

Death for coming late to the farm!

Tribune Editorial Board September 3, 2025



INCREASINGLY these days, stories of conflict in marital relationships paint a dark picture of the marriage institution. This is, to say the very least, highly unfortunate. The time-honoured values of love, care and discipline in the home seem to be taking flight as pestilential characters take charge in many homes, recreating society in their rotten image. Or how else does anyone describe the case of the despot in Efon Alaaye, Ekiti State, who was reported to have beaten his wife to death for arriving late at the family's farm?

The victim identified as Modupe Alasin reportedly breathed her last last week after she was mercilessly beaten by her husband. According to a witness, the man had accused the victim of coming late to the farm, and witnesses heard her tormented voice as she screamed and begged under the heavy barrage of her husband's blows. Shortly after the beating, the man was heard ordering the woman to fetch water from the nearby stream. That was when the story changed dramatically: the victim's strength could only carry her as far as the stream, where she slumped and died. The Public Relations Officer, Ekiti State Police Command, SP Sunday Abutu, confirmed the incident, disclosing that the killer husband had been arrested and was undergoing interrogation.

Surely, if the scenario painted here is what marriage has become, then there is no need to marry. Fortunately, though, this kind of incident, grim and distressing though it is, does not define the typical Nigerian marriage, and we do sincerely hope that it never does. For this is not a story about two lovers negotiating the challenges of life in an atmosphere of love and respect, as it should be. Rather, it is a story of a Pharaoh and his slave, a man with all the powers in the world destroying his hapless victim. It is the story of a woman with no power at all; a woman treated with no love or dignity. This was surely not a marriage, if it ever even started out as one, but a grossly unequal relationship where a man held a cudgel over his captive, demanding total submission. It is an infinitely dark, distressing story, one that leaves a thoroughly sour taste in the mouth. How do you even process the idea that a supposed marriage was a prison, a trap, a cage, an unregulated boxing ring in which one lone ruffian who should ordinarily not be seen anywhere near decent society called the shots? Why on earth do people who want not a partner but a robot ever venture to get married? Is it just to slake their depraved lust or to display their demonic inclinations? How and when did marriage ever become such a debased and debasing experience?

If you describe this story as distressing, it is because you still have a conscience, a commodity that is increasingly scarce in the society nowadays judging by the frequency and scale of horrendous crimes. Just how do you beat a woman to a pulp, then order her to go fetch water? Is she a slave? And should even a slave be treated in that heartless manner? Why do some men still feel that marriage entitles them to gender-based violence, making them

a lawless lord over their wives? And what becomes of the children implicated in this terrible case now that their father faces the prospect of jail or even the hangman's noose? There is a real possibility that through no fault of theirs, they will be deprived of both parents, all on account of the wicked acts of their father. It is clear that despite their huffing and puffing and mindless rage, wicked people are really unthinking, unfeeling and senseless brutes. They are ruled by their muscles rather than their brains and are no better than the animals in the wild.

Pray, will the suspect in this case now farm with the woman's corpse? Now that he has allegedly killed his wife, who will the suspect be in a position to charge next with coming late to the farm? And if death is the reward for coming late to the farm, what would be the punishment for not coming at all? Would the offender be ground into powder? This story becomes even more benumbing when the fact is considered that the victim's "lateness" to the farm might even have been due to family commitments. Anyone who has to wash, clean, cook and take care of children and a heady husband might come to the farm late on certain occasions, and just how is mindless violence the solution to that infraction? Anger is a dangerous habit that must be checked before it inevitably checks those overcome by it into jail, or worse.

To be sure, we do not make the case that the victim in this case was without fault: no normal human ever is. Our point is that she did nothing worthy of death and, in any case, no one has the right to constitute himself into an accuser, judge and executioner over others. If all the suspect in this case did was verbally express his displeasure at his wife's action, this would have been a non-story and he would not be in jail as we speak. No human being is an angel able to take just about any offence in his or her stride. Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in relationships and they can even turn out to be a blessing in disguise when the parties concerned are willing to make amends. People intending to have healthy, long-lasting relationships must have effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Advising couples to prioritise open dialogue and finding peaceful resolutions to disagreements is not a fanciful theory; it is a practical strategy that can save lives. People who have been married for decades have not passed through the years having no faults or making no mistakes. Quite the contrary. What they have learnt to do is to manage emotions and respond to issues and situations thoughtfully. It is a fact that healthy relationships prioritise mutual respect, trust and equity, exploring non-violent means of conflict resolution.

As we have said time and again, crime festers in the face of impunity. That is why justice must be done and be seen to be done in this case. It is sad that human life could be cut short in this cynical and cavalier manner and we urge the Ekiti State government to take active interest in this case and use this case to send a signal to would-be felons. The message should be that there will be no place for abuse and abusers of any kind in Ekiti State.

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We commiserate with the family and friends of Modupe Alasin and wish them the fortitude to survive this hour of trial. May her soul rest in sweet repose.