere. And there were voices. He heard a man curse at the radio's poor reception. A beam of flashlight cleaved the darkness. Then the crackle of a match being struck. The voices at the office resumed their conversation. From the tiny window up on the cell wall, cool, rain-washed breeze drifted in bearing the sounds of rustling leaves, shrilling crickets and the piercing squeaks of bats.

Zuba shut his eyes. He wondered how Nonye was faring. She would be too scared to sleep in the house all by herself, and the housemaid had travelled home for a sister's marriage ceremony. He should not have done this to her. He should have listened to her.

Tears stung his eyes as he thought of their father on his hospital bed. How much different, how much better their lives would have been had his father's oversized ego not driven him to quit his university job and start a secondary school. He felt the hot rush of bile at the thought of the school principal, Mrs Egbetuyi, and her husband sleeping comfortably on some downy bed somewhere. Perhaps he

should have followed his police friend's advice, and gone along with the selling-marijuana-to-the-students scheme, since he could not stomach the poisoning-of-students'-food scheme. Then Mr and Mrs Egbetuyi would have been the ones lying on a cold concrete floor.

Zuba rubbed his keloid. To his left, two of the inmates snored a duet. To his right, Ike kept twisting and turning. He wondered what Ike was thinking about. The Egbetuyis? Or his pregnant wife and child?

Mosquitoes swarmed upon the cell like the fourth biblical plague. Huge mosquitoes with needles for proboscises, and sirens for whines. Their whine was infuriating. Why couldn't they go straight to business without announcing themselves?

"When they cry in your ears, they are asking: 'Are you *asleeeeeeeeeeeep* yet?' his mother used to say. "So if you don't swat and let them know you're awake they'll get to biting you."

"But Mummy, all I hear is a long whine, I can't make out any words," he had said.

"That's because they speak *mosquitolese*, not Igbo or English. So swat and keep swatting at them to make them know you are awake. Otherwise they will give you malaria and I will give you injections with big needles," their mum had answered.

In the cell, Zuba kept swatting and swatting.

"These things won't allow somebody to rest," Ike muttered as he slapped at the mosquitoes.

Zuba's right arm started aching and he switched to swatting and slapping with his left. Hours later, however, he and Ike became still like the other inmates of the cell, too tired to react to the needles drilling and re-drilling into their bodies in search of succulent veins.