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baby thrown to lagoon


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## I WANT JUSTICE FOR MY CHILD

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BY OUR REPORTER ON JANUARY 25, 2015

COVER

- Mother of baby thrown into lagoon cries out
- Culprit set free by naval authorities

By PATIENCE EGWUWA

Almost three years after her baby was callously thrown into the Lagos lagoon, by the naval rating that impregnated her in the course of a short-lived marriage, Glory Yusuf, has opened up on the horrible experience.

For nine long months, Glory bore the pain and stress of pregnancy. Like every other woman expecting her first child, she had great expectations for her unborn child. On the day of her baby's birth, she struggled to stay alive for her child.

Even when the pain of childbirth overwhelmed her body, she still managed to heed all the instructions from the healthcare givers who helped with the labour.

Finally, Glory pushed out her child into the world. It was a bouncing baby girl! There was joy in her heart and immediately, the pains started to recede.

Eight days after, she staged a naming ceremony during which she named her bundle of joy Happiness. No doubt, she expected that the girl would become for her a source of unending happiness.

The only person who was not happy with the birth of Happiness was her own father, Moses Joseph, a naval rating. Few days after Happiness was born, her father came for her, but not with love in his eyes. He came with a sneaking determination to commit murder.

After two failed attempts at getting the baby from the mother, Joseph resorted to taking the law into his

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own hands. He hired thugs, went after the mother of the child with arms and eventually snatched her from its mother.

The incident happened in the dark hours of February 2, 2012 at the Boundary Ajegunle area of Lagos. The baby was just two weeks old.

Sunday Sun met with the young woman recently, and discovered rather painfully that the man who had bagged a 10-year jail term following a court-martial by the Nigerian Navy has since been set free.

That sobering fact just added to the pain of the mother of the victim who told our reporter that she is yet to find rest ever since the brutal end of her baby's life.

With pain in her eyes, Glory struggled to recall the story as it happened. "He came to my house after the naming ceremony and demanded for the baby. I refused because I didn't know what he wanted to do with a one-week-old baby.

"He then told me that he wanted to take the baby to the motherless babies home. And I was like 'God forbid, how can you take my baby to a motherless babies home when I am still alive?' I refused to let him take the baby that day and he fought me."

Glory conceived Happiness in the course of an inchoate marital relationship. Trouble started after Glory discovered that Joseph was married and had lied to her about his status. It happened while her pregnancy was approaching five months. A woman visited the couple with two children.

Joseph had told Glory that the woman was his late brother's wife and that she had come to beg for school fees for the children. She swallowed the story hook, line and sinker.

Three days after, she discovered that the woman was actually Joseph's wife and the children, the fruits of his union with her. When she demanded an explanation, the man told her to abort her pregnancy now that she knows about his marriage.

Since she was not given to abortion, Glory left the house and struggled her way through the pregnancy. It was surprising to have Joseph making a demand for the child after he had asked her to terminate it.

Continuing her narration, Glory said that in his efforts to have the child, Joseph beat her to a coma and seized the child.

"I did not even know when he took the baby away. It was even my neighbours that ran after him and took the baby from him. They told him that he couldn't take away such a young baby like that from its mother. When I woke up, they gave me my baby and told me what had happened. I was so grateful to them. After that, I called my mother and told her that the father of my baby wanted to take the child from me. And she then promised to come to Lagos from our state, Kogi.

"The very day my mother entered Lagos was the second time the man came back for the child. After greeting my mother, he said he wanted to take the baby. My mother was very angry with him. She asked him what he wanted to do with a week-old baby and if something was wrong with him. After quarrelling with my mother, he promised to come back for the child. In my mind, I thought that he would come back the way he had been coming. But the night he came back, he came with about eight-armed men around 3:00am.

"They pointed a gun at me and demanded for the baby. But I refused to give them the child. Then they knocked my mother down and said they were going to shoot me if I didn't give them the baby. Then my mother started begging me to give them the child since it was the father of the baby that is asking for her. At a point I had to let them take the baby and they went off with her. As they were leaving, I started shouting and ran after them. That was when I saw the father of my baby outside with those boys. He didn't enter the room with them. They started their bikes and left.

"Then I ran inside, took my phone and started calling him to return my baby, but his number was not going through. I kept trying the number till 4:00am, but it was not going through. So, I ran to their barracks. When the gateman saw me crying, he asked what the matter was and I told him. He said the matter was beyond

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him, that he would take me to the barracks chief. After hearing my story, the barracks chief asked me if I was sure of what I just told him and I said yes. Then he asked them to call the man.

"When they called him, he said he was at Boundary where his baby was stolen. The barracks chief then ordered him back to the barracks. When he got there, I held him and begged him to return my baby, but he denied knowledge of the incident. He was even telling me to go and look for his baby. The barracks chief then asked me again and I told him that I was sure the man came with the people that took my baby. In fact, if I see the very man that took the baby from me I can still recognize him. The barracks chief then took us to Navy Town.

"When we got to the town, the man was still denying. So, they said they would take the matter to the overall *oga* upstairs, so that the *oga* will ask the man the question himself. As they were going, the father of my baby gave his phones and N17,000 to one Hausa boy that has been following us. He told the boy that he was expecting a call from the mother of his children; that when she calls he should direct her to the Navy Town and give her the money. As they were going up, one of the phones started ringing. When the boy picked it, one of the boys who snatched the baby from me was heard saying: *oga*, where are you now? We are at Marine Beach waiting, but you are not here. Come and settle us now.'

"The boy cut the call, took the phone to a military police officer that was also there and reported what he heard. The officer then took the phone from him and called the boys back and started speaking Hausa to them. When he asked who they were, the boys became angry and were like: 'So, you don't know us again. We followed you to your girlfriend's house to take your baby. Now, you don't know who we are.'

"As a result of that phone call, they did not take him up again. Instead, they put the man in a vehicle and with some other military police officers and drove him to the Marine Beach. When they got there, they called back the number and that was where they arrested two of those boys; Ilaya and Bello. After they were questioned, the boys explained how they collected the baby and that when they left my house; they had put the baby in an Indomie carton and thrown her into the lagoon. When they said that, I was shattered. I was crying; that they should go into the water and get my baby. Even if it was her corpse; that I wanted to see my baby again," she said amid tears.

By this time, Glory was fighting hard to keep the tears away, but without much success. You could see a woman who has been through a lot in one lifetime.

Following that revelation, the woman said the Nigerian Navy promised to handle the matter. "After the trial, they told me that they sentenced the man to 10 years imprisonment; and that the case was over. I could not believe it, but because I did not have anybody that would support me, I just left the matter in God's hands," Glory said.

As if that was not enough, Glory claimed that not long after the jail term was handed down, she started seeing the same man who killed her child.

"It was not up to six months when I started to see him. The first time, I saw him at Airways Bus Stop here in Apapa as I was going to CMS. He was on bike and in Navy uniform. Another time, I saw him at Ajegunle in the night. He was wearing only the Navy beret. Even as at December, I still saw him."

Glory, who said she would like to move on with her life, told our reporter that she could not find rest until justice was served in the murder of her infant daughter. "Every time I remember the things I went through having that baby, I just want to die. I am tired. I can't even sleep at night. I am worried," she said, fighting back the tears.

Following the incident, Glory said she lost the job she was doing on Lagos Island because she was always going from one place to another in search of justice. The court case was also taking much of her time and as a result, her employer disengaged her.

So, right now, she is struggling to eke out a living with no tangible source of livelihood. But uppermost in her mind is her desire to ensure that the killer of her child is duly brought to book. "Nobody has the right to take away the life of my child like that. It is God that created her and I am sure that he has a purpose for her life. I just want her killer to face the full weight of the law." Before the Navy took up the matter, Access to

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Justice had commenced a Coroner's inquest into the death of the infant. But on the request of the Navy, the matter was discontinued at the time.

So, in its reaction to the release of the Naval rating, the NGO said the action was highly condemnable. "It is distressing to discover that, less than two years after Joseph was sentenced by the Naval Court Martial, he has since been walking the streets a free man in uniform having been released on the basis of an alleged administrative review by the Navy for which the deceased's mother, Miss Glory Yusuf was never notified.

"This so called administrative release of the Naval Rating is a cause for grave concern as it is bewildering to imagine that the Nigerian Navy could release a man whose conduct was so barbaric and inhumane when he had not served out his jail term.

"What is worse is that Mr. Joseph still retains his employment as a service man within the Nigerian Navy despite the guilty verdict handed down by the Court Martial. This action by the Nigerian Navy clearly demonstrates its disregard for human life, particularly the life of the two weeks old innocent child that was intentionally taken away by her own father.

"Access to Justice is concerned that this action by the Nigerian Navy sends negative indications to the public that naval officers responsible for any criminal act against civilians can easily escape the arm of justice under administrative guise and be fully rewarded thereafter with the retention of their stewardship.

The body called on the Lagos State Government, the Attorney General of Lagos State and stakeholders in the justice sector "to demonstrate their commitment to enhancing respect for human life by immediately taking steps to inquire into the circumstances of the naval rating's release to demonstrate that the state government would not condone or tolerate law enforcement agents' arbitrariness and abuse of civilian's rights," the statement read in part.

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