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Cry of 28-yr-old army officer's widow

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When a big problem brings you down, smaller ones ride roughshod on you. This age-long adage is playing out in the life of Mrs. Rebecca Jang, a young widow who has not known piece with her in-laws since her soldier husband was killed by an accidental discharge from the gun of his colleague.

Rebecca, a Jarawa woman from Jos East Local Government Area, Plateau State, had got married to young Lt. Benjamin Jang, a Calabar man from Ikom Ekpa in Cross Rivers State after the two met in Jos sometime in 2014. The young lady was at that time a student of Sociology at the University of Abuja, while Jang was serving in the Nigerian Army as a Lieutenant.

The two love birds got married at St. Micheal Catholic Church, Nasarawa Gwom, Jos on September 20, 2014, with the hope of building a matrimonial home together. Unknown to the new couple, tragedy was lurking in the corner.

As it is usual with marriages involving military men, the couple had no opportunity of a honeymoon. As soon as they completed the wedding ceremonies, Jang left Jos to resume duty at his base. Since the wife was running her undergraduate programme at the University of Abuja, the couple were not in a haste to raise children, so they both agreed to bid their time.

Barely 10 months after their wedding, however, tragedy struck and put their marriage asunder. On July 26, 2015, Jang was allegedly shot dead in error by his own colleague.

Narrating how she got the news of her late husband's death, Rebecca said: "I lost my husband on the 26th of July, 2015. Somebody just called to tell me that my husband was dead, and I told the person that was not possible. The caller then told me that my husband was mistakenly shot by his own colleague. As I was trying to find out if the story was true, I got another call from a commander who

told me in clear terms that my husband was dead.

“The next day, I gathered myself together and ran to 144 Battalion where my husband was serving to confirm the true situation of things myself only to discover my husband’s dead body at St. Anthony Hospital’s mortuary.”

The death of her husband thus marked the beginning of the agonies the young widow has had to pass through since then. It began with her immediate relocation to her husband’s home town at Ikom to mourn his death. She had thought that she would be taken as the chief mourner and be given the needed care and consolation by her in-laws, but, according to her, she got the shock of her life instead.

She said: “It was difficult to comprehend the whole thing. I got married on 20th September, 2014 and lost my husband 26th July 2015. The four months I stayed at my husband’s family home was like a journey into hell. I never invited any of my parents or relations to come with me when I was going to mourn him because I thought I was in safe hands with my in-laws considering the cordial relationship I had with them while my husband was alive. I never knew that the same people whom I considered my family members had suddenly changed.

“While investigation was going on in the hospital, the burial had to be delayed, which explained why I had to stay for four months before the burial. I went to the morgue to request for the clothes my husband wore on the day he was shot, but the morgue attendant gave me his jeans trousers and a shirt which I knew was not his, because we were of the habit of exchanging pictures on a daily basis.

“I then proceeded to my husband’s beat to collect his property, which I took to his parents. He had a car and some other items. The family told me that in their tradition, such property should not have been touched until the man had been buried. I never argued with them; I gave them the car key and other items.

“As we began to plan the burial, we discovered that it was taking a long process for the army to release money for burial, so we have to look into the personal account of my late husband. My husband and I operated a joint account. Since I was also a signatory to the account, I had the knowledge of how much we had in it, and I thought that since we were one family, I should not hide anything from them. I told them that we had N1.3 million.



“After telling them the account details, they started plotting how to exhaust the account so that I would not have anything left for my upkeep. So they told me they had given a befitting burial to their son and that they had to build a tomb which will cost them N600,000. I thought I should not oppose the plan since the money was not my target. At a point, they said they needed all the money in my husband’s account, and I gave it to them.

“My in-laws came to me again after sometime to ask for the particulars of my husband’s car. I told them that the particulars were in the barracks where we lived at Maxwell Khobe Cantonment, Rukuba Barracks, Jos. That was when it dawned on me that the people wanted to strip me of everything my husband had. But I kept quiet and just watched them.

“When they eventually announced the date for burial, I asked them to give me permission to come back to Jos and tell my parents about the burial arrangement. That was when they started saying I had a hand in the death of my husband; that I was trying to run away. I was shocked.

“The same people I thought would love me started raining abuses and placing curses on me; that I would pay for the death of their son if I had a hand in his death. I then realised that I was in a deep mess. They accused me of killing their son so that I could take over his property.

“They called my late husband’s friends and told them that I was a drug addict, saying that I killed their son and so on. They said I only got married to their son for 10 months and I wanted to inherit all his properties.

“I was preparing for my final exams in the university, so I took permission from them to go and sit for my final year exams. That too became a problem. They accused me of not settling down to mourn my husband. In short, anything I did was a problem.

“When I went back to Ikom with my parents for the burial, I did not know that they were still plotting to deal with me. In the room I stayed, my ATM card got lost. Unknown to me, they sent one of my husband’s nephews to come and take my ATM card so that they could check my personal account for money. It was the same nephew I used to send to the bank to get me money for my upkeep while I was mourning.

“I still endured the situation and prayed to God to see me through the burial. At that point, I would have found my way out of the place, because their attitude towards me was becoming unbearable. But I could not leave because I needed to pay my last respects to my late husband. So I endured and

I could not leave because I needed to pay my last respects to my late husband. So I endured and stayed.

“To make thing worse, they refused to welcome my parents who came all the way for the burial in spite of the fact that my parents had informed them on the phone that they were coming for the burial. My in-laws resolved not to have anything to do with me and my parents who came for the burial. They refused to give my parents accommodation and I had to take them to a hotel.

“They were just looking for one excuse or the other to scandalise me and cover up what they did to me. One of them would come and take my husband’s picture and start talking to it, saying: ‘You see, Ben, you went to marry a prostitute and she has killed you and withdrawn all your money and hid it.’ She was saying it to my hearing.

“I later discovered that my sin was that my late husband named me as his next of kin. That was why I was passing through all this.

“Things continued to degenerate to the level that my life and those of my parents were at stake. I had to call my husband’s commander to send his men to protect me. The whole thing was getting beyond my control. I needed to save my life from the hands of my in-laws.

“In fact, the commander who sent some soldiers to protect me advised me to leave the village immediately after the burial. That was the man who saved my life from the hands of my in-laws.

“My pain here is that if I could walk away from the money they had taken away from me without complaining, the car, and other belongings of my husband which I personally brought from his unit to them, I don’t see any reason why my in-laws should torment me, spoil my name by telling people that after masterminding the killing of my husband, I also refused to stay after his burial. It was because of the torment they plunged me into that the commander asked me to leave the village that day to avoid the unknown.

“The plot by my in-laws to strip me of everything was taken to the level that even my personal laptop, which I was using for my school project, was seized from me. They claimed it was their son that bought it for me. While I was with them, I gave out the laptop for repairs. Unknown to me, they went to the repairer and seized the laptop. They formatted the laptop and destroyed all the information in it, including my project. They now told me that my husband bought that laptop for his 75-year-old mother. The lap top contains virtually everything about my life.

“Holding the laptop means that they don’t want me to go for clearance in school. I am pleading with them to return my laptop because the harassment has gone beyond what a widow in my condition can bear.

“I am also calling on the Nigeria Army officers’ Wives Association to please step into this matter and save me from the grip of my husband’s people. It is too much for me.”

When The Nation sought the reaction of the in-laws to the widow’s allegations, they declined on the ground that they were still mourning their son.

A member of the Edim Family, Mrs. Glory Ushie, told our correspondent on phone that the family was not in the position to respond to the allegations now. She said: “The family is still mourning the mysterious death of their only bread winner; we are not in the position to talk now. At the appropriate time, we will respond accordingly.”

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