

Learning by Ear 2013

Crossroads Generation - Facing Tough Choices

EPISODE ONE: “The Best Day of My Life”

AUTHOR: Crispin Mwakideu

EDITOR: Madelaine Meier, Yann Durand

COPY EDITOR: Charlotte Collins

List of characters by scene:

SCENE 1 : MERCY AT HOME WITH HER PARENTS

- **MERCY (F, 15)**
- **LULU (F, 40)**
- **MSOTO (M, 45)**

SCENE 2 : NIKI AND HIS MOTHER AT THE SHOPPING MALL

- **MRS. JUMBE (F, 35)**
- **NIKI (M, 16)**

SCENE 3 : DAN KANYAMA ARRIVES AT BONGO ACADEMY

- **PRINCIPAL JULIETTE (F, 50)**
- **DAN (M, 15)**

SCENE 4 : NIGHT-TIME AT MERCY'S HOME IN THE SLUMS

- **LULU (F, 40)**
- **MSOTO (M, 45)**
- **MERCY (F, 15)**

1. **INTRO / NARRATOR:**

Welcome to Learning by Ear and our educational and entertaining radio novella "Crossroads Generation". This is the very first episode. So lean back and get ready to meet three young students who are facing some difficult choices.

One of them is Mercy Msoto, a beautiful and intelligent 15-year-old girl from a poor family who refuses to accept her destiny, struggling instead for a better future. There's 16-year-old Niki Jumbe, a model student from a well-to-do family who's striving for recognition. And lastly we will meet Dan Kanyama. His parents live in the neighbouring country of Laboria, but they're sending him to school abroad so he can get the best education possible. Back home, a career in his father's successful gold mining enterprise awaits him.

These young people are caught up in a challenging, fast-changing world, and each day they find themselves standing at a crossroads. Which path will they choose? Make yourselves comfortable as we embark on the first episode, entitled "The Best Day of my Life". Mercy has just picked up a letter that was waiting for her at her former school, and she can hardly believe what it says...

SCENE 1: MERCY AT HOME WITH PARENTS

2. SFX: SLUM DWELLING ATMO

3. SFX: FOOTSTEPS. MERCY RUNS IN.

4. MERCY: (screaming through door) Mum, you're not going to believe this!

5. SFX: CASSAVA BEING PEELED

6. LULU: (frightened) Mercy, don't scare me like that! I'm pregnant, for heaven's sake. I don't want to the shock to send me into labour.

7. MERCY: Mum, this is the best day of my life!

KW BEGIN

8. LULU: (ironically) Oh, really? So you want to help me cook supper? You've never been this enthusiastic before...

9. MERCY: Oh, Mum, please! Listen! It's important.

10. LULU: (calmly) Okay, okay. You have my attention. So: what is it?

11. SFX: LULU STOPS PEELING CASSAVA

KW END

12. MERCY: (happily) I am the only candidate from my school who's been offered a Presidential Bursary! This scholarship will pay my entire tuition fee for high school! That's what this letter from the Bongo Academy says. I just picked it up from my old school. All the teachers there are so happy for me, and...

13. LULU: (sighs) Mercy, my dear child, I know that you're clever and I know you want to stay on at school. But... how can I tell you this... I really wish it were different...

14. MERCY: But it *is* different, Mum. Look: all I need from you and Dad is to buy me a few things I need to start at the school. All the rest, the school fees and everything, will be taken care of by the bursary fund! At Bongo's they have a library, a computer room....

15. SFX: IRON SHEET DOOR BEING PUSHED OPEN

16. SFX: FOOTSTEPS - MSOTO COMES IN

17. MERCY: (enthusiastic) Oh, Dad! You'll never guess! (hugs her father)

18. SFX CLOTH RUSTLING

19. MERCY: (while hugging her father) I got accepted at Bongo Academy!

- 20. MSOTO:** (reserved) Wooh! What's this? Stop hugging me. You're crushing my ribs.
- 21. MERCY:** Look! Here - this is the list of the things I... I'll need to start school.
- 22. MSOTO:** (drunk tone) Whaaaat...? This is how you welcome me, after I've just spent twelve hours standing in the sun guarding someone else's house?
- 23. LULU:** Msoto, your daughter is over the moon! She says she's been given some money by the President!
- 24. MSOTO:** (curious) Really? Now *that* kind of welcome I like. Let me see that.
- 25. SFX:** PAPER SNATCHED RAPIDLY FROM HAND

- 26. MSOTO:** (reads out aloud sarcastically) Huh! “Dear Mercy Msoto, congratulations! Due to your exemplary performance in the primary exams you have been admitted to the Bongo high school Academy. You have also been selected as one of only a few beneficiaries of the Presidential Bursary fund. This will pay all your tuition fees for your entire secondary education. Before you start at the country’s leading high school next term, here are some things you need to buy: 1. Two school uniforms. 2. Two pairs of black shoes (Bongo recommends leather shoes). 3. A pair of sports shoes. 4. A fully-equipped geometry set... Bla, bla, bla, bla. Who do these people think we are? I’m eating boiled cassava for supper, and they expect me to be able to afford two pairs of leather shoes for my daughter? Two pairs of leather –
- 27. MERCY:** (scared) But Dad, we could try to –
- 28. LULU:** Mercy, there’s no doubt about it, you’ve done yourself proud. Now come and help me peel the cassava.
- 29. MERCY:** Mum, we could borrow money from my aunt Lena, couldn’t we? She seems to be doing well. I mean, she’s taken in my two younger brothers and is taking care of them... I’m sure she’d –

30. MSOTO: (very angry) Shut up, Mercy! Shut up! Now you listen to me. I don't want you ever to talk to anyone about your aunt or your two younger brothers. Is that clear? Do you understand me?

31. MERCY: But... but I don't understand. Why is it wrong to talk about that?

32. MSOTO: (firmly) Not another word from you! Help your mother peel those cassavas. I'm going out.

33. SFX STEPS MSOTO LEAVES

34. LULU: (pleads) Msoto, please don't come back too late - the food will be cold. And please don't drink too much.

35. SFX: IRON SHEET DOOR CLOSES

36. MUSIC TRANSITION

SCENE 2: NIKI AND HIS MOTHER AT THE SHOPPING MALL

37. SFX: CAR STOPS AND PARKS. INSIDE THE CAR:

38. MRS. JUMBE: All right, Niki - I'll wait for you here.

39. NIKI: Mum, I'll be fine, really. You don't have to sit and wait for me in the car park.

40. MRS. JUMBE: Niki, you're taking a lot of money into that shopping mall. I just want to be sure that you get in safely. Then I'll drive away.

41. NIKI: I'm sixteen now. I can take care of myself.

42. MRS. JUMBE: Yeah, yeah, Niki Jumbe is becoming a man! I know. And I don't want to treat you like a boy. That's why I gave you the money, so you can buy yourself what you need for high school. **(proudly)** My son at Bongo Academy! Mmm, I can't wait to see my friends and brag about you!

43. NIKI: **(annoyed)** Muuum... Can I have the shopping list?

44. MRS. JUMBE: I wrote it on my tablet PC. You can take the tablet with you. A Bongo Academy student needs to show people the kind of family he comes from. Just make sure you don't lose it. And when you've finished buying everything, just call me and I'll come and pick you up. Have fun shopping!

45. **SFX: TABLET HANDED OVER**

46. **NIKI:** Thanks, Mum. See you!

47. **SFX: CAR DOOR OPENS, NIKI DESCENDS, DOOR CLOSES.**

KW BEGIN

48. **ATMO: URBAN ATMO, SHOPPING MALL ATMO IN THE DISTANCE**

49. **SFX: ELECTRIC CAR WINDOW WOUND DOWN (from outside)**

50. **MRS. JUMBE:** And Niki! One more thing.

51. **NIKI:** **(bored)** What now, mum?

52. **MRS. JUMBE:** **(whispers)** Don't tell your father Jumbe about the money. I know he's also planning to take you shopping. So if you are smart and hide what you buy today, you could end up with even more things when you start school.

53. **NIKI:** See you later, Mum.

54. **MRS. JUMBE:** Niki - you know, don't you, that we're very, very proud of you.

55. **SFX: ELECTRIC CAR WINDOW UP (from outside)**

56. **SFX: CAR DRIVES OFF**

KW END

57. **MUSIC TRANSITION**

SCENE 3: DAN KANYAMA ARRIVES AT BONGO ACADEMY AND MEETS

PRINCIPAL JULIETTE

58. **SFX: SCHOOL OFFICE ATMO**

59. **PRINCIPAL JULIETTE:** So, you say your name is Dan Kanyama.

60. **DAN:** That's right, Madam.

61. **JULIETTE:** And you're not a resident of this country, am I right?

62. **DAN:** Correct. I am from Laboria. I've brought my travel document - here.

63. **JULIETTE:** **(cold)** Aha. Good. And do you have the school tuition fees? In our currency -- we don't accept other currencies, except –

64. **DAN:** **(interrupts her)** I have the fees in US dollars, madam.

65. **JULIETTE:** That's what I wanted to say. We accept only our local currency or US dollars. May I?

66. **SFX: BANK NOTES HANDED OVER AND COUNTED BY HAND**

67. **JULIETTE:** Good. That all seems fine. Welcome to Bongo Academy, Dan. You're one of the first students to enrol for this school year. I'll show you to the boys' dormitory. It's right inside the school compound.

68. **DAN:** Thank you, madam.

69. **MUSIC INTERLUDE**

SCENE 4: NIGHT-TIME AT MERCY'S HOME IN THE SLUMS

70. SFX: NIGHT ATMO IN SLUM SETTLEMENT

(speaking in hushed tones)

71. LULU: (in the distance: desperate) No, Msoto! We can't do that to Mercy. She doesn't deserve that.

72. MSOTO: (in the distance: loud) And what exactly does she deserve, then? Hm? Mercy is now fifteen years old. She's ripe and ready to become someone's wife. Besides, think about the dowry we'll get!

73. SFX: MERCY TURNING OVER IN BED

74. MERCY: Oh, no! Am I really hearing this?

75. LULU: Msoto, keep your voice down! Mercy might be listening. There's only a hanging blanket between our bed and hers!

76. MSOTO: Lulu, I've decided! And that's final. Now put out that oil lamp, please. I want to sleep.

77. LULU: (pleads) Msoto. Please think about what you're saying. I'm still trying to cope with what you made me do with our boys - sending them away to live with your sister... And –

78. MSOTO: If you don't want to put out the light, I'll do it myself.

79. SFX: BLOWING OUT OIL LAMP/ CANDLE

Silence

80. MERCY: (suppressed crying) This can't be happening!

81. MUSIC TRANSITION

82. OUTRO/NARRATOR:

Mercy just overheard her father come out with some heartbreaking news. Now she's at a crossroads, and she has to make a choice. What will she decide to do? Meanwhile, Niki and Dan are preparing for their first school day. You want to know why Dan's parents sent him to Bongo Academy? Watch his video blog online on our web page: dw.de/lbe. Or follow us on Facebook! Until next time: from Learning by Ear's 'Crossroads Generation' - goodbye.