

Love-struck teenager in murder saga

● 14-yr-old allegedly hacks niece to death to sustain romance with boyfriend

■ Precious IGBONWELUNDU ■

WHEN on November 19, Mr. Egwuda Humphrey and his wife scolded their 14-year-old niece for having a boyfriend who even bought her a mobile phone, they least suspected that she would visit her anger on their seven-year-old girl, Haluna. But Ruth VenMark did not only visit her anger on poor Haluna, she ensured that she paid the supreme price for telling her guardians about her romance with her boyfriend.

The distraught couple, who reside at Tudun Chiroma, Kofar Hausa, Nasarawa State got the shock of their lives on November 23, when they returned to find that the love-struck teenager had strangled their poor daughter to death, laid her on the bed and covered her with a cloth as if she was asleep.

Ruth, who was said to have admitted that she killed her cousin according to a relation in Lagos, reportedly told family members that she was angry that Haluna reported her romance with a boy named Nice to her guardians. Pleading anonymity, the relation said although Haluna had been buried, family members were still shocked that the teenager the couple admitted into their home in February to give her quality life could cause them so much pain.

The relation said: "The news is very disturbing. That Ruth killed Haluna and pretended as if all was well is still a surprise to us. As I speak with you, my brother (Humphrey) only started talking yesterday (Monday). He fainted on sighting Haluna and had to be rushed to the hospital. We are just confused.

"The most annoying part is that she said it was her cult members who told her to kill Haluna so that their secrets would not be made public. For a child of her age, who just got to Nasarawa this February, how would anyone suspect that she had been initiated into a cult?

"From what she told us, her cult members told her to deal with Haluna and ensure that there is confusion in the house so that my brother and his wife would not go to her school to report her as they had threatened to do.

"She said it was a 13-year-old girl that initiated her and also introduced her to her lover who bought her a phone."

The deceased's mother, Hassanna, who was in shock after the incident, told *The Nation* that she regretted insisting that her daughter should stay at home with her niece on that particular day.

She said: "Haluna was with me where I was plaiting my hair. She refused going home to stay with my niece but I forced her to go because I felt that she (niece) was lonely. Little did I know that I was pushing her home to be killed.

"While we were having breakfast around 8:30am, the woman who plaits our hair called and said that the kids should come and plait their hair. I asked Ruth to take Haluna to the woman's place, and she did.

"After some time, the woman called that she was done with Haluna's hair. I asked Ruth to take Haluna's younger sister, five-year-old Halfrida to the woman and bring Haluna home.

"So, when I had finished what I was doing, I left for the woman's place to fix my hair and Haluna followed me. As we were about to leave, Ruth asked me if I was going with Haluna and I said yes.

"But on a second thought, I felt that Ruth could be lonely and that could be why she asked the question. I told Haluna to go back, but she refused, so I allowed her to

follow me to the woman's place.

"On getting there, I asked my two girls to go home and stay with Ruth and their younger brother, Hanson. Haluna still refused but I forced her to go. She

collected my phone and told me a story from the bible, but when she finished, I still insisted that she should go home, and she did reluctantly.

"I finished plaiting my hair around 3 pm. Surprisingly, Haluna did not rush out to hug me as she usually did when I got home. I asked Ruth about her and she said she (Haluna) was sleeping. Her response came as a surprise to me because Haluna did not use to sleep in the afternoon.

"When it was 3:30 pm and she had not woken up, I asked



Ruth

PRELUDE

d her what she gave Haluna that made her to sleep for that long.

"I went to their room to wake Haluna up because her French teacher normally came at 4pm, so that she would set her table and chair. Surprisingly, my daughter did not wake up.

"I shook her leg and hand but they were stiff. I tried to carry her up and saliva poured from her mouth. It was like a dream. When I carried her, I saw marks on her body and I quickly called Ruth who was outside the house.

"I asked her in Hausa what she did to my daughter and she said she hit her several times. I asked why she killed her but she was just looking at me. I quickly called my neighbours for help and also called my husband on the phone so that we could rush Haluna to the hospital.

"On getting to the hospital, the doctor said we should provide a police report, but my husband insisted that they must attend to her.

"As that was going on, we called my sister to go with Ruth to the police station for police report. So, my husband left for the station to get the report."

Recalling what transpired at the police station, Humphrey told *The Nation* that he was stunned at Ruth's

confession.

He said: "She told the police that she was a cultist and that her members communicated with her through the phone to deal with Haluna and cause confusion in my home. She said the phone she was given could only be used by the cult members as no non-member could reach her on the phone.

"She told the police that she first hit Haluna in the abdomen stomach and when Haluna hit her back, she got angry and started hitting her with her initiation ring.

"Ruth also said that after hitting her with the ring, she strangled her to death and laid her on the bed. She said Haluna could not shout because she covered her mouth. The revelations were so disturbing that I became dumb for many days, I just could not believe that the child I left behind that morning was dead just like that. It was so strange because I do not leave by the roadside where a car or stray bullet would hit her.

"She was a very intelligent girl. She always came second in her class at Lofty Height Nursery and Primary School, Keffi. But a day before she died, she had promised me that she would come first because the pupil that had been coming first had not got two heads. Unfortunately, she did not live to fulfill the promise.

"I am really pained because Haluna is a child we were so proud of. She spoke fluent French and is always watchful. We will greatly miss her," he said.

On the action the family has taken against the teenager accused of killing her, Humphrey said: "We have returned her to her parents in Jos. The police questioned her for three to four days, after which she was released to her parents.

"We are not interested in any case because that will not bring back our daughter. Besides, Ruth is my wife's niece. I am only talking to you because I want parents to learn from our experience.

"Because Ruth's parent's could not afford to educate her, we took her to leave with us and put her in school, so that instead of sending money each time to her and her siblings, we could give her a better life and education while she would in turn cater for her siblings. But it has turned out this way.

"All we can do is to allow her to go and meet her parents. We would not want to have her in our home because the pain is much."

When contacted, Ruth's father, Mr. VenMark said she was released to them by the police and was currently in Jos.

He said: "I was not there when it happened, but we were told we went to the police station in Nasarawa.

"She confirmed at the station that she did it. She told us it just happened that she hit Haluna and she died.

"We are very sorry about the sad incident. I am short of words because Haluna's mother is my sister. The entire family has been disturbed over the issue. It is a very sad incident that will hunt me for the rest of my life and my daughter too, I doubt if she will overcome it.

"We have since taken her for prayers and we are still on it. All I can say is that we are truly sorry. I pray that we will be forgiven for Ruth's action."

However, the state's Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Cornelius Ocholi, said he was not aware of the incident. He told *The Nation* that he could neither confirm nor debunk the story because he was not aware of it.

"I cannot deny or confirm until I get my facts from the area. I must call and confirm from the Area Commander there because there are about five DPOs in the area.

"As I speak to you, I am on the highway to Abuja and I do not even know if the case has been transferred to the state CID or charged to court.

"None of the DPOs called me about it and I have not heard anything of such," Ocholi said.



The late Haluna

PRETORIA - About 100 000 people paid homage to the late former South Africa president Nelson Mandela during the three days his body lay in state at the Union Buildings, in Pretoria, the government said yesterday.

About 100 000 paid homage to Mandela