



CrimeGuard

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How my son was set ablaze by my landlady —bereaved father • says I was the target, calls on IGP to intervene

BY EVELYN USMAN

As he walked into Vanguard's Corporate headquarters, at Kirikiri canal, Apapa, Lagos, it was obvious that all was not well with Pastor Mathew Asuquo, as he later introduced himself, following his downcast facial expression.

The 62 year-old Asuquo has indeed been thrown into anguish, sorrow and pains that will obviously linger in his memory as long as he lives, following the alleged killing of his 20 years son, Emmanuel, by his landlord and members of his family.

Emmanuel, a Computer Engineer and an only son, was allegedly set ablaze by his assailants, while he had gone to ease himself, penultimate Tuesday, at 13 Alafua street, in the densely populated area of Ajegunle, Lagos.

His assailants as gathered, laid ambush by his father's balcony, waiting patiently for the best time to strike. It was gathered that their target was not Emmanuel but his father, who was to appear in court later that day with his landlord, over a matter bordering on assault and injury on his niece.

The genesis

Narrating the painful exit of his son, Pastor Asuquo who tried hard not to betray his emotion, recalled that the relationship between him and his landlord went sour after he approached him to caution his wife over taking delivery of babies in the compound.

According to him: "My landlady popularly called iron lady has been taking delivery of babies in the compound illegally. Most times, the babies would die and at other times, both mother and child would not survive, with blood would littering all over the place."

At a point, I approached my landlord to advised his wife against carrying on with such practice since she was unqualified. But I never knew I was getting myself into trouble. The next thing he did was to tell wife who started picking quarrels with my wife.

In one of the instances, she stabbed my wife on the forehead on March 20, 2015 during an argument over change of the padlock to the access door in the compound. I reported at Ajeromi division but she refused to show up. Thereafter, the case was charged to court. But till date nothing came out of it.

Build-up to latest trouble

"Then on August 8, 2015, my niece came visiting and was watching television with my children in the sitting room. When power went out, she decided to go outside. But immediately she stepped outside, my landlady burst into a rage of anger, saying 'so you these Calabar people, you don't want to pack out of this compound?'. Next thing she did was to drag my niece down from the staircase and before people could go and separate them, my landlady stabbed my niece on the forehead and on the cheeks.

I refused to report the case at



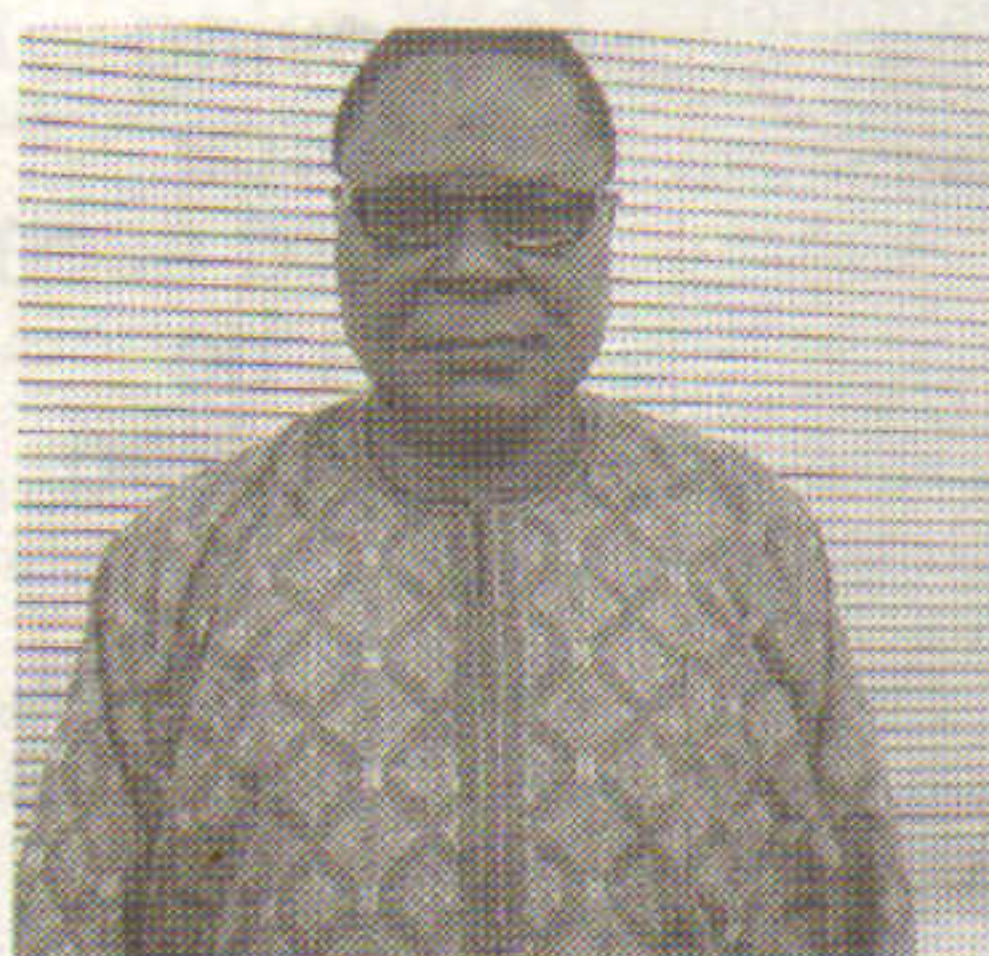
Emmanuel Asuquo...on hospital bed before he died

Ajeromi division because of the way the previous matter between my wife and the landlady was handled. Rather, I went to Area 'B' command, Apapa, where I met a senior police officer who sent two policemen to go with me and effect the arrest of the landlady. But when we got to the compound, she absconded, apparently on sighting us. I went back to Apapa, where the senior Police officer gave me a note to take to any senior policeman at Ajeromi that night. I gave the letter to an Inspector on reaching Ajeromi. He told me to put down my statement. Thereafter, he said I should go and treat my niece first in order to save her life and then come back the next day.

Alleged complacency by Police

It took the Police at Ajeromi division two days to bring my landlady to the station. (Monday). The Divisional Crime Officer asked my sister (mother of the injured lady) and her husband what they wanted the Police to do. My sister said since the landlady had disfigured her daughter's face, all she needed was for her to pay her bride price, failure of which the case should be charged to court.

The Police said they would detain the landlady till the next day, from where she would be taken to court. The DCO personally assured me that she won't be released. But moments after I reached the house



Pastor Mathew Asuquo

, the DCO sent seven people to me but I told my wife to tell them that I was not around because I did not know what their mission was.

To my shock, at about 11.30pm, my landlady was released but she did not come to the house, she went to number 10 on same street, which is her family's compound, to stay. I kept wondering why the Police should release her after assuring me that she would be taken to court the next day.

Deadly mission

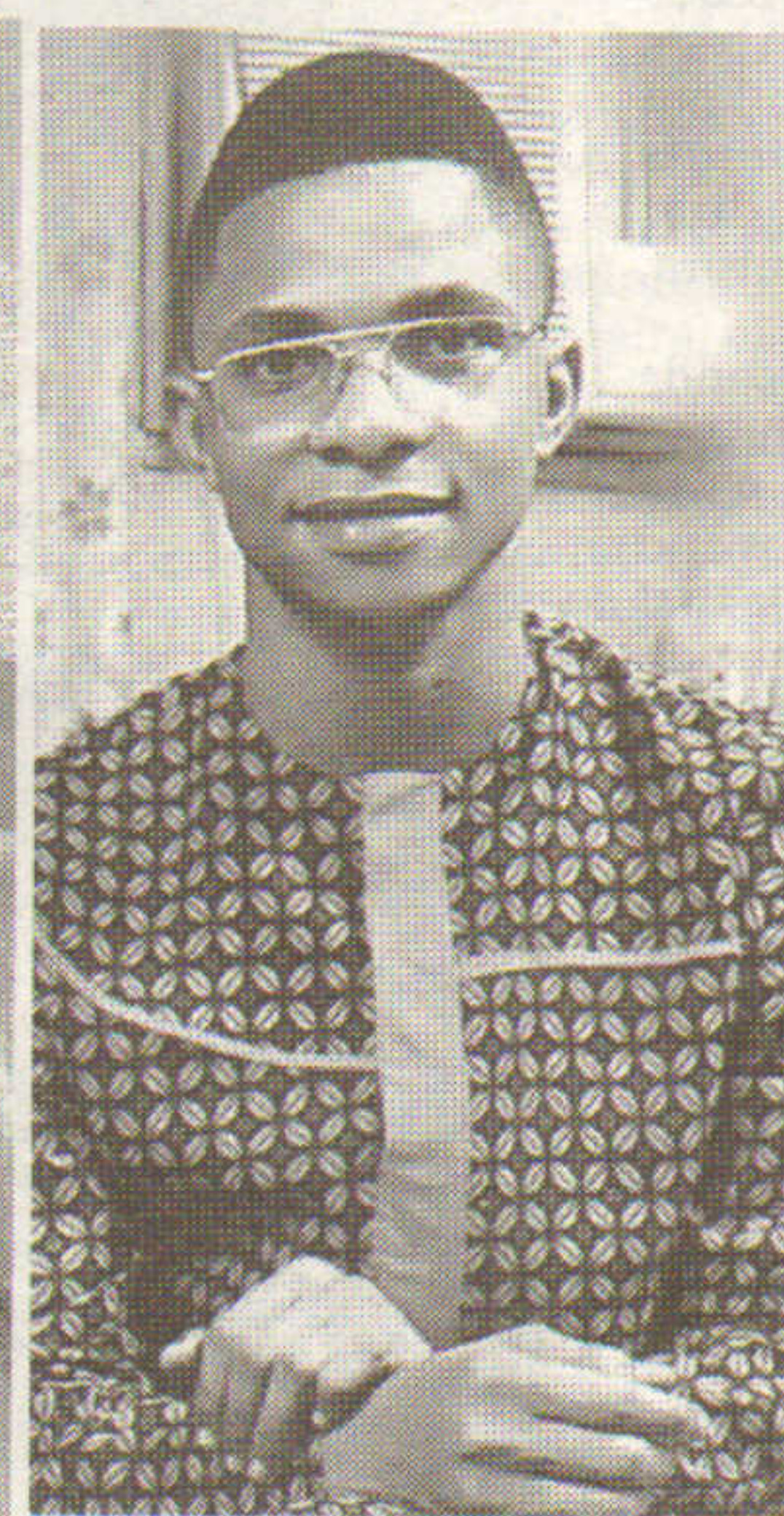
Later, I saw my landlord with two men entering into the compound at about 1.30am. His brother left the building moments later while the strangers remained. I was jolted from sleep with the shout of fire at about 2.45pm. I quickly woke my wife up, took our five-year-old daughter and ran out of the room. Thereafter, I went to the children's room where I saw my daughter Glory, standing. I asked what she was doing and she said she was waiting for her brother, Emmanuel Mathew Asuquo who was in the toilet, to come out so as to go and ease herself. I told her to go outside and wait and asked if she did not hear the shout of fire?"

False alarm

Pastor Asuquo stated emphatically that there was no fire when he came out of the room, saying it was all a plot to get him.



Asuquo's niece alleged stabbed by his landlady



Emmanuel Asuquo...before the incident

Continuing, he explained: "The two men that were earlier brought in by my landlord were stationed strategically at my balcony, awaiting when I would come out because my landlord and his wife know I am diabetic and as such, I usually go out to ease myself.

What these men did was to pour kerosene in a room that was vacated by a former tenant three years ago. The room was converted into kitchen where only the landlady and his family have access to. After cooking, the room is usually locked. Never had the room been left opened for five minutes.

Inside the room was an unused television which was placed on top of the food locker. What these strangers did was to pour kerosene on the television because they knew if they poured it, the tube will explode. Immediately they poured the kerosene, they locked the room and went back to their position, only for them to shout fire! when the tube exploded. Their intention was that I would run out because I was their target but it was my son that was outside.

Son's startling revelation

"Before he breathed his last, my son told me that when he came out of the toilet, somebody whistled to get his attention and that immediately he turned, someone sprayed kerosene into his eyes. By then, the power meter had been disconnected. He said as he bent down, with both hands on his face, someone poured petrol on him while the other struck a match and set him ablaze. He described one of the men as a tall man who worshipped in our church recently. By the time my daughter went to ease herself, she found my son on the ground, useless and raised alarm.

Rejected

We rushed Emmanuel to Prince and Princess hospital where he was rejected on ground that there was

no doctor. Thereafter we went to Zolonga, where he was rejected again and referred to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, LUTH. He was eventually taken to Tolu Medical Centre, where doctors battled to resuscitate him. They had to cut off his manhood because it was completely useless. I told them to cut it off if that would save my son. He was on oxygen support but died later."

At this point, he paused, shook his head in regret and bent it. Lamenting, he said: "My only son, my future hope was killed just like that".

Posers

"There was no fire anywhere. It was a coordinated attempt to deceive people and attract their attention to a particular place. The question is, who put the fire inside a room that only the landlady and her family members have access to? Who put off the metre? Why should such plan be hatched on a day I was supposed to appear in court with my landlady? From all indications, it was a well organised set up by my landlord and his wife. I was the target, not my son.

If they had killed me, I would have been very happy. I spent so much on him and for someone to have killed him in his prime is to render me useless. They have destroyed my family.

Right now, I don't know where members of my family are.

Appeals to IGP to intervene

"I am using this opportunity to call on the Inspector-General of Police and concerned Nigerians to come to my aid by ensuring that justice is done in this matter. This is because my son's killers are still roaming the streets of Lagos, boasting that they are untouchable. My son was my future hope. At 62, where do I begin from? How do I give birth to a child that will grow up to be Emmanuel's age? I am currently homeless because I can't sleep in my house at the moment, as I don't know what their next plan is. I am currently sleeping in the church. If I was asked to leave the house I would have gladly packed out. If I knew my only son and heir apparent was to be killed, I would have moved him out and die in his place. Where do I begin from", Pastor Asuquo lamented.

Arrest

Crime Guard however learnt that the landlady and a man alleged to have been with her the night tragedy struck have been arrested by policemen attached to Ajeromi division. A resident who spoke on strict condition of anonymity when Vanguard visited blamed policemen at Ajeromi for not nipping the situation in the bud until it led to Emmanuel's death.

According to the resident: "I blame policemen at Ajeromi for the death of this young man. Several times Emmanuel's father and the landlady have reported their misunderstandings to the police. But nothing was done to bring a lasting solution to the quarrel. Had they acted where they were supposed to, this would not have happened".