

LIFE GOES ON...

The Victim's report

Life is like a vapor you know, and like a vapor, one minute you're here, and in another you're gone, and forgotten just like that, as if you were never here to start with. If anyone had told me that the events of 2nd July 2018 would ever happen to me or even someone I know, I would have hushed and rebuked them for talking nonsense - I mean, who wishes evil on themselves or worse still expects it, talk less of accepting the probability of it, but it didn't just happen to me, it has literally altered the course of my life.

I was so excited to be back to work after the weekend break. I woke up before the first lights of dawn broke the sky and got ready after saying a prayer of thanksgiving. I was hopeful that it was going to be a great week. I left early enough to beat the crazy Monday morning rush and Lagos traffic, and boy was I glad I did. I worked as an office assistant in a Logistics and supply chain management startup firm – my job wasn't all that fancy, but I was grateful for it as I had good cause to leave my house every day and it managed to pay my bills so that I didn't have to be at the mercy of anyone for my daily sustenance and upkeep.

When I got to work that morning, I quickly tidied up my boss' desk, checked inventory, replenished exhausted stationary and supplies. I concluded my morning routine quickly enough to use the office Wi-Fi to catch up on what I might have missed on social media before the day's work began. As my colleagues trickled in, the quiet office gave way to a boisterous atmosphere as people were busy exchanging pleasantries or catching up on their activities over the weekend.

It was around 9am and now time to do the breakfast rounds. I'd usually in the company of one of the office cleaners go to buy breakfast for everyone interested in having some. So with a list of their preferences and money in hand, we dashed out of the office and crossed to the other side of the road to the woman that sells food. A crowd of customers was just building up at her stand when we got there, we joined the queue and in a few minutes it got to our turn so we made our purchase and soon were on our way.

I paused briefly for my colleague to collect her balance from the food vendor as she was also buying some for herself, when she was finally catching up with me; I proceeded to cross the road because I thought it was free. I looked to my left to see if there was an oncoming vehicle; the nearest vehicle to me seemed to be quite far away, enough for me to think that it was safe to cross. As I stepped onto the road, the vehicle I thought a moment ago was far away was already in front of me and suddenly, everything went blank...

The Driver's report

As I left for the meeting that Monday morning, I didn't have the faintest inkling that something so terrible was about to happen to me. It was the second day of the new week and being the first working day of the month, I was particularly excited as I set out with much hope that the new month will bring more fortune than its precursor.

I got into the car and turned on the ignition, the only stop I made was at the Mobil filling station at Maryland to top up my fuel and grab something for breakfast from the Mr. Biggs eatery there. I continued my journey as I gnawed into my fish pie while nodding to the melody of Tu Baba's newest joint playing on the mid-morning drive show transmitting from the decks of my car's stereo.

In order to avoid the almost predictable traffic building up at Ikeja, I decided to take the turn by Sheraton Hotels and link up to the Opebi-Allen road; I was heading to the Murtala Muhammed International Airport for a business meeting. A lot depended on the success of this meeting as I'd been chasing this appointment for four months now. I was driving at mid-speed say between 25-30 km/hr as I approached the Opebi roundabout and it was about quarter past 9am by the time. I swear it happened all too fast, I mean, she made an attempt to cross, and run into me. I saw her early enough and held the brakes momentarily, then I thought I saw her retreat in shock, I shook my head in pity and resumed driving. Two seconds later I am forced to stop again as I hear the horrified scream of a young man standing by and pointing at me.

I look through my rearview mirror to see the contents of the nylon she was holding splattered on the ground, I run out of the car in shock thinking I'd hit her, I run to where I thought she may lay but she wasn't there, I look back at the young

man still shouting, and he's pointing under my car, I try to look under, oh no – I'm stupefied by the sight...

The Eye witness' report

First I saw only one leg quivering as I screamed "Oh no...!" I thought the car had cut the leg and quite frankly I was too scared to think it was hers, then I peeped under the vehicle and that was when I saw her mangled body jerking, fighting for survival as life ebbed out of her. My body jerked in response as adrenaline rushed from my head to the rest of my transfixed frame as I kept shouting. I suddenly started sweating like I was burning with a fever.

I was having one of those phases again, I woke up that day not knowing what to feel, a year ago this day was really special to me. It was supposed to be my girlfriend's birthday but she had broken up with me. She claimed I lacked focus and didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. A lot had happened in the last couple of months to make me question the very essence of my existence. To make matters worse, my phone packed up for the umpteenth time the night before while I was in the middle of sealing a deal that could put some cash in my pocket for an extra couple of days. I was definitely unsatisfied with a lot of things in my life needless to say, and I didn't even know if I was even happy or grateful to be alive.

I had to run an errand for my brother that morning and he had asked me to leave early. My smartphone suddenly stopped working the night before so I had to resort to using a phone with a keypad. My brother gave me his ATM card to withdraw some cash for logistics but he had mistakenly given me the wrong passcode to perform the transaction. After three unsuccessful attempts, his card was temporarily barred, so I tried to call to inform him of the latest development but he wouldn't take my calls. He sent me a message reminding me that he had warned me severally that they weren't allowed to receive non-work related calls during office hours.

I knew this already but I felt my annoyance could not be sufficiently expressed in a text message, especially not when I had to punch in the texts from a keypad phone, I needed him to hear my voice to know how displeased I was at the stress he was putting me through. Sigh, just when I thought I would have some respite. I

eventually had to type the message and to do this I had to stop walking to avoid bumping into a fellow pedestrian or walking onto the road, so I stood to type and that was when I saw her.

She was a fair skinned, slim girl standing at a height of about 5 feet 7 inches, she looked smart in her cream coloured chiffon blouse well tucked into her straight cut navy blue skirt with transparent frames which didn't look medicated. She was holding a nylon - the contents of which I suspected was food. I was looking at her and thinking, *"Who is this fine one again, all these girls will not just let somebody's son stay focused."* Then I noticed she was looking at me, but in a rather shy way, *"wait oo... She you never see fine boy before ni? Abi which kind look be dis one again na?"* As if she could read my thoughts, she smiled as she walked past me.

As she walked past me, she almost brushed me with her shoulder, I just had to turn to take another look at her. She walked for a bit and stopped as if waiting for someone. I looked away to mind my business when I saw another lady whom I suspected she was waiting for walking towards her. *"They must be colleagues."* I thought as I watched both of them watch the road to cross over to the other side.

I really cannot describe what happened next, all I saw was that she tried to cross ahead of her colleague, then I saw a car stop abruptly in front of her as she panicked, As the car resumed motion, her colleague let out a screeching cry while flinging the nylon she was holding, I watched on as the car made to drive past me, I was horrified by the sight before me, so I let out a thundering shout that made the driver anxiously hold the brakes.

The Epilogue

Some wise man may say, life is a meatball of bitter-sweet experiences, but these experiences are a product of having to do, over and over again, a summation of what has been heard, seen, and done in the process of time. Every day, we go through life-defining moments. Life is teaching us lessons daily by the experiences it takes us through, but are we learning? These lessons come through challenges and opportunities, sometimes, opportunities disguised as challenges, some of them personal, and some we have to learn from the experiences of others, but are we learning? When we live to learn, we learn to live.

We can get a myriad of life lessons from this tale, but for me, it is the value of life itself. I often say, life is the real gift, everything else is a plus. It doesn't matter what your lot in life is, what counts is that you're still alive - for there is much more hope for a living dog than a dead lion. Only the living can dream, hope, plan, try, succeed, fail, learn and try again. So be grateful for every chance you get to enjoy this life gift and don't just go through life, let life go through you and you'll continue to live long after you are gone. I will now go on and try to conclude this tale.

As the driver of the car that had just run the girl over paced frantically with fear, confusion, and pain written all over his face, a crowd of witnesses started building up as all vehicular movements on both lanes stopped because of the accident. As the people gathered, some crying, others cursing, some trying to make a movie of the whole scenario with their camera phones, I thought of how we could help the driver rescue the remains of the girl or perhaps save her life.

Just then, one of the *'Keke'* drivers from the crowd thought he had heard a sound. It was a squeak first, then a grunt from underneath the car. That was all the motivation we needed as we gathered around the car, and like our lives depended on it, with the unity of our strengths we generated a force capable of raising the car like it was a piece of carton, while some others brought her mangled seemingly lifeless body out from underneath the car. As they held up her lacerated frame, she gasped for air and opened her eyes to the awe and cheer of everyone around, and almost immediately she was rushed into the car that hit her and rushed to the nearest hospital for proper medical attention. All these happened within fifteen minutes even though it felt like more.

As if on cue, almost immediately, everything went back to normal. I watched as men and women got into their vehicles and drove off, market women and school children wiped their teary faces and continued to their destinations, sales girls and security guards went back to their stations, and other vehicles drove on the very grounds where a girl almost got killed as those left at the scene shared their various versions of what just transpired.

As I carried on with my errand I thought about what if it was me, I said a prayer for her and her family and asked God to forgive me for being ungrateful for His gift of life. I thought about how I went from, "Oh No" to "Oh God" in what seemed to be

a split second, and I thought about how life just goes on even when life stops. Isn't life just a basket of purple bananas?

THE END