

Heartbreaking story of newlyweds burnt in Lagos tanker fire

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By Victor Ayeni

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Barely two weeks after Chiedozie and Joan Okoye tied the knot in Lagos, their love story came to a tragic, untimely end. A devastating gas tanker explosion near Otedola Bridge snatched them from their families. Now, their loved ones are left drowning in grief and grappling with the unbearable weight of a loss so profound that no amount of words could heal, writes VICTOR AYENI

It was a bright Tuesday, March 11—another typical day on the ever-busy Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. Nothing about it hinted at the tragedy that was about to unfold, a catastrophe that would claim lives and shatter families in an instant.

Among the unsuspecting motorists navigating the chaotic evening traffic were Chiedozie Okoye and his wife, Joan, newlyweds still basking in the joy of their union. Their journey home should have been just another routine drive, but fate had other plans.

A 30-tonne tanker, laden with automotive gas oil, rumbled towards a nearby gas station to offload its volatile cargo. But as it approached the uphill stretch near Magodo Phase II Estate, right by the notorious Otedola Bridge, disaster struck. The brakes failed.

What followed was the kind of nightmare only seen in horror films. The massive truck, now an unstoppable force of destruction, hurtled forward with deadly momentum.

According to an eyewitness who simply gave his name as Michael, as it careened downhill, it slammed into a mini-bus that had stopped to discharge passengers. The bus conductor, sensing impending doom, screamed for everyone to run.

But the warning came too late.

“It took about three minutes before the fire started. As soon as the gas exploded, people began to run, and there was chaos everywhere. Some managed to escape before the flames erupted.

“The tanker landed on a car, and there were people inside it. They were engulfed in the fire, their screams of ‘Help me! Help me!’ piercing the air, but no one could save them,” Michael recounted.

Although official reports put the death toll at four, other eyewitnesses at the scene claimed that more than seven people lost their lives in the explosion.

Many others were reportedly injured, and over 18 vehicles were destroyed in the inferno, which also ravaged several properties in the area.

A black Tuesday



For the Okoye family and their loved ones, March 11 will forever be a dark Tuesday, one etched in sorrow and marked by the tragic loss of a couple

whose dreams were cut short barely two weeks after their wedding.

“Dozie just resumed work that Tuesday after his wedding. His wife left her father’s house around 4 pm to meet him so he could pick her up on his way back from work. That was the last anyone heard from them,” a source close to the family revealed.

Sunday PUNCH gathered that as news of the gas explosion spread on social media, family and friends desperately tried to reach Chiedozie and Joan, but both their lines were unreachable.

At first, they feared the couple had been kidnapped. But as their silence stretched into hours, an ominous thought crept in, leading them to the one place they had dreaded—the scene of the accident.

Anxious and desperate, the family searched for the couple at the Burns Centre in Gbagada, where many of the surviving victims were receiving treatment, but they found no trace of them.

Fearing the worst, their search took them to Yaba Mortuary, where, on Wednesday evening, their worst nightmare was confirmed; the charred remains of Chiedozie and Joan were found.

“The only means of identification was their vehicle’s registration number, which was found among the burnt cars. That was how the devastated search team knew they had perished in the inferno,” a *Facebook* user, Icewater Arucha, wrote.

According to his *LinkedIn* profile, Chiedozie was an Executive Assistant at the Ladipo Oluwole branch of Zenith Bank Plc, a position he held since April 2016.

“Professional banker with over six years of experience in cash handling, funds transfer (both local and offshore), government remittances, customer service, and marketing. Highly organised and always willing to take on new tasks,” his bio read.

The weight of grief was evident in the words of Elliot Egari, a *Facebook* user who struggled to process the devastating loss.

“I just don’t know how I’m feeling right now,” he wrote. “Dozie Okoye could sacrifice anything to make you happy if it was within his reach.

“I’m greatly pained that help didn’t come your way, Doz my man, as I fondly call you. You will be sorely missed, my friend. May the good Lord grant you rest.”

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Chiedozie, a native of Uhueme Village in Agulu, Anambra State, had married his wife, Joan, a United States-based nurse, on February 22 in Lagos.

Joan (née Guisora), a native of Enugwu-Ukwu in the Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State, had been preparing to return to her duty post in the US on March 14—just three days after the tragedy struck.

In the comment section of Joan’s last public photo, posted on March 9, one of her classmates, *Mc The Young*, tagged her name and pleaded desperately.

“Please answer me. Please like my comment, I beg you. My body is weak since I heard you are no more.

“Joan, I saw you happy on your wedding day. Joan, please, your siblings and parents are waiting for you.”

Living on memories

On Saturday, February 22, love and joy filled the air at Momoh Gardens on Wole Olateju Crescent, Lekki Phase 1, where Chiedozie and Joan exchanged vows.

After the solemn exchange of rings at St Jude’s Anglican Church in Omole Phase 1, Ikeja, family, friends, and well-wishers gathered at the reception hall, celebrating their union with music, laughter, and cheer.

But exactly four weeks later, on Saturday, March 22, a different kind of music played—a dirge of sorrow, underscored by the wails of a grieving family in Agulu.

A *Facebook* Live video posted by Ivenkilli in a public group, viewed by *Sunday PUNCH*, captured the heart-wrenching sight: a convoy of cars trailing the hearse that carried the coffins of the young couple.

Tears flowed freely as mourners watched each coffin lowered into the earth, the finality of their fate sinking in with every shovelful of dirt.

For those who knew and loved Chiedozie and Joan, all that remains are fragments of beautiful yet painful memories.

“I am trying so hard to move on,” an *Instagram* user, Mrs Cindy, wrote. “But each time I see videos of Dozie and his wife, I break down and start crying again. It’s so painful.

“Please, can blogs stop carrying these stories? It’s heartbreaking to see your loved ones trend in death. Dozie, you will never be forgotten. Forever in our hearts. Rest in peace, Dodo and Joan.”

Funke Sobowale, another *Instagram* user, while expressing her thoughts, also struggled to process the loss.

“I can’t believe you are gone,” she wrote. “You still called me that same morning to say you had resumed work.”

Describing the love between the couple as fresh with “a future so bright,” an *Instagram* user, *William Perry9410*, also lamented the tragedy which cut the marriage short.

“What should have been years of memories, laughter, and family has ended in heartbreak. Not because of fate, but because Nigeria failed you, like it has failed so many others.

“Whether it was a fuel tanker on a poorly maintained road or vehicles that should have never been on the road in the first place, the reality is painful – this loss was preventable.

“It’s devastating to think of the dreams you held, the hopes your family had, all gone because of a system that continues to place little value on human lives. To those in power: if only you could pause and imagine your own children lying in the wreckage. But your children live abroad, shielded from the rot you’ve allowed, while millions suffer and grieve daily,” he wrote.

Commenting on the spate of accidents around Otedola Bridge, a safety officer, Emmanuel Bernard, described the latest tragedy that claimed the lives of the couple, among others, as one that required practical solutions.

“There should be proper regulation of gas transportation, periodic checks on gas and fuel tankers, and the introduction of remote sensors that can detect leakages in real-time.

“We also need a well-trained police force and strict enforcement of traffic regulations, especially regarding routes for vehicles carrying hazardous materials. Unfortunately, we live in a society where many would rather blame spiritual forces for problems that human ingenuity could solve.

“The frequent loss of lives on Otedola Bridge must stop,” he stated.