

# To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ Mercy, The Girl With The Red Leggings



The rumor arrived before she herself made her appearance: 'Mercy is back!' 'Mercy? Really, you are kidding! Mercy back?' 'Yes, she is in the country and will be here any day now!'

Two days later Salamata came inside my house and announced with restrained excitement as if she introduced a famous star: 'Here ... is ... Mercy!' And there was Mercy! Glowing, beautiful, graceful and courteous Mercy, with Philomena in a sling on her back and a present for us in her hand.

We all started talking at the same time. Mercy, you are back! You look so great! Hugging, exchanging compliments, truly happy to see her so well. She had hardly time to sit down because she had not seen her own parents yet and had to move on with her taxi to the small village nearby. Of course we could not keep her long and yet we did, we simply had to!

Mercy, who worked with us at our home for the handicapped children, left four years ago and she left rather unceremoniously. Mercy had been a very good caregiver and her children Inno and Philo had thrived by her playful and loving care. When she came to me that Friday night four years ago she cried uncontrollably. 'I am so sorry but I have got the ticket to fly to Italy and the flight is Sunday and I simply have to go, it is my only chance'. Taken aback, though these kind of sudden departures happen quite a bit in Ghana, we kissed and I thanked her for her work in our community and waved her good-bye.

Life goes on. We heard about her every now and then. In Italy, always good news, and once we saw Philo in a beautiful new dress. 'From where?' Oh, Mercy has sent money over from Italy and the caregivers together had bought the most intensely beautiful dress for Philo from the money. Philo wears that dress every Sunday. And now this... Mercy is back!

She left like a girl with red leggings and a gentle though somewhat casual style of doing things and she re-appeared transformed into a demure, graceful lady! 'Mercy, tell your story if you will?'

Well, they did get a ticket for me, my uncles in Italy, and I was to look after a

child, was to be a nanny. Then I worked extremely hard all the time and everywhere, mostly in textile factories. I still do, from early till late at night. People in Italy like hardworking foreigners and next year I will get my Italian citizenship. And also ... Mercy is married!

Did you know him before you left Ghana? 'No, but they told me about him and I had a full year in Italy to study his character and then I said yes, I want to marry Ebenezer'. What we gathered is that Ebenezer, her new husband, was originally in Holland but as the immigration laws in Holland got tougher every year he had drifted down south to Italy where seemingly it is easier to become a legal immigrant. That's by the way why many boat-immigrants travel overland from Spain to Italy where they can breathe freer without being immediately picked up by the police. Spain too is difficult for immigrants. Whatever the cost was, and it must have been a whole lot more than the few hardships she had endured in Italy of which she talked about, she reappeared as a woman radiating success and we were so happy to see her almost majestic appearance.

She left, really had to see her own real parents now (Bob and I are like second parents to her) and so we kissed and she was gone. She will come back in two years, by that time an Italian citizen with her lawful young husband Ebenezer. Who knows, a baby as well. We are proud for her!