

# Harvest Of Deaths After Marriage Ceremony

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Emmanuel Kika sat on the hospital bed looking despondent; his mind, a tangle of thoughts. Tears gushed out his eyes and gradually overflowed; streaming down his cherubic face. The sad news of the death of his wife, Uzoma Veronica Okeke and five other members of his family, which included his mother, aunt, brother, sister and a house, help had just been broken to him moment after he came out of a coma.

Reality dawned. From the look in his eyes, it was apparent that the unpleasant incident would be forever implanted in his memory. Around him in the ward lay other victims of the ghastly motor accident, which claimed the lives of no fewer than nine on Saturday, August 18.

Other wards too hosted victims of the accident, while the dead were already resting in the morgue. Among the survivors, four were on danger list, their lives hanging in a balance, just as 22 sustained various degrees of injuries. They included three children of the same parents.

The victims were returning from a traditional marriage ceremony at Nsugbe in Anambra State, when they met the tragedy. Reports said their bus collided with another, which detoured from its lane as a result of a failed attempt to overtake a trailer.

Recounting his ordeal, Kika said if not for the efforts of people around him, who comforted him, he would have been mad.

"It took the help of men and women of good faith before I was consoled and regained myself. At first, they were hiding the ugly news from me, not knowing that I saw the corpse of my wife on the road before I was taken to the hospital.

"I cried. I wept, because many people lost their lives to my wedding. I shouted Lord! Why me?"

Many sympathizers have wondered why such a mishap could befall the young couple on their wedding day as both families had looked forward with anticipation to the day the two lovebirds would tie the nuptial knots. They did not have any premonition that fate would play a fast one on them. According to

Kika, he had prayed fervently concerning the union and all seemed well. But on the day of the ceremony something happened to underscore the fact that evil was lurking in the corner.

"I was told by my wife's people not to collect any gift that comes in form of money from any villager in the course of the ceremony. On Saturday, last week, August 18, around 9 o'clock the marriage train moved from Aghor, without any cause for alarm. My mother, who died in the accident, was well pleased with my wife. As a matter of fact, each time I sent money from Lagos, where I work, to her, she feels uncomfortable, because, she was anxiously waiting for the day I will bring a woman to her for marriage as the only son. So, when I was preparing for the traditional wedding at Nsugbe, she was very happy and pleased to follow me there", he said.

Kika said there was an initial threat or opposition to the marriage, although, he had dated another lady for close to seven years without settling down with her.

"I was having love affairs with a lady, Patience Osadome, who, I dated for seven years until she ended the relationship on her own accord. And each time we met, we greet well. So, it was not as if I broke her heart or jilted her. She cannot be said to have constituted any threat to my marriage because I did not do her any bad.

"No opposition; no threat to the wedding because I decided not to make it open until I print out invitation cards by December."

He said he had known his wife for two years before they decided to marry and settle down to a family life. His words: "I have known Amaka (bride) for two years before I decided to go into marriage with her. She works as sales representative in the complex where I work with Sony Land Shopping Plaza, Lagos. Though, I did not involve the pastor of my church in the marriage, I prepared for it spiritually. I was waiting to tell my pastor when I am ready for the solemnization of it".

According to him, the marriage was billed to take two forms.

"Apart from the traditional aspect, there is the 'Igbakwo' rite, which I was



•Uduaghan

planning to accomplish by December".

He lamented that the monetary gift that he initially turned down from an old woman in the wife's village was ultimately passed onto him through his younger brother, which turned out to be an albatross.

"A woman brought a N50 note to me as a gift which I did not collect, because, I had been warned earlier by the relations of my wife not to collect any money as gift from the villagers in the course of the ceremony. That I should not even show up as the husband whenever the villagers are looking for the husband to present gift to. My brother later told me in the vehicle on our way back that a woman gave him N50 to give to me. At this, I was shocked," bemoaning what could be the likely implication of it, not knowing that the entire family was marked for death.

He said: "As you can see, I sustained just little injuries in an accident that cut off the head of my wife. We sat together

in the bus. Our driver was fully in control of the vehicle until when a similar bus from another lane of the dual-carriage, Benin-Onitsha expressway headed for our own through the divert opening created for possible turnings, collided with our own and before we know it, our vehicle started somersaulting. In the process, I lost my mum, my immediate sister, my house help sister, my elder brother, Gabriel Kika and my aunty. In fact, six of my relations died on the spot, and about 10 of us are in the hospital here".

Notwithstanding his predicament, Kika was full of gratitude to God for saving him and some members of his family.

"Though, I am left with only two persons, still, I thank God that my younger brother and my elder sister were among the survivors of the accident", he said.

On hearing about the sad occurrence, Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan had to cut short his trip outside Asaba, the state capital to rush to the Federal Medical Centre, to see the victims and commiserate with them. The governor who is a medical doctor, was literally on call duty as he went round the wards examining the conditions of the victims and giving them words of hope and comfort.

As evident in their countenances, the presence of the chief executive officer of the state and some top government functionaries, who accompanied him on the unscheduled visit, did lift their spirits.

He promised that government would foot their medical bills. The gesture also rubbed off on a pastor, who was involved in a separate accident and a police constable who was attacked by hoodlums.

"I never thought His Excellency will come and see people like us. He actually came to sympathize with us and promised to off set the hospital and mortuary bills, even the burial, which I appreciate and I was so happy to hear from him. My only prayer and plead is that he fulfils his promise," Kika said.

But the governor, who spoke on the tragedy, governor described it as "touchy and very unfortunate."

He however thanked God for saving the lives of some of them, urging the victims to be courageous and not to see the calamity as the end of life.

Uduaghan also criticised drivers whom he accused of being responsible for the accident, decrying the problem of over speeding by drivers. He advised them to always drive with utmost care.

He also implored night travelers to have a rethink as most accidents occur during that period.

"What happened is the fault of the driver. The driver was not careful enough. People living around here know that we used to have high number of accidents on the road, but when it was dualized, we expected it to minimize, but the problem of over speeding still persists. I thank God that not everybody died, some people survived. It is very touchy that a young couple and people from the same family were involved. It is unfortunate. I pray that God will give them the courage to bear it. Government is taking over the medical bills", he promised.

Waxing philosophical, Uduaghan said the incident is a "lesson that we don't have control over our lives."

He advised people to always seek the face of God when embarking on a trip.

For the Federal Medical Centre, it was a crisis situation of sort as its facilities were overstretched by the high number of victims, but its Medical Director, Dr. Leo Erhunmwunsee, said he had to mobilize everybody in a bid to save as many lives as possible.

According to him, "we started this without demanding any money, with the promise that the hospital will recoup at the end of the day.

"Even before the promise by the governor, we took a decision to treat them before money is needed."

He called on both the federal and state governments to come to aid of the hospital by upgrading facilities to meet the demand of times.

"What we need is bigger structures and instruments to cater for accident victims. In such a situation you need instruments to treat at a go. We also need expansion of bed space in order to cater for victims," he said.