

"THIS IS THE DAY"

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CONTENT

CHAPTER ONE: THIS IS: THE DAY.

CHAPTER TWO: THIS IS THE DAY.

CHAPTER THREE: THIS IS THE DAY?

CHAPTER FOUR: THIS IS THE DAY!

CHAPTER FIVE: THAT WAS THE DAY.

Chapter One: This Is: The Day.

"Life is what you make it to be." These were the constantly repeated words of my mother every time I told her about how lousy my life and my job were. I hated the fact that she failed to see life from my point of view: something which I had incessantly trumpeted whenever she repeated that silly and inconsiderate phrase to which she would gladly reply every time, saying, "Well maybe you are also failing to see things from my point of view." While saying that, she would stare directly into my eyes and have the most unsettling smirk which yelled in my left ear, "YOU KNOW I AM RIGHT!"

Of course, she was right. She is an African mother who grew up in the most desolate parts of the Eastern Region in Ghana; who most definitely fetched water from a cursed stream where she tussled with a 500-pound killer whale and came out victorious, after which she fetched buckets of water which her 1-year-old-self managed to carry on her head and probably had to walk barefoot through the valley of the shadow of death, where in all likelihood fought Lucifer himself with her bare hands and triumphed over him: After which she casually walked 2 million miles to deliver the water from the cursed stream to her house so that her parents and 3 brothers would be able to bath and help her mother cook for all the 4 villages in the town of Kibi. My mum told stories of her childhood at every chance that she got. "Mummy, how are you doing?'. 'My son, today was very stressful but not as stressful as when I was 5 and had to assist Yaa Asantewaa to fight the colonial masters.'"

I never really paid attention to what she said because it seemed as though she had volumes of book recitals in the back of her mind and like an eager 6-year-

old standing in front of a church on a typical Children's Day service, she was ready to pour out all she had memorized, but this time, instead of a happy crowd with all smiles and cheers, I was simply uninterested. On some occasions, when my pockets were empty, I would feign interest so that she will cook my favorite meal for me: mashed potatoes and grilled chicken. For an African woman, she was good at cooking a somewhat western dish. I loved my mum's cooking. It was so fat-filled and juicy; it could make a pig die from obesity. Thinking about that, that's what probably killed my father: alongside the lung cancer that he had trophied from winning all those fights against his sweet cigarettes and tobacco sticks. It's funny how mum had to save all her pay to put him in a nice and befitting box but somehow refuses to get rid of the numerous ciggy boxes he left behind on our balcony. I hated when he smoked, even the thought of it made me cough; After all, you can't blame me, I am a woman with severe chest problems. Sometimes I think that God has the best jokes; He gave a man, who even 7 years after His death left a strong tobacco scent in our little London apartment, the best of lungs and me, a young lady who doesn't even go to the kitchen to inhale mum's smoked fish, the weaker lungs. Well, God, I'm laughing now. If mum had heard that last bit, she would have cracked open her 8-billion-year-old Bible and read to me Matthew chapter 9 verse 10 or something of that sort and laid hands on me for Jesus to forgive me.

Yes, she is the most Bible-believing Christian in the whole of the United Kingdom and that annoys me so much because that's her justification to prove that she's always right; even when it's about my life. She thinks that the Bible has all the answers to the world's problems. She reads it day and night and lives by every word those pages boldly command. But in all honesty, I've seen some problems

come knocking at our door on several occasions that got solved miraculously. If that wasn't God who brought us out of those situations, who could it have been?

One very vivid memory of a circumstance like that cropping up was when immigration was on my parents' tails or when we had to flee from immigration officers repetitively for about 11 years. When I say "we", it was mainly my dad and mum because I was too young to remember anything. They were illegal immigrants who managed to pray their way into getting a year's visiting visa to England and never returned to Ghana. They did the most subservient jobs to make ends meet. They did everything, from cleaning cadavers in morgues, scrubbing toilets at the cheapest hotels, and cleaning train stations. 12 years later, they met a Ghanaian pastor, through a neighbour, who led a local assembly in nearby Peckham. One of his church members had a cousin whose friend was married to a brother of a man who somehow managed to connect them to a sweet old British lady called Emily. Emily somehow helped them get British citizenship. Every Christmas, my mum bakes bagels, buns, and biscuits and goes all the way to Birmingham to deliver them to her. Mum always found a way of reimbursing the people who helped her in life; she was good at that.

Happenings like that couldn't have been through pure luck: God must have been behind all that and that's what scares me the most; Because if what she reads in that Bible of hers is true, then maybe she might be right about how I should be living my life. The thought of her being right scares me to the core because I don't want to end up like her: get married, have a kid, and then wait on death. I want to explore the world and make lots of money doing that too, but the pay at my current job would barely allow me to even take a cab.

Indeed, life is what you make it to be; these are just the thoughts that run through my head, as I sit in front of my mirror in my messy room and get ready for work because I believe this is the day.

Chapter Two: This is the Day.

I sat on the train and was about 13 minutes away from my final stop, which was at the East Croydon train station. It gave me enough time to drift into the nooks and crannies of my deepest thoughts.

I am Emma, a young Ghanaian-British citizen with a Master's Degree in psychology and I work at the Family Health Hospital as a therapist: talk about the pure case of the blind leading the blind. On paper, my duties at work were to counsel pregnant mothers who were suffering from postpartum depression but I ended up picking some of the doctor's consultation roles because the hospital had only a few medical practitioners. It was something done off the books because if word got out that a therapist was diagnosing patients, the hospital would be in extremely hot waters and I could also lose my license to practice but I needed the extra pay so I had to take the risk. I usually deal with patients who have been diagnosed with terminal illnesses such as kidney failure, advanced cancer, heart disease, etc. It's not the most pleasant of jobs especially when you have to try and comfort someone who knows they are about to die. It's a dreadful experience because as the words of bad news jump off your lips, hit the eardrums of the patient, and are processed by the brain, these words would then transform into tears that can't be controlled. I hate the fact that I have to wipe my table after every one of those patients leaves. I have to buy several sanitizer bottles and tissue papers to wipe tears and snort off my table because my simple-minded boss fails to write off these basic toiletries as an expense. I have to spend 14 pounds every week to purchase them and with the current inflation in the country, it might be 15

pounds soon. I hate my job! It's a hospital for Christ's sake! They should at least have extra sanitizers for the counseling department! But no, they would rather spend all their money getting the chief doctor's brand new Mini-Coopers when the hard-working staff of the hospital has to deal with homeless beggars on the morning train. I hate my job!

My last patient was a 16-year-old who was dying from liver failure. I wasn't surprised. He came into the appointment drunker than Tyrion Lannister during happy hour. When I told him he was dying, he asked me why, as though I was God. I told him it was due to his excessive drinking, coupled with some already existing underlying health conditions: mainly, a rare genetic deformity called Wilson's disease. He seemed not to have the mental capacity to process the news, so, he proceeded to talk about how his life had simply been a journey from one trouble to another. Honestly, I couldn't care less about what he had to say. I just nodded and occasionally said "I understand" while he told me about how he wished he could celebrate his 17th birthday with his girlfriend. I wished I was in his shoes. I hated my life. I had friends who made 18 times what I made in a year within a single night after simply shaking their bums at strip clubs in Soho. But instead, here I am listening to this drunk dying bastard rant about his last days on earth. At the end of the session, he shed some tears and vomited all over my work table and floor. FATHER LORD, I HATE MY JOB!

I had to sit outside my office as the janitors mopped up the floors and cleaned my table. This was depressing because this meant that my office would smell just like the rest of the hospital: detergent and death. Maybe it was a sign from my mother's great God that it was time to either get a new job or die. That was about the 19th time that I had had that thought race through my mind. After

scanning half of London, no medical institution needed my services in any way. All of them either had an in-house therapist or simply didn't need one. It made me question my career choice. Well, the other option was death; a little extreme but it was an option.

Based on my last checkup, I seem to be in perfectly good shape. With my healthy dietary choices and strict exercise routine, only a speeding train could kill me. I tittered in my mind: maybe it was a sign from my mother's great God that it was time to die.

Thoughts like these flooded my mind all through my 20s but I never acted on them because if my mum heard that her only child had committed suicide, she probably would just faint and die: She is very dramatic. She was the only person I loved on this earth and the only reason I hadn't done it yet. I remember when I was 21 in the university, I purchased a 22-diameter nylon rope. I got it from the hardware shop not far from where I lived and it was dark brown so it matched my skin tone; After all, if I was going out, it had to be so aesthetically pleasing it could be on the cover of British Vogue. But I was too much of a chicken to do it. I stared at that beautiful rope every day till I was 23 and I finally decided to get rid of it. I gave it to my neighbor as a birthday gift. He was a mechanic so I just assumed he would need it in one way or the other. He was a 24-year-old tall handsome young man with a luscious beard that sat on a perfectly chiseled face. He had a jawline that could cut wood and a chest broader than the Westminster skyline. He was extremely fit and even from under His shirt I could tell that the bumps of his abs would seamlessly match that of the potholes on a typical Ghanaian road. He was just my type. But the only problem was that he barely tried to maintain a conversation with me and no matter how sexy I looked, he never seemed to notice

or pay attention to me. I also hated the fact that he called me "Bro". I mean who is your "Bro"? Nonsense! He had me thinking I was too old to compete with the 25-year-old-looking women who flocked in and out of his apartment. I honestly wish I had that rope right now.

I sat on the train from Brixton to the East Croydon train station and it gave me enough time to drift into the nooks and crannies of my deepest thoughts and I think today might be the day.

Chapter three: This is the Day?

I got off the train and instead of climbing the dirty stairs at the East Croydon station to walk to work, I decided to sit on the old train station bench. It was covered in a green sticky liquid and reeked of canned dog food, but that was the least of my worries. I needed a place to think.

I am Emmanuel Ansah a 26-year-old woman trapped in a man's body. I was born on the 27th of January 1992. Though my parents were Ghanaians, I was born in England, which made me a British citizen by birth. I had a very horrid childhood. My home was filled with utter hardship and verbal abuse mostly from my dad. Because of my citizenship, I was able to get the best education at little to no cost to my family. If that wasn't the case, I would probably have had to do some of the menial jobs my parents had to do to support the family.

28 days after I started my A-levels, I was diagnosed with ADHD, thus my inability to stay on topic. My mother made sure it was never placed on my medical record because she wanted me to be a doctor and she knew that with that little detail on my medical records, I would never be able to achieve her goal for me in life. As such, I never really got medication to help treat it. Instead, my mum made home remedies for me that she had read off the internet.

She usually made bitter concoctions for me and told me that it was healthy and would help me focus more in school, but it never really did. The failure to get drugs to help treat my ADHD at that age left me depressed and ultimately stressed because of the huge expectation my mother placed on me to pass my A-levels so that I could read medicine at the university. Growing up, she wanted to be a surgeon but due to the financial constraints she faced back home in Ghana, she

couldn't fulfill her dreams. So naturally, I had to inherit that dream of hers. She always disguised her true intentions by somehow telling me that it was God's plan for my life and to finally put the cherry on top of the already melting cake, she always found a way to guilt-trip me into studying long hours so that I could work my family out of poverty when I became a doctor. Maybe she acted from a good place. Mum never bothered to ask me what I actually wanted to do with my life. I was very good with arts and crafts, but she always found a way to erase that passion from my mind. As an African mother, art was a taboo that was never mentioned in our little home; it was either you were a doctor or a failure.

All through school, I struggled with remembering and focusing on the things I read but I somehow managed to get into Lambeth College which wasn't far from home. I didn't get to do medicine but she was proud that I read psychology and was going to work in a hospital. Honestly, that's what kept me going all through university and my Master's program: that proud look on her face when she heard there was still a possibility that I could work in a hospital one day.

Mum wasn't difficult to please: go to school, go to church, and once you had these boxes ticked, you didn't have a problem. I mostly enjoyed peace in the house until the matter of my sexuality sprung up. I never told her about it but she found out somehow. She told me she sensed it in her spirit while she was praying. But I later found out that she had stumbled on a text my then 29-year-old boyfriend sent me. It broke her. So, I promised to drop that life and chase women like that African man I was born to be. I lied. I just changed my phone's password and occasionally brought home one of my girl best friends to give her the impression that I was probably dating a woman. She never asked me directly but she always assumed it. She is the most gullible human being I have ever known. I didn't have

a love life because I struggled internally as to which side of the spectrum I belonged to. I hated the fact that the world saw me and automatically dictated which gender I was. I also hated that I couldn't reply to the world by actually telling them what I was because, in my hearts of hearts, I wasn't sure myself. I tried dating a couple of women but they were too complex; most of them are nothing like my mother, a traditional woman. I also tried dating a couple of men but they were so nonchalant about everything. So, I decided to be alone even though I hated every moment of it.

There are so many things I hate about my life; like the fact that I don't know where I am headed in life. I just seem to be going through the motions: I am a victim of a life that I never asked to be born into. I hate my 9-to-5 job because I don't give a hoot about those patients; I need the money so I can simply survive. I hate the fact that those patients come to me and get some form of counsel and comfort while I have no one to go to when I need counsel and comfort. My mum is too judgmental and therapy is too expensive in this city. For years, I have had to deal with my problems and they don't seem to be going away anytime soon. They seem to be getting worse and I can't take it anymore.

So, after I got off the train, instead of climbing the dirty stairs at the East Croydon station to walk to work, I decided to sit on the old train station bench. It was covered in a green sticky liquid and reeked of canned dog food, but that was the least of my worries. I needed a place to think because that was the day.

Chapter Four: This is the Day!

"GET OFF THE TRACKS, THE TRAIN IS COMING!" I didn't get why this chubby old British fella yelled at me. Why can't people simply mind their own business? He obviously didn't know what I was going through. He probably had it easy in life. Conceivably, he was raised by middle-class parents in their early 30s in a nice house somewhere in Birmingham. He seemed educated and, in all honesty, looked like he lived a well-fulfilled life. I think if I were surrounded by people like him who didn't know me from Adam, but were somehow concerned about my well-being, I may not be in this mess. He could just be trying to be a hero, who knows? But as I stood there, I just wanted to scream at him: "SHUT UP!"

I believe the real reason he kept on screaming and yelling is because human beings are simply advanced animals who are scared to die. I once argued with my mum about why people cried at funerals. I told her it was because of the innate knowledge that we would also one day lie in a casket or be dusted in a pot, just like that individual who was once full of life. My mum replied with a resounding "no" and continued "I cried because he was my husband and he owned my heart". I honestly didn't understand how she was able to love that man. A man who came to the UK as an angel and died a demon. He used to be like her - a strong Christian - but somehow got swayed into the pits of hell. He picked up drinking and then smoking. What followed after was constant verbal abuse from him. I hated his guts. I pray he rots in hell's deepest underbelly. God indeed has the funniest jokes, because if mum's Bible is right, I might be meeting my dad soon.

And for this reason, I hate my life so much. Even on the most memorable day of my life, I still couldn't seem to focus on myself. If it's not mum or thoughts of dad or my work, then it's this stupid British man who keeps on screaming at me! For once in my life, I don't want to think about the repercussions of my actions and how they will affect my mum or anyone else. After all, if I couldn't make the cover of Vogue, I guess I would have to settle for the Channel 31 evening news because this may be too gory to be aired on BBC.

The only one who currently runs through my mind as I stand here is Emma. She never really had a chance to be the woman she always wanted to be. I also think about Emmanuel. A man who had to be a man - even though he constantly fought to be that within his mind and body.

I am Emmanuel Kofi Ansah, a 32-year-old man who is currently standing 33 seconds away from a moving train at the East Croydon Station. Judging by its speed I should see the light at the end of the tunnel or the grim ripper or an angel taking me home soon. I never lived and I never loved but I was loved by my mother, but not even her God could save me from this speeding train because this is the day.

Chapter Five: That was the Day.

Evelyn stood in her apartment's kitchen and pulled off the big red mittens she usually used when she was baking for sweet old Mrs. Emily. She was able to come home early from her nursing job because she specifically took the morning and early afternoon shifts. She had cooked her only child's favorite meal, mashed potatoes, and grilled chicken. After all, it was the 27th of January. She maintained the Christmas and new year's decorations because she didn't want to spend extra money to buy new birthday decorations for her party for two. She knew her son was going to be home soon so she placed his food in a microwave but since she was hungry, she decided to dish a little of the mashed potatoes for herself. She walked steadily to the living room, while carefully eating the food with her hands. She sat down, turned on the TV, and kept skipping through the channels till she landed on her favourite news network, BBC. And there it was: the CCTV footage of a train tearing to shreds a young black man.

Her jaw as well as her plate dropped because she knew, that was the day her only son decided to take his life.

THE END?