

KEMI Sokenu, a hairdresser, does not toy with her dreams. She believes her ability to dream while sleeping is a divine gift, which has, on many occasions, guarded her against misfortune. It is against this backdrop that she hurriedly called her elder sister, Funmilayo John, on Monday June 16, 2008 to join her in a special prayer against tragedy in their family.

"I told her that I saw groups of people rushing in and out of our house. I said I saw blood spilling on the floor. It frightened me and disturbed my sleep that morning. So, I said she should let us pray," Sokenu told *SUNDAY PUNCH* in their family compound at Temidire Ona Oko (Ago egun) area of Idi-Iroko in the Ipokia Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The 32-year-old gave all her attention to her sister's apprehension. But when it came to prayer time, Funmilayo suddenly walked away. She instead reached for her three-year-old son, Benjamin John, and prepared him for school, while tying James John to her back.

After she was through with the boy and ascertained that nobody was watching, Funmilayo quietly went to the base of the well in the compound. She looked in all directions, removed the little boy from her back and threw him into the well. The boy had hardly landed in the water when Funmilayo also jumped into the well.

This somehow attracted the attention of a female member of the household. The confused woman quickly rushed to the scene and raised the alarm, shouting repeatedly at the top of her voice. By this time, Funmilayo's mother, Mrs. Matta Sokenu, who had just returned from the Catholic Church she attends, was having a nap in her room.

The unusual noise terminated her sleep and she joined other Good Samaritans in the attempt to rescue her daughter, who was hanging midway in the well. Funmilayo's father, Chief Michael Sokenu, ran to the Divisional Police Headquarters, Idi-Iroko, where three policemen followed him to his compound to remove the blood-soaked body of Funmilayo.

"She was not dead when we removed her. She was only unconscious. So we took her to one private hospital. But they asked us to take her to the General Hospital, where she later died. It is not an experience one should talk about. It is like fire in my skin," the bereaved father said in the midst of his children and other sympathisers.

While all attention was being given to the revival of Funmilayo, no one thought of the little boy she first threw into the well.

The father said, "Everybody was just confused. We did not know how to go about it. You know in such a situation one could hardly hold oneself.

"It was one of her sisters who said, 'Where did she put James?' That was when we started searching for him too, until we thought of the well where we removed him. He was dead."

The news of the incident spread rapidly like harmattan fire to all parts of the border town, from the popular Iyana-Ago to Babaloke, to the area called Festac quarters. A first time visitor will not have problem locating the compound of the Sokenus, which was hitherto anonymous in the town.

As the people of the town discuss the incident on a daily basis at market places, relaxation joints and *okada* parks, the common question, which is yet to be answered, is why a mother would kill her baby and herself in that manner.

It was gathered that Funmilayo had not enjoyed good health since last year when she was delivered of the same boy she threw into the well. Her failing health took her out of her matrimonial home for treatment.

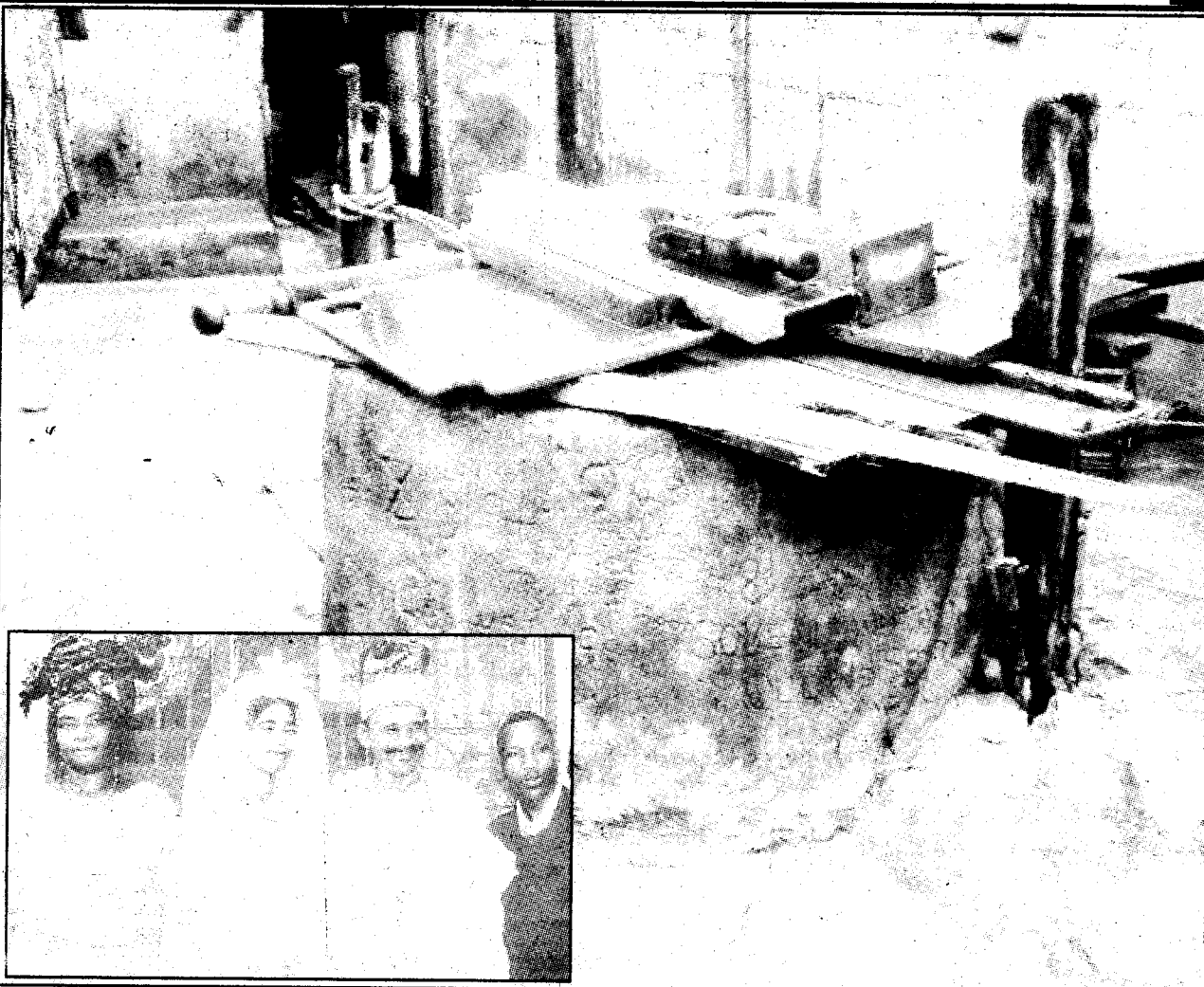
"When we realised that she was not getting proper treatment, I had to first take her to Lagos. But when the condition was not improving, I later took her to Ajase (Benin Republic)," Sokenu said.

"She is my eldest child, very intelligent and reliable. Apart from this, whenever we called her husband to ask of her state of health, he would say nothing was wrong with her."

Funmilayo was said to have lost much blood and weight during the sickness until a few weeks ago when she started showing signs of a physical improvement. Unlike before, she was relating well with other members of the household, giving hope of her anticipated recovery.

However, the grief of the family was compounded by the attitude of Funmilayo's husband, Olakitan John, during the period his wife was bedridden. In Funmilayo family's reckoning, John placed no value on the life of the woman he vowed to identify with in all situations during their marriage ceremony held on November 13, 2004.

Sokenu said, "He (John) never came here to ask about Funmilayo's condition. And people used to see him in town. As a husband, who married his wife in a proper way, her wife's condition should be his responsibility. But he just



• The well in which Funmilayo and her son died. Inset: Funmilayo and John with her parents on their wedding day

How woman threw her son into well and jumped after him

The tragic case of a 32-year-old woman, who threw her son into a well and then followed suit, is still generating ripples in Idi-Iroko, two weeks after the incident, writes TUNDE BUSARI

behaved as if he was not concerned. No in-law would like this, and I think it is a lesson to others."

It was learnt that John's indifference to the ordeal of Funmilayo first reared its ugly head at the eighth-day naming of James. He was said to have travelled to Cotonou, leaving the ailing Funmilayo with her family. "That was how he did the naming ceremony of his second born," Sokenu said.

But after the incident and the tragic news got to John, he was said to have braced the odds and visited the Sokenus. The visit caught the family unawares.

They could not do anything but assent to his request to take the corpse of his son for burial. "We gave it to him and he left immediately," Sokenu said.

John, a tyre merchant and native of Saketa in Benin Republic, was said to have not hidden his growing discomfort in his partnership with Funmilayo, especially some months before they had their last born.

This development gave credence to the reservation, which Funmilayo's father had expressed when John informed him of his intention to have Funmilayo's hand in marriage.

Sokenu said, "I only agreed to the plan because of pressure, and to give peace a chance. It was not that I had anything against the boy, but how he hastily packaged the marriage gave me a concern as a father."

The father's worry can be understood given the fact that Funmilayo was still a student at the Teachers Training College, Ipokia.

Besides, she was also neck deep in a relationship, which was enjoying the support of her sisters and friends at school. However, the family could only offer a little resistance as respect for her age and status in the family.

"Their courtship was not up to four months. Everybody

was just wondering what was happening. But when she insisted that that was what she wanted, we said she should go ahead and we supported her. It was not a big ceremony that drew many people," another member of the family said.

Curiously, however, John's parents were not part of the people who witnessed the ceremony. "As I am talking to you now, I have never seen any of his parents. Even on the day of the marriage when we had expected to meet them, they never came. And he said it was because they were too old," Sokenu said.

When correspondent's visited his residence, which he allegedly recently inaugurated at the popular Shalom Hotel area, it was deserted.

Also, his shop, located at the border road, beside Prestige Joint, was under lock and key. When he was reached on his Celtel number volunteered by someone who claimed to be his brother, he said he was not in town. "It is true my wife died, but please I will call you in the evening time," John said. But John never did.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Command, Femi Awoyale, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, also confirmed the incident. He, however, ruled out any foul play. "The father came here around 10 in the morning on that day to report the matter. Our men followed him to the scene up to the hospital for autopsy," Awoyale told our correspondent in a telephone interview.

The remains of Funmilayo were buried the same day. Funmilayo's mother, who struggled to speak, said, "I have left everything into the hands of God. I pray to God to spare the life of the only boy she left behind and her other sisters and brothers."