Clarion Review

General

At the End of the Day
Ebuni Ilombu
Xlibris
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Three Stars (out of Five)

If Bridget Jones earned an advanced degree in literature, her diary might read something like Ebuni Ilombu's debut novel, *At the End of the Day*. Ilombu describes the everyday trials and triumphs of a young woman in the city, using pointed, self-mocking humor. Rather than an office worker in the 1990s, however, Ilombu's story features a well-read dental student from Nigeria as she navigates twenty-first-century London.

Culture and climate shock greet Marina as she arrives in London. The apartments are tiny, the people are standoffish, and the weather is chilly. As Marina describes it, "The first thing to bite me when I arrived in London wasn't of course another foreign swarm of dedicated bloodsucking mosquitoes like the ones I'd just escaped from, but the equally sharp fangs of the bitter winds of a very cold winter season. I had no idea their gnashes could actually penetrate so deeply into one's marrow." Thus, the reader is introduced to Marina's style of observation: articulate, self-deprecating, and exasperated.

Marina's life is fairly common, with the usual professional challenges, boyfriend troubles, and parenthood qualms. What is unique here is the educated tone in which Marina tells her story. The erudite language makes some scenes laugh-out-loud funny, and many of Marina's commentaries are hilarious. Noting the usually gray English weather, she says, "In the UK, at the appearance of the first rays of sunshine, tens of thousands of people would flock outside, most in their skimpiest outfits and in such a tremendous state of excitement to welcome it. This exuberant adulation seems to frighten it off, so that it retreats back into the sky for ages on end before making another brief appearance again." These are the parts that the reader will want to share with friends.

At other points, the verbosity is distracting. People aren't described as skinny; instead, they have the "physique of an ectomorph." Marina doesn't just cry in the bathtub like an

ordinary girl; her “lachrymal ducts burst.” The exaggeration is likely intended to be funny, but such extreme language would have greater impact if it were saved for peak moments.

The author’s loquacious approach weakens many of her most inventive descriptions. For instance, when she overextends a clever personification, it takes something away from the imagery. Readers will know what she means when referring to insomnia’s culprits, “trepidation and excitement,” as a “pair of neurotic night watchmen, anticipating an imminent break in.” They don’t need her to continue with convoluted sentences like this one: “Both had conspired together and skillfully sabotaged the fundamental framework necessary for any modicum of a decent night’s rest.” Awkward, excessive explanations occur throughout the book, distracting from the story.

At the End of the Day is a protracted, coming-of-age tale, culminating in Marina’s decisions about her role in the life of a child needing foster care. Readers will recognize in her a maturity that Bridget Jones never achieved.

Sheila M. Trask