

5 Mercy, Mercy Me

"Oh, mercy mercy me,
Oh, things ain't what they used to be,

I want you the right way,
I want you,
But I want you to want me too,

Just like I want you."

Mercy was a web design client, she ran an Afro Caribbean hair and beauty salon, and as she ended up paying me "on the drip" for her first website (she was to go to full ecommerce shopping later) I saw her often and got to know her quite well.

Mercy ran her first beauty emporium upstairs at a local market hall, and sometimes you knew she was in as her rapacious laugh could be heard from the fish stalls at the swing doors of the Market Street entrance. Her hairdressers always had people in, having cuts and waves, or just hanging about. The salon could have been down town Kingston Jamaica, mixed amongst stalls for haberdashery, second hand CD's, handbags, books, clothes, Polish food etc, it was colourful with a great vibe, the sound of hair driers, laughter and chat. All day long. I liked Mercy, she was sassy, friendly, if a little shy, polite, she always asked after my sons, my family, my girlfriend, and if girlfriend loved me still and still treated me good.

And Mercy was "hat", Mercy was hot in the same way the Jamaican scotch bonnet chillies got their name, because they're "hat"! And, yes if she jumped up and down her ass would wiggle, but she was tall, neither thin nor fat, with neither big or small bumps. She had the legs tho. The nicest smile, flashing white teeth and the biggest lips I'd ever seen, usually painted a deep red, sometimes I longed to kiss them. She was pretty, dark haired and as black as ebony. Mercy was Nigerian and without any disrespect to her I only understood a part of what she ever said. But it was her eyes that captivated me, she would look to the floor then up at me and when she smiled they smiled at me, for me, she had beautiful brown eyes, like shiny conkers that contrasted with the whites. You'd know she was looking right at you from across the other side of Mo' bay.

Eventually she paid her bill off, but I occasionally called in when in town, Mercy expanded her salon to do more beauty then also started to carry a huge range of ethnic hair products and I showed her "weasel" husband how to put the items on the website for sale. I'd met her kids, and I went to his fortieth birthday bash where there was a sharp black and white divide across the room (he is white) and I stayed for at least half an hour.

Then I think that things started to go down hill for Mercy, I think she'd expanded to much and too quickly, trade had gone down and there was a lot of stock to pay for. On one occasion I called into the salon as I was passing, and found her, alone and unhappy, and she told me as much as I thought, confirming how bad things where. She gave me a great hug and as she held on tight, I felt her tear on my cheek. "You, You a good man, Andrew, you make damn sure, girl feend treat you damn good, damm right".

Sometime later I bumped into Mercy in town and in a brief exchange she told me that she was moving to another shop on a busy street and I said I'd call at some point and take some photos for her website. A few weeks later as I drove round the one way system and past her new salon I saw her lounging on her settee by the window, just gazing into space. Crossing the road I felt some butterflies in my stomach, I had hoped to catch Mercy on her own, perhaps it might lead to

something more, and I was wondering what could happen. "Oh, Andrew, I am so happy to see you", she said standing and moving to me to give me a hug, "Your girl, still keeping you good? Honey, huh? " In between embraces, " Ha, I'd look after you, right and fine!"

"Whats new Mercy", I enquired.

She sat back on her settee and I pulled up her hairdressing chair close to her and perched on the edge as Mercy took my hands in hers. She took a good long look at my palms as she held my fingers, took a deep breath and I could see her bottom lip quivering, as she looked up at me and deep into my eyes. I could see the start of a tear in hers.

You know, in the past I've told someone that's not related to me more of my woes than I can someone I'm close to, perhaps this was going to be similar.

Then it all came out.

In a rush.

Mercy started to cry and said through her tears that Mick the husband had gone off and left her, she was in trouble with Doctor over money, she was desperate financially, shop very quiet. "Fuck", She whispered. Comforting her I put my arms around her and wiped her cheek. "Start at the beginning", I said quietly. "Well, him gone, spent all time on internet, plenty of fish website, we been together eight years, no sex for seven"! She peeped at me as she sobbed, "Well", I said, "I think two boys younger than that, indicates you might of M?" trying to lighten the situation. "Mmm, she giggled, once or twice only, man put coat on me bed, me pregnant". "Anyway", She continued, "He not even wanting to see the boys, I so upset 'bout that, gone off, when I speak to him, won't tell me where is? Know?, Given me no money for boys, nothing, nada". "Oh and Doctor, bad trouble, bad Andrew, real bad". She had stopped crying but tears where running down her face. I felt so sorry for her, the Mercy I knew had no bad in her.

Doctor it transpired was her wholesaler of hair products and she owed him three thousand going back six months and he was going mad about it, ringing her up all the time, threatening court action etc. The fact was that Mercy didn't have much stock left and had spent the money.

I left Mercy soon after that and promised to see her soon. Driving away I thought about Mercy and her kids, Mercy is a lovely person and I felt for her. And I had an idea, so what I did, I did for her. I got in touch with Doctor (and if I thought Mercy was difficult to understand then Doctor was worse) at their wholesalers somewhere in London and with the help of Doctor's daughter Zina, built them a shopping website for a few hundred pounds as long as they where to reduce Mercy's bill by the true cost of the site - two thousand. This was a lot of work for us, but I helped her.

Obviously Mercy was overjoyed, and the next time I saw her in her shop she was in better spirits, and there where a few customers in, Mercy danced around the shop, "Andrew, you make me so hat!" Smiling, "You gerefren let you down, you come here" and hugging me, " I can't thank you so much for what you done for me". She glanced at a customer waiting for her turn, "told, y'all, and I'm right about him, eh?" A pretty black woman nodded and giggled into her magazine. As I left, promising lunch soon, Mercy calls after me, "If I can't have you - you find me a man, a white man tho".

I didn't see or hear from Mercy for a while but she rang me and asked me to switch off her website as she had closed the shop.

A year passes, and I've decided to be unfaithful, its not that I want, but whats a man to do when he cant get enough at home? And my number one candidate is black bird for the job.

We arrange for lunch and I am waiting outside Verdis in glorious sunshine for Mercy, who a few minutes late appears from around the corner and swaggers towards me beaming, she's very smartly dressed, white jacket and trouser suit, bright red blouse and lips, high heels. Stunning. Mercy kisses me on the cheek, and I smell some nice perfume, I take Mercy's hand, tell her she looks "fab", she pinches my fingers as we go inside.

Mercy orders a salad and I order a pizza, and as she sips her coke she asks after my family, I ask after her boys and errant husband. "Gettin a d I v or c ee" she splutters as her coke goes down the wrong way, "Sorry, Drew", composing herself, "I hot", she pulls her blouse out a bit as if exaggerating the movement. "Not been here b'fore, nice places", smiles, winks, giggles. Turns out weasley bloke hasn't seen the boys in a year and has not contributed to her either. She can't get hold of him. She's got a cleaning job.

Mercy pingles with her food pushing the remains of her ceaser salad around the plate, as she tells me about when she lived in Japan during her twenties studying at a university in Tokyo, how she doesn't want to/can't go back to Nigeria, I think her family where quite well to do but something political had happened forcing them to move away from their country. Eventually the subject comes round to relationships. More specifically me and my girlfriend, the girlfriend question. "Yo girlfren? She treating you right"?

And its like a scene in a film as Mercy raises her fork, everything seems to stop, with only me in real time, the waiter, menu in hand frozen walking, the girl on reception in mid sentence on the phone. M's eyes are on me, unmoving. A split second in time to examine everything as what I say next is the step on one path or another in one direction or another. I look into Mercy, she is not the same as she used to be, I think that she is beaten currently by life. Don't get me wrong I fancy her, I would be proud to be walking through town with her on my arm, there is chemistry between us and if I didn't have girlfriend and wanted a long term relationship, I would be there with flowers in moments.

But I read in her eyes, and consider, and a Jamaican saying comes to mind, "Wan wan cocoa fill filla basket", with various meanings, but that one coconut is enough to live on, and Mercy would be enough for me, but it also means that you can get by with what you've got.

And as I look, I realise those eyes are saying:

IF YOU WANT ME

You can have me, but

I need...

RESPONSIBILITY

COMMITMENT

RELATIONSHIP

FUTURE

CHILDREN'S FATHER

and those aren't bad things.

And

I could take her home. But all I can foresee is more hurt for her, she isn't there just for a bonk, she's too nice for an affair. I like her, and her kids too. Perhaps, she should get the bus. And as Robert Palmer sings in my head:

"I want you, the right way
I want you...
But I want you to want me too
Just like I want you"

The moment snaps, and is unfrozen, noise and movement returns to the restaurant, Mercy chews on her mouthful and looks at me questioningly, as I hear myself speak, almost in third person, as I lie. "Yep, yep, everything's fine, its all good".

And Mercy says "So, I thought you want me?"
and I reply, "I want you, in the right way" and smile at her, as I think sadly that's not this way.