

BY BAMUTURAKI MUSINGUZI

Independent Black publisher Cassava Republic Press is celebrating major recognitions for its title *The Mercy Step* by Marcia Hutchinson, which has been longlisted for the 2026 Women's Prize for Fiction and shortlisted for the Discover Prize at the British Book Awards.

Senior editor, Cassava Republic Press, Layla Mohamed acquired the manuscript after it had been turned away by 50 publishers. Fifty doors closed on the story of Mercy — a precocious Jamaican-British girl growing up in Bradford in December 1962, in a household shaped by a violent father, a devout mother, and the long shadow of the Windrush. Mohamed saw what others had missed.

Extraordinaire

For Cassava Republic Press, a London- and Abuja-based independent publisher known for championing African and diaspora voices, the recognition is more than a literary milestone. It affirms the press's longstanding commitment to publishing the stories mainstream publishing often overlooks.

"From the very first pages, I knew this was something extraordinary. Mercy's voice — so alive, so precise, so achingly real — is one that stays with you. The fact that fifty publishers passed on this novel only deepened my conviction that we had to publish it. This is exactly what Cassava Republic is here to do: to find the stories that others overlook, and to give them the platform they deserve," Mohamed said.

The Mercy Step reflects Cassava Republic's founding conviction: that African and Black people must own the means of cultural production in order to shape our narratives on our own terms and that the stories others pass over are often the ones most worth telling.

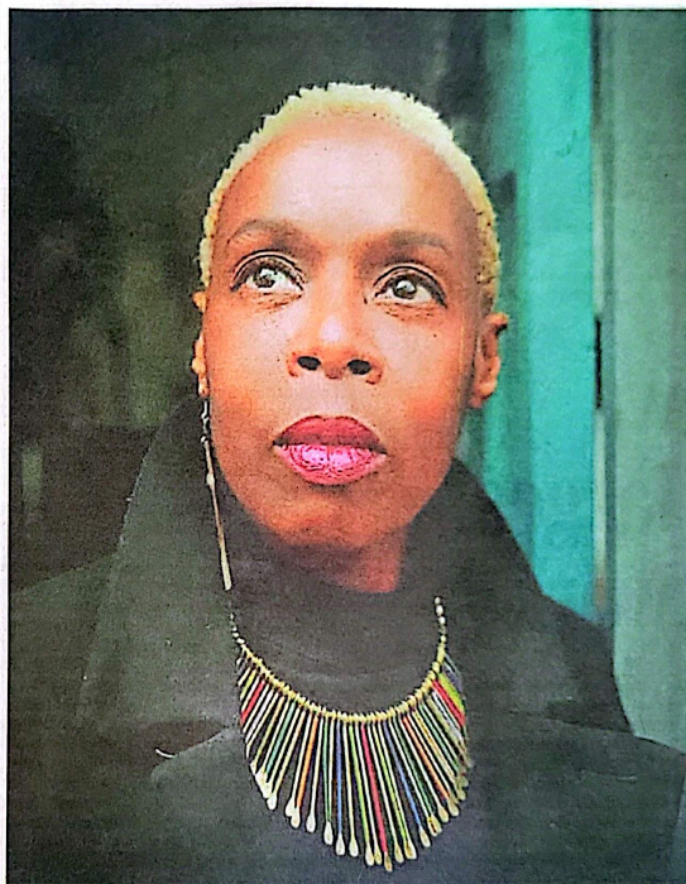
About the novel

December 1962, Bradford. Mercy is born into a world that feels far too big for her small body — into a home run by an angry, violent father and a devout mother, both Windrush migrants from Jamaica. She craves her mother's attention, which she must share with the Church and her many siblings, while the whole family live at the whims of their father's temper.

But Mercy is nothing if not resilient. She finds joy and escapism in books, in learning, in the loyal company of her doll Dolly. She is determined to overcome her upbringing — no matter

Cassava Republic Press brings debut novel to global spotlight

A win for Cassava Republic Press. *The Mercy Step* is a sharply-witted and tender portrait of a young girl's quiet rebellion, and her refusal to be broken.



Marcia Hutchinson, the author of *The Mercy Step*. PHOTO/BRITTLE PAPER.

Quick notes

The Mercy Step is a powerful, heart-wrenching story of family, faith and the search for freedom. Hutchinson's tender and piercingly observant debut maps the coming-of-age and quiet rebellion of a Black girl in 1960s Britain. Longlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2026.

Shortlisted for the British Book Awards Discover Book of the Year 2026.



Title: *The Mercy Step*

Author: Marcia Hutchinson

Pages: 288

Published: 2025

Availability: Amazon

Publisher: Cassava Republic Press

what it takes.

Raw, tender, and often extremely funny, *"The Mercy Step"* is a debut novel informed by the author's own experience as a child of Windrush generation parents. It announces Marcia Hutchinson as an unmistakable new voice in literary fiction.

Women's Prize longlisting and the British Book Award Discover Prize

The Mercy Step is longlisted for the 2026 Women's Prize for Fiction. The shortlist will be announced on April 22, 2026 at 14:00 BST. The paperback edition will be released on April 30, 2026, bringing the novel to a wider audience.

The Mercy Step is shortlisted for the 2026 Discover Prize by The British Book Awards. The Discover award was created to amplify books and stories from underrepresented writers, with a particular focus on the work of indie presses and imprints.

Praise for *The Mercy Step*

"Dark, humorous, and passionately captures the unique realities of the northern Black experience. Powerfully told from a child's vantage point, the storytelling is imaginative and animated, yet piercing in all the right places," says *The Observer*.

"A vivid and important story, told with warmth and verve. Children are so often the unseen and unheard victims of domestic abuse, and Hutchinson speaks into this silence with incredible compassion and authenticity. I laughed, I cried. Mercy's voice will stay with me for a very long time," says Roisin O'Donnell, the author of the Women's Prize-longlisted *'Nesting'*.

"A moving, funny and perfectly-observed slice of Black British life... has all the hallmarks of a modern classic," says Paterson Joseph, an author and actor.

"A brilliant debut. Both deeply touching and haunting, with a compelling child protagonist that's impossible to look away from," says Irenosen Okojie, the author of *"Nudibranch"* and *"Butterfly Fish."*

"A mesmerising debut — intimate, poetic and unforgettable. Marcia's honesty and storytelling left me spellbound," says Peter Kalu, a novelist, playwright and poet.