

Monday 10:48 PM

There's plenty of things I'm looking forward to being done with once I leave prison. Mostly, it's the smaller, day-to-day things I want to forget. Like the anxious feeling that arises in me whenever I hear the sound of keys jingling. Or how I have to wait in line to eat food, wait in line to get laundry, wait in line to make a phone call, wait in line to brush my teeth, and wait in line to shower. I also want to forget what it's like to have to wear shoes in the shower.

Tonight, as I lay down in my bunk to sleep, I'm quickly reminded how I can't wait to forget about the smell of prison. Prison stinks. Living in a room with over 100 guys and no A/C, it doesn't smell too great. At night, when all the guys are back from work, the gym, or the TV room, the smell reaches a different intensity. From 11 PM to 6 AM, the prison smells like a constant fart. With so many guys sleeping in one room, the smell just lingers until we head off to our separate prison lives in the morning. I can't wait to forget what it's like to smell 100 guys' farts at night and instead, smell a woman sleeping next to me again.

After the events of the past few days, I am exhausted and it doesn't take long for me to pass out despite the smell of the prison dorm. But my much-needed rest doesn't last through the night.

The extremely bright prison lights suddenly turn on and I look at my watch - 3:37 AM. The lights don't normally come on until 6 AM. I look around from my top bunk to see what's going on and notice a large Spanish man with cornrows running down the bay, holding a giant push broom over his head. Other men are also waking with expressions of confusion. The broom-holding inmate runs past me to a locker a few bunks away.

He swings the push broom with all his might and slams it into the locker. He jumps back and stares at the locker, waiting for a response. The men in the lower bunks near the locker run away quickly, while the men in the upper bunks, pulled their blankets up over their faces and peeked out in terror at the locker.

The locker offers no response to the attack, so the Spanish man raises the broom over his head once more. He moves with cautious but very deliberate steps as he approaches the locker. I can see in his eyes that he has taken aim once again. He leaps forward, takes another powerful swing with the broom, it smashes into the locker and he quickly retreats. All the men still near the locker have horrified looks on their faces, they don't make a move, they are frozen with fear.

Half asleep, I find myself confused about what is taking place. The first thing that comes to

mind is Mr. Jones, another inmate from a different unit. He looks exactly like the singer of The Counting Crows (hence the nickname). When I first saw Mr. Jones, he had his hands against the prison wall while he swung his hips from side to side and front to back. It was an odd display I've seen him perform many other times all around the prison. One day, I built up the courage to ask him about his strange hip movements. He told me he only does it when he's talking to a ghost. The ghost can only answer with a "yes" or "no". When his hips sway side to side it is a "yes" and when they sway front to back, it is a "no." He told me later he had been talking with an inmate that died behind the wall, at the higher security institution.

I wonder if Mr. Jones was telling the truth. Perhaps this ghost inmate had taken possession of the locker and was refusing to leave. It would explain the looks of extreme fright from all the men near the locker and the broom attacks by the young Spanish inmate.

From the opposite end of the bay, a guard is approaching, holding a small black storage container. He stops some distance from the haunted locker and slides the container across the floor. An inmate grabs it and gives the Spanish inmate with the broom a look that implies, "I am on your side in this battle." The Spanish guy nods his head, displaying some relief. His new companion moves towards the locker and nervously places the container beside it.

I turn to the man next to me and ask, "What's going on?"

"A skunk," he replies. At that moment, the smell hits me. It's the strongest smell of skunk spray I ever endured. It's so powerful, it burns to breathe in.

The rapid broom attack yields success and the skunk has fled into the container. The guard carries it away down the hall and shuts off the lights as if nothing ever happened. As if it were all a bad dream.

Men are mumbling and coughing loudly from the smell left behind by the imprisoned skunk. The men are obviously upset but I am happy. The smell of skunk burns into my nostrils as I take deeper breaths. Finally, the prison doesn't smell like a constant fart for once. With a smile on my face, I settle into my bunk to sleep.

Sweet dreams guys...