

## **Ain't nothing but shit happening (or Busy doing nothing)**

Assistant Inspector Mvuu sits in a chair behind a wooden desk with piles of paper on it. His cap is hung on a hook that looks like an upside down question mark nailed onto the back of his office door. His police jacket is hanging behind him on his chair. His office is naked and thread-bare except for his humongous body and pile of papers on his desk. There is no computer because the police force has not computerized. Good for him. Where would he find the time to learn the new skills needed to use computers? Microsoft Word; Internet and Windows *what what*. Windows! He muses. The only windows he is interested in are those of Kombis. No! He thinks to himself, it is actually not the windows that he loves but what the Kombi drivers hand over through them. He nearly salivates at this thought. After wiping his broad sweaty forehead with an equally broad and sweaty palm, he grunts and signs a form and puts it on one side opposite the huge pile he took it from. Mvuu should have already completed signing these forms but he was napping a while ago. Although he is awake now, Mvuu is still snoring. He snores whether he is awake or sleeping. He also grunts and wheezes like he has asthma. His body weight seems enough to explain and justify all the sounds that he is making. Surely, he needs an outlet for all the hot air he seems to be filled with. He looks at his watch again and this is probably the fifteenth time he is doing so within the space of two minutes. “*Dhemeti*. Time is not moving *mhani!*” he curses in a low voice. In order to kill time, Mvuu decides to go to the toilet.

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It is when Mvuu stands upright that his monstrous frame really hits you in the face, with the force of a Tyson punch during his good old days before he bit that other boxer's eyes or ears. Whatever Tyson bit, there can be no speculation about Mvuu's appearance. His name, in fact surname, is like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed he looks like his name on two feet. Yes a big hippopotamus in police uniform. His uniform, originally a size 36 standard police force issue- the last size-has a different shade of dark blue between the thighs and on the buttocks. These darker and newer looking but thigh-grazed patches are modifications and extensions made by Phiri an old Malawian tailor in Njube Township. Phiri's interventions make Mvuu's uniform a size 69. This size is not available in the standard issue of police uniforms so Mvuu had to innovate. In redesigning this uniform, Phiri asked Mvuu to bring fabric that is enough to make a pair of trousers that would fit Phiri himself, and leave enough room to accommodate Phiri's son and his son's friend. This, added to Mvuu's official uniform size is what he is now wearing. His gigantic waist and buttocks make the handcuffs on his waist look like two tiny wedding rings held together by a silver necklace.

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Mvuu reaches the toilet and closes the stall behind him. "Dhemeti who pissed on the chamber?" He wipes the yellow urine drops off the toilet seat with some tissue paper, snores, grunts and wheezes louder as he spits on the tissue paper he has just cast into the toilet seat. Upon unbuckling his belt, his belly becomes jelly-like and gushes out threatening to pour itself out onto the floor. He collects it and pushes it back up, as is customary when he engages in this type of business. He sits on the toilet seat, literally

engulfing it as if he has swallowed it with his massive rear end. He heaves and pants and starts to fart. All the Russian sausages, chicken wings, thighs, meat-pies and chips now congealed into another form come out galloping like a horse in a thick diarrhoea-like form. His loud farts fill the air and these are accompanied by a rancid smell. In his heart he celebrates these farts and the rancid smell. Shitting is an expensive thing- in fact a privilege in these harsh economic times in Zimbabwe. What more to shit like him, long and hard, and fart the fart that comes with garlic laced delicacies? Not forgetting the two litres of Coca-Cola. While everybody else is pencil-thin, except of course for the politicians and prophets, Mvuu is sparkling hippopotamus fat. But he has not always been this way .There was a time when he was staying in Dzivarasekwa after graduating from the police academy that he was merely a sack of bones in a worn-out shirt and pair of trousers. He was as thin as someone who had swallowed a red-hot wire, as we say in the townships. Then his name Mvuu was a contradiction and serious paradox. He used to say it in a hushed tone with little confidence when people asked for it. He didn't know that his posting to Bulawayo would change his fortunes. The constant flow of his thick shit merged with his thoughts of how he had transformed from skinny and seemingly misnamed Mvuu whose skeletal frame always bore an empty belly shitting water and air, to the real hippo shitting real shit shitted by men who are really eating. This is what is called eating. "Ya mhani, when I arrived in Bhuruwayo that's when I really started eating", he thinks to himself, a satisfied smile flitting across his face. 'Now I am competing with Shefus in heaviness.'

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Wire-thin Mvuu had been posted from Dzivarasekwa Police Station to Bulawayo's Traffic West department in Mpopoma Township. Although he always wanted to make-believe this was a neutral posting, he knew very well that this transfer was because his father-in-law was a big Shefu in Harare where the country's police headquarters are. Who can survive in Zimbabwe when s/he doesn't know someone who knows someone who in turn knows someone who knows someone big? That is the only way of getting into the style and gravy train. Traffic West opened a new world for Mvuu and this is the time that he ballooned to a size big enough to fit in his name. While being a traffic policeman as taught at the police academy entailed regulating traffic and observing the adherence to traffic rules, on the road it was a different playing field, and as needle-thin and hungry Mvuu soon learnt, traffic policing in Zimbabwe meant stretching the law. Mafia-style, the police had to make drivers an offer they could not refuse. Within two weeks as a doe-eyed hunger stricken newbie, Mvuu had learnt how to hide behind the bushes and shrubs on the side of the road, and then jump in front of a speeding kombi waving the green police vest and sleeves. One had to be as nimble as a matador too, as sometimes some of the speeding cars were like charging bulls, with no care for what was in front of them.

Negotiations; to be precise strong-arm tactics, would then ensue with perplexed drivers whose only way out was oiling the greedy palms attached to the green sleeved arms. These green sleeves worn by traffic policemen became Mvuu's second nature. For once in his life he was convinced that police work was indeed his calling. "A goat eats where it is tied. If you're a teacher, you had better feast on the chalk and blackboard!" Mvuu philosophized. Towards month-end, the green sleeves became his prosthetics making

him complete as he hustled for school fees and grocery money. He chased the United States dollars which defiantly did not have the face of Number One on them. They seemed to be challenging our sovereignty and eating them was the best way of punishing them. Mvuu and other equally fat policemen who could easily pass for Officer Elephant, Officer Whale and Officer Titanic would erect road blocks even when it was raining, whose boom when it was upright, uncannily looked like a finger up the anti-corruption commission's arse. Bulawayo's roads were like a benevolent cash machine. Yes, this was indeed Gideon Gono's casino economy and the odds always favoured the house. Mvuu often thanked his ancestors and his father-in law Shefu for moving him to Bulawayo. Although he was now in his third year in the city of Kings, he could barely utter a single statement in Ndebele the local language. He could, quite paradoxically, utter a reasonably fluent Ndebele demand to a driver to cough up his dues: "Yeyi ndoda ayibuye yonk'imali ngiyifuna ikwanile. Nxa kungela lokho ngek'ulunge lawe uyazi." While he had initially been soft he had learnt as Officer Elephant liked to say: "These drivers are neither your siblings nor your parents. You're no relation of theirs shamwari. You did not come all the way to *Bhuruwayo* to play, but you came to work. Work for your family, that's why you came all the way from Harare." The massive potholes which on rainy days looked more like dams ensured that the general appearance of the Kombis, and better yet, the suspension was always haggard and a rickety fucked up mess. This coupled with the general lawlessness in the country, ensured that the Kombi drivers paid for one thing or another. They had even come up with new things to make money like a 'Third Number Plate' required to be on all cars on Zimbabwean roads. Even Mvuu did not really understand what this was or meant. But then again: "What is understanding without money in your pockets?" "Let's see your licence. Move and park off the road," Mvuu

would bark like a rabid dog as he transmitted the coded statement which in road and traffic policemen language literally meant: “Park there and give me my money or else you’re screwed. Yes. Fucked!” The Kombi drivers –the mice- understood this language and how the cat hunted and so a tense truce was forged around tributes of cash. Within two months of being at traffic West, Mvuu had to be introduced to Phiri in order to sort out his uniform that had literally burst at the seams exposing his hairy armpits, fleshly belly, drum-thick thighs and a hairy ass-crack that always seemed to enjoy peeping through his ill-fitting, now yoga-pants like uniform. His wife is a similar grotesque mess of flesh that gleams like every time she wakes up she leaps into a huge container of Vaseline. His two young daughters, *Patie* and *Pam* short for *Patriotic* and *Pamberi* respectively, look like over-fed warthogs even when they have not yet eaten anything in the morning. Whenever they travel as a family, the suspension of Mvuu’s second-hand Japanese imported Toyota Rav 4 is stretched to its limit. The car groans and moans as if it will talk like Balaam’s donkey when it saw a sword wielding angel in the middle of the road. A loud fart shakes Mvuu from his dreamy nostalgia and signals that he has completed his business. He manhandles a huge chunk of tissue paper with his gigantic hands and the tissue seems to struggle and resist being swiftly foisted into the dark nooks and crannies of his shit-stained ample behind. He manhandles another generous amount of tissue and repeats the procedure. For a man his size it’s a big surface area to work with and repetition is the key to success. Heaving, he pulls up his trousers and buckles his belt. He looks down at the floating mound of bits and pieces of his shit proudly before he flushes it down. It refuses to go at once and he smiles to himself before he flashes again. He muses: “This is revolutionary shit that refuses to go but remains resolute and fights back like...” He cuts his revolutionary musings short and

acknowledges to himself that he shits well and this is the evidence of being a healthy man who is capable of eating well in Zimbabwe.

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Mvuu sweating from the effort of transporting his immense self on two legs waddles back to his office. Outside his door is the shrunken body of a woman with chapped skin and lips. She has possibly been waiting for some time and has resigned herself to the long wait. She has spread her doek on the bare concrete and is sitting on it. The woman's doek is frayed. It also has a hole that looks like a mouth silently shouting that it has seen many such instances as the woman has had to wait at the bank, at the bread queue, at the mealie-meal queue, the water queue and the election queue. Wait, queue, wait, queue, wait, queue, and queue. This is the Zimbabwean way of doing things. You have to join any queue you see because there might be something worth a bite at the end of it. Queues are like the promise of rain during a dry season. Well in Zimbabwe they are more like the promise of a drizzle in a desert. Word has it that some people have joined a queue only to discover it was a queue for body viewing. The contrast between gleaming Mvuu and the match stick woman is extreme. Mvuu is like the living example of a plural format of the word and image- person. The woman could as well have been invisible. Mvuu does not acknowledge her presence and rolls into his office as if he is oblivious of the presence outside his door. He sits at his desk and goes through the WhatsApp messages on his Samsung Note 3, another sign of the bounty of Zimbabwe's roads. Who can blame the men of God when they say Zimbabwe has abundant wealth? Hezekiah's sack of bones at the door stirs again but he ignores its knocks on the door and

fixes his eyes on his cell phone. “Eish these stupid rumours, people are crazy. Why do they say such things about Comrade of comrades our revolutionary Number One? Mnxim mhani! Shitty dzevanhu.” Sergeant Memo knocks at his door and walks in. “Shefu there’s someone at the door.” And he responds, “Ah how are you Memo, ask her what she wants. These Povo are a problem. If she wants to certify something tell her to come back on Thursday because today we are about to close and our ink pad is dry.” Memo sees off the woman who shakes off her head and mutters to herself: “Kambe shuwa sengileviki ngisiza lapha bengiphendukisa. Ah iZimbabwe le shuwa! Kuyini shuwa lokhu. Nsukuzonke hereherehere kungela lutho olwenzakalayo.” When memo walks back in, Mvuu says to her: “Ok I will catch you later. I am waiting for the boys to come in. Memo smiles and responds: “Sharp, just wanted to confirm Shefu if we are still on after work.” Mvuu slaps her on her uniformed buttocks and waves her off. He contemplates seeing her later from above her before going home. One of the many perks of being the Shefu. Just as Memo turns the corner, Chimsoro and Fungai drive in with their green-sleeves still on their arms. Every time Mvuu sees them coming in he feels a slight pang of jealousy that he is no longer at the front manning the road blocks and dealing with Kombi drivers. Windows. Oh Windows. Not computer Windows but Kombi windows. Damn! His father in-law got him demoted to a job behind the desk! No, he actually got him promoted from Police Cadet to Assistant Inspector hence his being behind the desk but at times it feels like a demotion. Luckily, by the time of his Assistant Inspector promotion Mvuu had gathered enough police street-wisdom, or rather road-wisdom and he was well-versed in the rules of the game. He now gets his share directly from the foot soldiers at the front line. They have a working relationship and a silent and unsigned contract that the loot has to be evenly distributed with Mvuu the Shefu. Chisuri, Mboko and a few others tried to resist

this arrangement and they learned the hard way. One day Mvuu drove up unannounced with a few officers and pounced on them at a road block. Those with cash on them, like Chisuri and Mboko were immediately fired on the spot. Chisuri had tried to run off and swallow the money but there was just too much of it to swallow without water or a two litre Coca-Cola to wash it down. He was caught red-handed with eyes bulging and him half-choking on soiled American dollars with the rest of the loot in his underpants. This was reported in state media as a sign of the professional police force cleaning house. Well, it was cleaning house of a different kind. It was the re-establishment of the honour amongst thieves. The roads are the police force's investment company, and as an investor Mvuu wanted his dividends every day. The show of force rebalanced and re-aligned the food chain. With one signed form as his day's work, Mvuu sits across his desk facing his juniors, Chimsoro and Fungai. They sit like people about to play a game of cards and the juniors are waiting for the Shefu to draw his first card. Door locked, they begin to distribute the loot. Mvuu sets the ball rolling by picking up a hundred dollar bill, Chimsoro does the same, as does Fungai and the chain goes on. The cycle continues until the wad of notes is finished. Any remaining extras go to Mvuu because he is Shefu and as he always says: "Boys, I know you have already eaten some of the money and you know *kuti* this police work can only work when you work well with your Shefu!" After Chimsoro and Fungai leave, Mvuu gets up and unhitches his jacket from behind his chair and then walks towards the door. He reaches up to get his cap from the upside down question mark. The slight tilt of his toes heaves his massive body and he farts. He giggles heartily to himself. He is content and happy. He can fart. He can fart and shit in a country where others shit air and do not know what shitting good shit is anymore. The upside down question mark, like everything else in the office is now engulfed by the heinous smell of his fart. He feels

like it is looking at him and nodding in agreement. He can hear it saying: “I salute you Assistant Inspector Mvuu, you indeed can fart and shit. You’re the Shefu. A big man!”

The end