

Car owner claims Uber driver jumped into lagoon, family kicks

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Tade

Deji Lambo

The family of Adekunle Tade has called on the Lagos State Police Command to conduct an in-depth investigation into the events that led to his death and apprehend those responsible.

The family, while demanding justice for the deceased, accused one Audery Nwokeji of alleged involvement in the death of Tade, who was a driver operating a cab hailing service, Uber.

PUNCH Metro gathered that Tade had taken the car he was using for Uber service on hire purchase from Nwokeji, but few days after he began using it, while on his way home around 10pm, armed robbers reportedly waylaid him along the Airport Road, Ikeja, Lagos State, and snatched the car and other valuables from him.

Tade, who was said to have immediately reported the case at the Oke-Odo Police Station, was said to have been advised to inform Nwokeji about the robbery, but his wife, Adeola, while speaking with *PUNCH Metro*, said the last time she saw her husband alive was when he left for Nwokeji's place to inform her of the loss of the car.

Disturbed by her husband's whereabouts when it was getting late, Adeola reportedly contacted Nwokeji, who said Tade had jumped into the lagoon around the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge while they were on their way to the police station to report the case.

Adeola said, "Around 10pm on Tuesday, December 4, 2018, my husband called with a strange number to inform me that armed robbers waylaid him along the Ikeja Airport Road and stole his phone and the car he got on hire purchase from Nwokeji. The following day, he went back to the Oke-Odo Police Station, where he had initially reported the case, and was advised to inform Nwokeji of the robbery since she was the real owner of the car, as he had yet to complete the payment for it.

"The last time I saw Tade was the day he left for Nwokeji's house at Lekki; but when he got there, I received a call from one Mr Kehinde Olatona, who took him to the woman's house, that Nwokeji, who did not believe what my husband told her about the car, had prevented him from leaving her house. So, I became worried and had to call Nwokeji to ask after my husband when it was getting late; to my surprise, she said my husband had jumped into the lagoon around the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge while they were on their way to the police station."

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When contacted, Olatona said the voice of Nwokeji threatening Tade prompted him to enter inside the compound, adding that when he entered, he saw Tade sitting on the floor.

Olatona stated, “I parked outside, but when I heard her shouting, I was forced to enter the compound and immediately I opened the gate, I saw Tade sitting on the floor. She issued all sorts of threat and also said she was going to involve the commissioner of police.

“When she told the security man to lock the gate, I quickly gave Tade my phone to call his family so that they would know his whereabouts and afterwards, I left the place.

“On the third day, I called Tade’s wife to ask if the issue had been resolved and she said she was told that he had jumped into the lagoon. It doesn’t correlate at all; how would a car be missing and the next thing for him to do was to jump into the lagoon?”

Tade’s close relative, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said he was surprised that Nwokeji could claim that his nephew jumped into the lagoon and no one knew about it, adding that when she led the police, the deceased’s wife and himself to the bridge, the people, who claimed that they saw her shouting said they never saw anyone jumping into the lagoon.

He stated, “Nwokeji cooked up her story; she is lying. There is no way someone would jump into the lagoon in broad daylight and people won’t see and make noise about it. Even, all her witnesses said they only heard her shouting and that they never saw anybody jumped into the water.

“I became suspicious when one of the people, who said they saw her shouting, stated that a body was recovered from the opposite direction. Why I became suspicious was because the water tide wasn’t flowing backwards and for the remains of someone to have been recovered from the location the man pointed at is questionable.

“I immediately called the attention of the police officer to my observation and we decided to find out from the marine police operatives at that location. When we got there, the officers we met said they were not aware of the incident but told us to confirm from the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency.

“It was from LASEMA that we confirmed that a corpse was recovered and they provided the police with the details we used in confirming that it was Tade’s body that was recovered when we went to the Mainland Hospital.

“But the photograph of him, when the corpse was recovered, showed some marks and what the family suspects is that he might have been stabbed to death before he was dumped in the lagoon. But, we are counting on the autopsy result from the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital to reveal the actual cause of death.”

When contacted, Nwokeji said she had no reason to beat Tade, because she insured the car that was allegedly stolen, adding that the closed-circuit television cameras installed on the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge would reveal that he actually jumped into the lagoon.

The 25-year-old said, “When he told me that the car was snatched by robbers, I told him that there was no problem, because the car was insured and I knew that the worst case scenario was that the insurance company would sort it out. But I decided that we should go to the police station to report; we encountered traffic on our way to the police station and he opened the vehicle taking us on Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge and jumped into the water in broad daylight. I was shocked; I have been asking for the footage of the CCTV installed on the bridge, because it will show what actually happened.

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“The Uber driver I ordered to take us to the police station and other people on the bridge were witnesses to what happened and there was another guy in the car with us. Why would I beat a person who I was taking to the police station? He didn’t steal my car; he only said it was stolen; the car might have been stolen, so why would I beat him? This is not the first time that I am doing the Uber business; I have had drivers who won’t give me my complete money, did I beat them? I just let them go.”

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, CSP Chike Oti, said the case had been transferred to the homicide section of the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department, Yaba, for further investigation, adding that the command was awaiting the result of the autopsy on the corpse of the deceased to ascertain the actual cause of death.

Oti told our correspondent, “A case of drowning was reported at the Maroko Police Station. The deceased was alleged to have jumped from the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge into the lagoon. The people, who were with him at the time he allegedly jumped into the water, reported the case to the police, who immediately launched an investigation into the report.

“In the course of our investigation, we employed local divers that same day to go inside the water to look for him, but they came out without finding the body.

“The next day, the body floated and it was recovered and taken to the mortuary for preservation and autopsy. But to make sure that the investigation was properly done by the right detectives, the matter was transferred to the homicide section, SCIID, Yaba.

“The family members of the deceased made some allegations against the owner of the car (Nwokeji), and because of the allegations, the police invited her for questioning. The woman alleged that the man opened the door, ran out of the car and jump into the lagoon and this made her go to the police station to report the case of drowning. What we are saying is that the family should allow investigation to run through its natural course.”

The PPRO, while commiserating with the family of the deceased, said a case of murder had not been established against Nwokeji, adding that an autopsy had been conducted on the corpse to determine the actual cause of death.

“A case of murder has not been established against Nwokeji until we are sure that evidence points to the contrary. If the family has any contrary evidence, it should please come forward, while the result of the autopsy is being awaited. If the family is saying that the man was killed and dropped in the lagoon, doctors will determine that, or if the man jumped into the lagoon and drowned,” Oti added.