



Residents of Agege, a Lagos suburb, resort to vigil as armed robbers threaten to repeat attack after killing five on first invasion

Dream big, if you are aiming at great breakthroughs," is a popular injunction in the Pentecostal Christian parlance. The spiritual idea, no doubt, holds no meaning to the armed robbers that swooped on Dopemu, a lowly community in Orile-Agege area of Lagos State recently. It was very early on the day of horror.

Most of the houses there are not better than modern-day poultry, and most of their inhabitants are the "wretched of the earth," yet, the marauders reportedly invaded the neighbourhood in two buses and a car, giving them horror.

"I don't know what they wanted here out of all the areas in this Lagos. Most of us here cannot feed our families," wondered Jimoh Baruwa, a tenant in bungalow number 13, Ifekoya Street, where another occupant, 50-year-old Tajudeen Aderibigbe, father of nine and a native of Abeokuta was shot at and left dead in a pool of blood after he was dispossessed of some items, including a handset. According to Baruwa, it was around 2.45 am on the "black Sunday."

"When they broke into the house, we all knew because they announced their arrival, saying, 'we are armed robbers o; we are here for you today. So, don't waste our time!'" Baruwa further revealed to Saturday Punch. Funny, you would say.

In the ensuing panic, not a few hurriedly hid their wards under beds, only to find Aderibigbe's body long after the moment of hell.

Just adjacent to the house is 12A, also a bungalow. One of the occupants too, Gabriel Iwaloga, was shot dead according to her daughter, after "giving them all he had." The case of Iwaloga, who resigned five years ago from the Nigeria Police, is pathetic. "He cooperated with them. It was when they were departing that they sighted the picture he hanged on the wall. In it, he was in police uniform. That was when they looked back and shot him in the neck," his daughter recounted in grief.

Shocked? You haven't heard anything! Adealu, Ogunnaike and Adebambo Streets – all in the same neighbourhood – lost a resident each, besides sundry valuables. The victim on Adealu Street was said to have met his death in his bus where he spent the night. He probably had thought that he was in a well-secured environment where robbery is a taboo. Too bad, he was dead wrong.

"It was a bad night. Booming of guns rocked everywhere; heavy gunshots. It was like a war situation. Virtu-

ally every house was invaded. They really prepared for the attack," said Musiliu Bello, an estate agent at Ifekoya.

But for resounding choruses of "blood of Jesus," by all its members when the robbers invaded their apartment in Adealu Street, the family of a pastor with The Redeemed Christian Church of God would have had the corpse of its breadwinner to bury. The pastor however sustained gunshot injuries in one of his arms.

"They were about 15 young boys and they did not cover their faces. They collected all our handsets in the family, including money. They asked me for gold jewelry and I told them I did not have. For that, I got a dirty slap on my face. At a point, they almost fought over the money they got from us. Though I thank God for sparing my husband's life, it was a harrowing ordeal," narrated the pastor's wife.

Today, the bereaved among the residents seem to have found wisdom in the Biblical saying, "He who giveth taketh," accepting their cruel fate. However, their agonies are not over yet.

'Take another wife? If my wife hears that, she will hang you!'

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out of his grandmother's fold, according to him, in search of adventure and extra money to, like his mates, rent a bicycle from one Baba Jeje in the neighbourhood. By his confession, he lacked nothing, but succumbed to peer influence.

Back in the evening from a market where he had gone to offload yam tubers, a terrible pain in his neck would not allow him a sound sleep. Worried, his loving grandmother, according to him, could not sleep too.

"At a point, when the pain became unbearable, I had to confess what I did to my grandmother," he recalled. The confession was to be the most costly in his life. "In utmost anger, my grandmother descended on me, beating me black and blue. In fact, I thought I would die because the beating was so severe. Ever since, I have remained straight in whatever I do," Alabi added.

Then Spectacles wondered why, despite his status, particularly as a Moslem and his personable look, he had not deemed it fit to take another wife.

The Saturday Punch correspondent was there on Monday; the residents were still frozen in fear. Still dazed, the residents stood in groups, discussing the incident. Those that sat in front of their homes rested their lower jaws on both hands.

Visit the area today; young and old, the embattled people wear red eyeballs. You may easily conclude that they are smokers; what an error it will be!

"Since that Sunday, we have not closed our eyes in sleep; we have been keeping vigil in the streets, burning tyres and beating all sorts of items like tins to create noise," disclosed Bello. Why? He explained, "The robbers threatened to return to the few streets they did not touch. In fact, they announced it in Taiwo and Kibishile Streets and asked people to prepare for them."

Now, those that have not the financial wherewithal to relocate like others are already preparing to do, now arm themselves with knives and cutlasses every night. Yes, they now hold processions in the streets all night long, holding their destinies firmly in their hands.

"But the police are there for you," the correspondent told one of them, who retorted, "Police? We called those at Dopemu Station, we had no response. It was those from Area 'G' at Ogba that reported around 6 am, saying that they could not locate our area early enough. All this accounts for why we decided to be staying outside to guard our homes."

For how long will the residents have the sleepless nights? Are the police not there? What are the authorities doing? one would certainly ask.

The chairman of Orile-Agege Local Government Area, Hon. Taofeek Adaranijo was not available for comment, but one of his aides, who sympathised with the residents, said the council had been doing all it could to assist the police in securing the area. "We have given the police some gadgets including walkie-talkies among other monthly gestures. Very soon, we are also going to present a patrol van to the police. All this, we believe, will help them give us better security," the aide explained.

But the state police spokesman, Olubode Ojajuni, believes that the society has a key role to play to stem the tide of such robberies, even across the country.

He said, "It is a battle that must be jointly fought by all of us. The police have never rested on their oars and we are still taking effective proactive measures to tackle the problem frontally. The truth must be told; each of these armed robbers tormenting the society comes from particular homes. They are not ghosts. They have parents and relations who should care about their activities. They are the ones that should caution their young ones and ensure that they are brought up with sound moral values. Though we will continue to do our best, the task must not be left for the police, and residents should always furnish us with information about any suspected criminal around them."

"Good talk," the police authorities would readily say. But how prompt do the police respond to such situations? Don't they tell the public either that they had no vehicle; their vehicles were bad or they had no fuel to rise to such emergencies? Are people not tired of them? What is the government doing to arrest unemployment and its rattling attendant hunger and frustrations in the land? Many questions, no answer yet.

His response was as quick as lightning. "Take more wives? If my wife hears that from you, she will hang you!"

It was an opportunity for Spectacles to know how his "gentlemanly disposition" earned him his wife, Chief Mrs. Adetokunbo Mojirade Alabi, through a relationship that began way back in 1976 in London at a co-tenant's party. "I was the MC at the party. Everyone was set when the bell to the place rang. We all ignored it because we thought it was a gatecrasher. But feeling that the person needed attention, I rose to open the door for her. Alas, she had come to see a friend. I approached her courteously and got delivery of her message for the friend she had come for. And so it began between us until 1978, when we got engaged."

Alabi, who said everyday is memorable for him spoke about his passionate love for the music of the late Apala maestro, Yusufu Olatunji. "He was on the band stand when I was being named the Gbonkaa Olubadan of Ibadanland," he revealed. That however did not end it; he named his second son after the music legend!