

Death in hotel room

30th March 2022

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SHARES

From **Rose Ejembi**, Makurdi

The family of 26-year-old Veronica Takor, whose body was found in a hotel room in Makurdi, the Benue State capital, are trying hard to unravel the cause of her death.

The remains of Veronica, a 200 level Microbiology student of Benue State University (BSU), was found in Room 406 of Madonna Guest House, located in Nyiman Layout, Makurdi, penultimate Sunday morning.

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While controversies about the cause of her death have continued to rage, some believe that she may have been used for ritual purposes, even as others insisted she must have been drugged to death.

But her family, who insisted that, as a confirmed Catholic, she was a very good and principled lady, adding that the fact that she died in a hotel room does not change that fact.

Narrating to our correspondent all that transpired that day, the immediate younger sister of the deceased, Sarah Takor, said they had all woken up to a new day on Saturday March 19, 2022: “My late sister, Veronica, usually fixed nails and sold okrika at a small shop she operated at the entrance of our street on George Akume Way, Makurdi.

“We all woke up on that fateful Saturday and my sister went to the market while I, our mum and the other siblings were producing palm oil at home.

“She returned at about 10am and came to the house to take her bath and, when we asked her what she brought from the market, she said she had dropped them at the roadside, where she used to fix nails for people. After her bath, she left for her shop. So, when we finished making the oil, we dressed up and attended a wedding.”

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Sarah said, on their way back from the wedding around 2pm, the family stopped by Veronica’s shop but did not meet her there, and when they inquired about her whereabouts from her neighbours, they were told that she just stepped out and said she would soon be back.

“We saw all the things she had earlier bought from the market where she kept them. But since we couldn’t wait for her because we were exhausted from the wedding, we came back home. While we were coming home, I tried to reach her but her phone was switched off. Also, when I got home, I tried her number again and it was still switched off.

“After we got home, my mum went to visit one of her friends, who was on admission at a hospital close to our house. When she came back around 6pm, she asked me if my sister was back, because she was supposed to be back by then, and I said she wasn’t back. We called her number but it was switched off,” she said

Sarah said she and their widowed mother, Mrs. Philomena Takor, continued to try Veronica’s phone number throughout that night till 5am the next day, which was Sunday, and it never went through.

“My younger sister, who usually sleeps with my mother in her room, came to me and told me that my mum couldn’t sleep but cried throughout the night. So, I went into my mum’s room and comforted her and then brought out a mat. My mum sat on a bench outside because there was no light and the room was very hot,” she added.

She said it was while they were outside that they noticed a young man pacing about around their compound and they became suspicious.

Sarah further said: “We could see well because our house is not fenced. The guy kept going up and down trying to get the attention of somebody in the house but, incidentally, whenever he tried to do that his eyes would lock with my mum’s, so he was scared.

“After sometime, he saw a girl coming out from my stepmother’s house to go and fetch water and he stopped her and asked her if she could call somebody from our house for him but the girl refused and left him. When he was about to leave, my mother said I should go and meet him and ask what he was saying to the girl.

“Immediately the guy saw me coming, he started beckoning on me to come closer. I told him that where I was was okay but he assured me that there was no problem. So, I went back to the house and wore my slippers and then went to meet him. When I got to him, he asked me if my sister didn’t sleep at home. And I said yes. Then he handed my sister’s phone to me. I asked why he was with my sister’s phone and he said my sister went out and had too much to drink and that she hadn’t woken up but was still sleeping at the hotel.”

Sarah said the young man whom she was later told lived in their neighbourhood, then handed Veronica’s phone and a key to her. She asked him what the key was for, and he said it was the key to the hotel room where her sister was.

“He then said I should take the keys and go there and stay with her till she’s up. Then I asked him who took my sister out because it’s so unusual for my sister to ever consume alcohol not to talk of spirits. He even mentioned that my sister vomited and pooped on his body and so he needed to go and change, that’s why he came to inform me.

“At that point, I sensed something very fishy about the whole thing. I later discovered that the guy was our neighbour but I never knew him until that day. I asked him who took my sister out and he mentioned one nickname. By that time, I had already unlocked my sister’s phone. When he mentioned the nickname, I now told him to mention the person’s real name and he said it was Sunday and I checked and it was Sunday who called her last.

“He demanded for the phone but I didn’t give him. I asked him a few more questions and then I opted to go with him to where he said my sister was, instead of him going home to bathe. I told him to stop a motorcycle, while I went in to dress up to follow him. At that point, I began to be scared, so I rushed in to dress up.”

Sarah said on getting back inside their house, she was rushing to prepare and follow the young man when their mother, who was waiting to hear from her came and asked what was the issue and she told her not to worry at all and that all was well.

“Before I left with the guy, my mum said I would not go out if I didn’t tell her where I was going. Then I placed my hands on her shoulders and assured her that everything was under control and that the guy just brought my sister’s phone to me and told me my sister was at Madonna Guest House. So, my mum opted to drive her car and follow us,” she said.

Sarah said when they arrived at the hotel, the young man, identified as Kator Kobo, took her upstairs to the room where her sister was, opened the door and asked her to come in but she refused.

“He then banged on my sister and said Vera, your sister is here. The sound that came out when he banged on her was as if there was a vacuum inside of her as if the body was swollen or something. I then shifted back in shock and then grabbed the handle of the door very well and held my sister’s hand and discovered that the body was very cold and stiff.

“So, at that point, I shouted and started calling for help. My mother who was downstairs was also climbing the staircase and calling on me to know what was wrong because she thought I was in danger. I was still at the door and I told my mother to come. I didn’t go into the room because I had my sister’s phone, which was evidence with me and the guy was also in the room.

“When my mum came, I stood by the door and allowed her to go into the room and she started calling the name of my sister and crying. At that point, my mum and I started shouting and calling for help. Then the manager of the guest house approached me. I kept calling for help and many people who were around there all came. That was around 6am on Sunday,” she said.

She added that when she and her mother continued shouting and crying, the manager again approached them and asked them to stop shouting and not disturb others who were lodged in the guest house.

“That was his concern. So, I told him that my sister was lying still there and I wanted someone to attend to her for me, and he asked me to keep quiet? I told him to go in and attend to her or call police but he did not do anything about that. Rather, he went downstairs and gathered his staff and was talking to them.

“So, while I was crying and shouting, a guy from the crowd that had already gathered said he told the guys to carry the girl to hospital so that they could give her drip but they didn’t answer him.

“Then, I asked him, if she was his sister, would he just stand there and watch them do whatever they liked with her? He then told me that he tried his best and they beat him and broke his phone. He even showed me his phone. At that point, I kept quiet because at least he tried to intervene but he couldn’t help my sister.

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“A guy also asked from the crowd who the guy was, and the manager now called the same nickname that the first guy initially mentioned to me at home. Then somebody said, ‘These guys are regulars here. You no sabi them?’”

She said unknown to them, the hotel management had called the police and, about an hour later, a police van entered the hotel and the policemen went upstairs to the room where the remains of her sister were.

“But before the police arrived, someone who suspected it must have been a ritual killing or something told me to go upstairs and check on my sister’s panties and find out if they had taken it away or something. My mum also said I should take pictures too. I went upstairs to take pictures but the manager asked me not to do so that police would come and snap by themselves that I should go.

“I went inside the room and could only see her clothes scattered on the floor, then they put her pants in her bag, they folded the bedsheet and put it in one corner of the room. Her trousers and shirt were on the floor, her bra and wristwatch were dropped in another corner. A lot of cigarette butts were on the floor and then she was naked and only covered with a curtain that was removed from one of the windows in the room.”

Narrating further, Sarah said, shortly after the police arrived, two other suspects as well as the young man who brought Veronica’s phone to the family were arrested at the hotel, while the remains of her sister were removed and taken into the vehicle.

She said, as the police were driving away from the hotel, she and her mother drove behind them to the Police B Division, where the suspects were detained and then the body of her sister was taken to the Bishop Murray Hospital’s mortuary.

“When we got to the hospital, the doctors did not confirm it. So, I flipped open the curtain that was used to cover my sister so that I could see her face. Her lips were black and her nails were dark already. Her skin was already very strong and swollen.

“Then a police officer asked me not to touch the body again. So, I shifted back and continued crying. They rolled the body inside; we registered the body and then went to the police, where they took my statement and then we came back home,” she said.

Sarah, who has remained inconsolable since the death of her sister, told our correspondent that now that the case has been transferred to the state police command, all the family wants is justice for her late sister.

"I suspect that something must have been wrong. The guy told me that my sister took too much whisky but I doubt him because my sister does not consume alcohol, not to talk of taking whisky. Also, when I saw my sister naked, I suspected that they may have made their way through her. At that point, I wasn't in my normal state of mind because I couldn't imagine my sister in such a state.

"I came back and these were the things that were running through my mind. Could it be that these guys made away with my sister or what did they actually do to her? Because my sister that I know can't consume alcohol to the extent of dying. She doesn't.

"I suspect that they may have drugged her and did whatever they wanted to do with her. I feel that what they gave her was different from the alcohol that they claimed that she took. She must have also gone through pressure for her to excrete on the bedsheet. I also imagined a lot of possible things that they may have inflicted on my sister afterwards," she said and broke down in tears.

Siblings

"We are four children in our family. The first is a boy, the deceased is the second. I am the third and then we have a last girl. My sister was 26 years old. She finished from College of Education, Katsina-Ala, but she was at BSU, 200 level, studying Microbiology. All of us are students of Benue State University. Our father is late. He died 14 years ago."

Asked what kind of a person Veronica was, Sarah said: "My sister was the shy type; she was peaceful. She was caring, loving and she didn't look for trouble. In fact, she didn't interact much. She loved her space. She loved being alone and all that. She was a psalmist who loved to sing a lot. Before her death, she was the choir mistress in our church."

On how their mother was taking the news, Sarah said: "She's not taking the news easy at all. That's why we have not allowed her to follow us on all the police issues at all because she can't imagine her daughter dead. Of us all, she was different. We suspect she must have been lured into that hotel. She didn't tell us she was going anywhere other than her small shop. I'm sure the person who lured her called her after we left the house.

"We seek justice for my sister. We want to clear our sister's name and have closure in this matter. That she died in a hotel does not define her in any way. So, I want justice for my sister."

But the manager of Madonna Guest House, Mr. Armstrong Iloakahia, said that the hotel knew nothing about Veronica's death even as he dispelled rumours that some parts of her body were missing.

Iloakahia told newsmen one of the hotel guests checked in on Saturday and he came back on Sunday morning to check on his female guest only to discover that the girl had died in the room.

He said: "I closed to go home on Saturday, but from what I saw, the girl was doing drinking competition outside the hotel.

"The drinking competition was such that anyone who could consume a certain amount of spirits was given N1,500. From what I was told, the guest brought her inside the hotel room to sleep when she became unconscious.

The manager disclosed further that when the guest who brought late Veronica into the hotel later appeared on Sunday morning to check on her, he was immediately arrested by the police.

While noting that it was the first time such incident would happen in the hotel since the 10 years of its operation, the manager dismissed as claims that the hotel is a den of ritual activities.

Iloakahia, however, sympathized with the family of the deceased and prayed God to grant her soul eternal rest.

Meanwhile, the Benue State Police Command, in a statement, confirmed Veronica's death at the hotel, adding that three people had been arrested in connection with her death.

Police public relations officer, Catherine Anene, debunked claims that some parts of the deceased were removed by her alleged killers.

"There is a death report of a lady in a hotel but details will come from the doctors. Though we didn't see marks of violence on the body. The autopsy will reveal the cause of the death.

“The person that died was dressed but we didn’t see marks on her body meaning there are no injuries. Three suspects were arrested in connection with this case so they will give us details. We can’t say it is a case of murder because we didn’t see marks of violence.”

When our correspondent sought to know if there was any new developments about the case, Anene in her reply through a WhatsApp message, said there was no new development yet.

It was learnt, however, that the prime suspect, who allegedly invited Veronica to the hotel, is still at large at the time of this report.