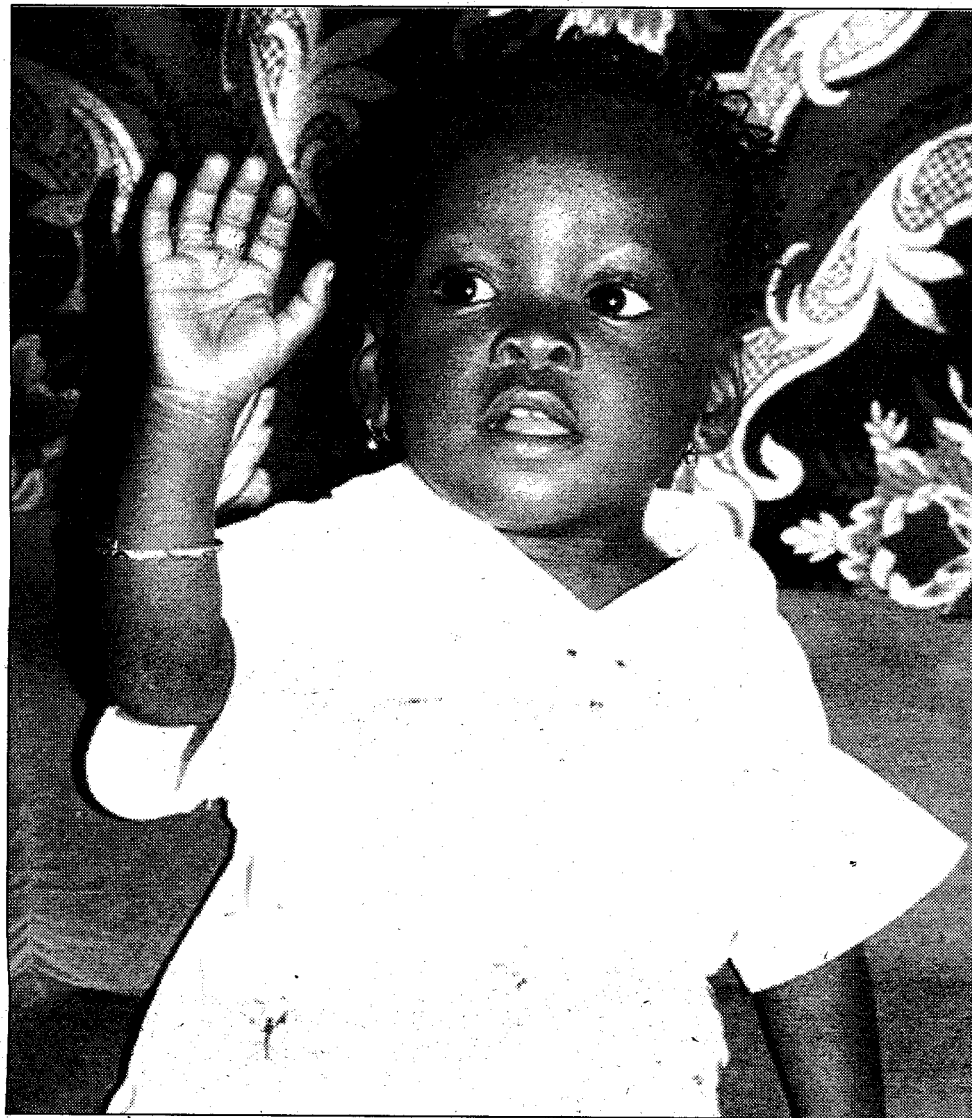


Mystery over the death of a little angel

• Neighbours flee as two-year old girl dies in their compound



• Tanwa

By Seye Olumide and Isaac Taiwo

"The building in question is not more than 20 metres from my shop. My expectation was even to find her outside or very close by.

"But when I got there, I met some women outside and two men. I exchanged greetings with them and went straight into Mama Bukky's room, hoping to find her there.

"To my surprise, my daughter was not in the room. "Then, I rushed out and raised an alarm that I could not find my daughter who strolled into the house not more than five minutes earlier.

"While I was searching everywhere, looking desperately inside the rooms in the building, going to the backyard and coming out, none of the residents around said anything. They all sat looking pitifully at me.

"There is a woman who sells soft drinks in front of the house. I inquired from her about Tanwa but she feigned not to know her.

"I also met Bukky and Sunday, her brother, both told me they did not see my daughter.

"After about two hours of fruitless search, myself, Mama Bukky with one other woman in the compound decided to go to the *Baale* (the traditional ruler) of Orile-Agege to lodge the complaint.

"On getting there, we were told that no missing child that fitted Tanwa's description had been found. We were advised to go to the Police to report.

"But surprisingly, before we got to Elere Police Station to lodge a report, some residents of the house where we had searched for the girl several times earlier, had gone ahead to the Police to report that they found the body of a little girl lying naked beside their pit toilet.

"When we got to Elere Police Station, the policemen on duty asked what the matter was, which I explained to them.

"They also asked me whether Tanwa had been sick. I told them that she was hale and hearty.

The Chairman, old Oko-Oba Residents' Association,

Mr. J. O. Oladehinde, who is also the owner of the house in which Abosede and her family live, told *The Guardian* that residents of the house where the body of Tanwa was discovered may have questions to answer.

According to him: "After several hours of search for Tanwa, the mother was advised to go to the Police Station to lodge a complaint. No sooner had she left than one of the residents named Mama Titi came to me as the Landlords' Association chairman to inform me that the body of Tanwa was found lifeless beside their toilet and that they had gone to report the matter at the Police Station.

"I was furious with her and immediately let her realise that there must have been something fishy.

"I asked her: 'Why did she not allow others in the vicinity know before going to report at the Police Station?'

"Where was the body of the child for over three hours when the mother and neighbours were searching for her?'

"I, with some other people in the area, went to inspect the child where she lay and I discovered one strange thing when I got to the scene.

"There are two pit toilets and there is a metal wire-mesh over the hole.

"One of the wires had been cut in what could have been an attempt to force the body of the girl into the toilet but the body was too big.

"I suspect that was why they abandoned the body beside the toilet.

"Another thing that baffled us was that there was not a single mark on little Tanwa's body.

"These evidences aroused our curiosity. We suspect that those who perpetrated the act must have done it deliberately and then gone ahead to report in order to cover up their misdeed."

The body of Tanwa has since been deposited in the mortuary at Channel House Limited along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway while the result of the post-mortem is being awaited.

However, residents of the building sensing danger or perhaps, realising the gravity of the matter, have since relocated out one after the other.

The empty building has since remained locked.

As at the time *The Guardian* visited the house on Thursday and Friday, none of the occupants was available to talk to.

Hakeem Oyebola also confirmed that about 10 occupants of the house, mostly women were arrested and taken to State Criminal Investigation Department at Panti, Yaba.

But he expressed reservation that as at Saturday, some of those who were arrested had been released.

People in the neighbourhood have decried the attitude of officers at Elere Police Station over the issue, saying that instead of them to carry out proper investigation and conduct thorough search of the building, they rather came out to accuse them of attempting to set the building on fire.

A police officer at the station confirmed the incident to *The Guardian*, saying the case had been transferred to Panti.

Officers at Panti also confirmed that some arrests were made and that investigations were ongoing.

But Oyebola lamented that he was not impressed by the way the matter was being handled.

"Even at present (Friday), what is delaying the post-mortem is money.

"I do not have money to pay for the post-mortem.

"It was the Landlords' Association that gave me N10,000 to pay the mortuary deposit for my little girl," he said.

Meanwhile, the puzzle remains over who, or what killed Tanwa.

LITTLE Tanwa Oyebola would have been two years old in June this year if calamity had not struck.

Beautiful and smart, she endeared herself to many people within her vicinity due to her playful disposition.

Tanwa's popularity was acclaimed because her mother is a petty food-seller at a strategic junction between Sanyaolu and Oladehinde Street, old Oko Oba Road, Agege, Lagos.

She was the fifth and last child to Hakeem Oyebola and his wife, Abosede whose 15 years of marriage has produced five kids, viz: Ramoni, Abudulahi, Sherif, Jubril and Tanwa.

She was also said to have struck a close friendship with another young girl named Bukky, who lived with her own parents at No. 20, Sanyaolu Street, two buildings away from her mother's shop.

However, the 10 years of peaceful co-existence of the Oyebolas and their neighbours on Oladehinde and Sanyaolu Streets turned sour on Tuesday, March 6, when Tanwa's body was found lying lifeless at No. 20, Sanyaolu Street beside a pit toilet.

She was said to have left her mother's shop not more than five minutes earlier.

The petty food vendor, Mrs. Oyebola, was still in a confused and sorrowful mood as she reconstructed the sequence of the tragic events at the weekend.

She said it was not quite five minutes after Tanwa walked into No. 20, Sanyaolu Street, when she was found dead. Abosede just could not believe that it was that quick for even a child, to die.

Several residents and sympathisers who learnt of what happened have also expressed concern over the sudden manner of the death of the girl. They are also unhappy with the manner the Elere Police Station, Lagos, were handling the matter.

According to Abosede: "I am a petty food seller and I live with my husband, Hakeem at No. 20, Oladehinde Street old Oko-Oba, Agege.

"My shop is at a junction between Oladeinde and Sanyaolu Streets.

"People who patronise me know Tanwa because she was always with me in the shop after his brothers have gone to school.

"She used to be very playful with people and regularly went to No. 20, Sanyaolu to play with some children, especially Bukky.

"But last Tuesday, her father did not leave for office early, so I did not wake her up early to follow me to shop.

"At about 10.00 a.m. when her father was leaving home, he told me that Tanwa was still sleeping. I then prepared her breakfast before she woke up.

"I was busy picking beans when I saw her coming towards the shop from the house and she had already soiled her body with faeces.

"I rushed to carry her, cleaned her up and feed her.

"After a while, she told me that she wanted sweets which I bought for her.

"At about 1.00 p.m., she soiled her body again and I removed her clothes and gave her a bath in front of my shop.

"Before I went into the shop to bring her underwear, Tanwa had already walked away towards No. 20, Sanyaolu where she was later found dead.

"Immediately I came out, she was no longer where I left her. The house directly beside my shop is a flat and the gate is always locked.

"Moreover, she used to go to No. 20, Sanyaolu to play with Bukky. So, when I came out of the shop with the underwear in my hand, I headed straight to the house where I felt she must have gone to play.