

Tragedy! Teacher kills student's father with plank...says it's in self defence

DAYO THOMAS

JUST a bang, and the man died! That was the tragedy that befell the late Mr. Olugbemiga Olaoyi, 48, when he was hit by Omoneyin Romanus (alias OBJ), his daughter's teacher, after an argument that lasted barely two minutes.

Many who knew the late Olaoyi for his acclaimed gentle disposition are yet to reckon with the circumstances of his death. Olaoyi's sudden death carries with it a mystery that has confounded the bereaved, the witnesses and even the mastermind. A month after the incident, it has continued to pose a serious dilemma among the residents of Lambe, a suburb in Lagos State. And to those who are still tied to superstition, the entire sequence of that tragedy gives credence to its premeditated attributes; no wonder, many observers said Olaoyi might have been destined to die.

But such conclusions do not have a place in law. And even if Olaoyi had answered the call of destiny on that fateful day, it had found Omoneyin, a graduate of industrial chemistry from the University of Ilorin, a willing accomplice. And so, the law has since started its course as he is being currently interrogated by men of the Nigeria Police at the Elewera Police Station, Abeokuta, Ogun State.

A few weeks after the incident, the widow, Mrs. Olaoyi, is still in shock. She found it difficult to accept that her husband was no more. "It is like a dream to me, and I still find it hard to believe that OBJ killed my husband just like that. Why?" she asked.

The widow stared blankly as she walked hesitantly around the empty parlour she shared with her husband up till the last moment death took him away.

"We came back from the church and the children ate in the afternoon", she managed to explain. "He did not eat as he was busy fixing the louvres and window frames. When it was about 7:30pm, my husband asked what we were going to eat and I told him there was no soup. He then told Deborah, my daughter, to go and buy bread for him to eat. About five minutes later, Deborah came back crying that OBJ, her teacher, slapped her because she did not greet him.

"My husband was shocked that OBJ could beat the girl that much simply because she did not greet him. He then took Deborah to the place to clarify what happened; and he never returned."

"About five minutes later, the girl ran back again that OBJ had killed her father. You can imagine how I felt. I ran to the scene and found my husband lying down lifeless. We rushed him to the hospital and we were told that he had died."

Those who were at the scene of the fracas were equally amazed at the rapid turn of events. "I have not seen such a thing before in my life," said the woman, whose shop served as the theatre for the drama of the absurd. Even the helpless audience watched like people entranced.

The calamity means different things to different people, but to Romanus, it is a



•Late Olaoyi

clear path to jail or even death. No wonder, his house address has suddenly changed.

Like a rain-drenched chicken, he sat in a corner, in his new abode, at Elewera Police Station, where he has many allegations hanging on his fragile neck. The whole scene looked too hazy to him. So, he had a distant gaze as his eyes moved from one corner to the other.

He said, "On Sunday, I was hungry and I went out to buy spaghetti at a shop not too far from my house. There, I met one of my students, Deborah and she refused to greet me and was even trying to hide her face. I called her and asked her why she did not greet me. She just looked at me and hissed. I now tapped her cheeks. She then ran out to call her dad. Immediately the girl arrived with her dad, she just said, 'this is the teacher that beat me.' And the man did not even ask me anything, he just said, 'so, you are the one beating my child,' let me never see you touch my child again. I did not utter a word. Maybe he was angry because I did not answer him, I attempted to walk away. He then picked a stick to hit me and I picked my own to defend myself. I just saw that he fell down and I fell too. Maybe it was my own stick that hit him. But I realised that when I stood up he couldn't stand up again. That was how everybody started shouting that I killed the man."

Romanus looked depressed over the prevailing circumstances, as he is unsure



•Romanus with the plank

of the journey ahead. He found himself thinking and imagining. "Why me?" was his question.

With a mixture of fear, surprise and bemusement, he asked again, "Why me?" But even if he does not know why tragedy made him a companion that night, most of his neighbours have a semblance of the reasons. Aside his notoriety as a bully, his love for alcohol is legendary.

"OBJ was totally drunk that day," said the police. He was said to have drunk himself to stupor and lost his senses in the process. Witnesses later corroborated the statement. "Even as they were beating him, his body was smelling of ogogoro (local gin). He was drunk, so he did not know what he was doing again."

OBJ's indulgence in alcohol is said to have been a source of problem for the neighbourhood, as he tended to be violent when drunk. He was said to have beaten his former landlord many times in Lambe, and the man had to partner the other landlords to eject him from his apartment.

He is said not to have regard for his female friends as he beat them even at the slightest provocation. "He is very mean, he even impregnated a lady during his NYSC and the girl has been delivered of a baby, but up till now, OBJ has not gone to see the girl. He is capable of anything," one of his close associates said.

At the Prime College, Lambe, where Romanus was teaching, he was described as erratic, "though he nevertheless had a

great passion for his work." Despite the fact that he was being paid as low as N10,000 by his proprietor, he was said to be devoted to his job.

The most hit of the tragedy seems to be Deborah, a 13-year-old, JSS 1 student of Prime College. At a tender age, the fragility and precariousness of life was painted in its horror form. She is still at a loss. Though she has gone back to school, the whole scene was like a dream. Even when the pastor was administering the earth-to-earth ritual, Deborah still had a wish in her mind: on his father, that her caring father would just rise up and walk again. That he could leap out of the casket and resume life again; the pain was personal to her. She is depressed over the painful irony of the manner of his death. She was at the centre of the crisis that led to her father's death. She described her father as an easy going man, who avoided controversy like a plague. Though her father hated violence, he couldn't condone injustice. He never liked anyone cheating another person.

She is now living in a world she never knew existed, as the air around her house is still heavy with grief.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Command, Oluwafemi Awoyale, said, "the case has been reported, and we will be carrying out our investigations and will later charge the case to court."