

By HENRY OKONKWO

SIX months after his death, the body of 37-year-old trader, Mr. Chukwuebuka Umeobiari, is yet to rest in peace.

Reason: Circumstances surrounding his sudden death have raised lot of dust that is yet to settle. Now, his family members are at loggerheads with his widow, Rose, who, they accused of being responsible for the death of her husband. The in-laws have also taken custody of the widow's six-year-old daughter, Amarachi. Miracle, an act that has left Mrs. Umeobiari devastated and broken-hearted. "My in-laws have taken my daughter away from me for months, I don't know where or the condition they have kept my daughter. For months they don't allow me access to see or even talk to her. They don't pick my calls anytime I call them. All I'm begging them is to allow me see and hold my child. I am innocent and I'm ready to prove my innocence, but they have vowed that they would ensure that I either die or rot in jail", she cried.

Chukwuebuka, an indigene of Aguata, Anambra State, was said to have committed suicide on July 1, 2016. According to Rose, who had been married to the late Chukwuebuka for six years, she came back from the market that fateful Friday afternoon to see her husband hanging from the ceiling fan hook inside their apartment at Lasisi Ajibade Street in Ikeja. She said her husband was gasping for breath, intermittently kicking his arms and legs in the air when she saw him dangling in the air.

But the in-laws have refused to believe the story and have called for her arrest, insisting that she is being economical

Suicide mess

Family accuses wife of killing hubby
My hands are clean, she says



State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) Awka for three days. The case was later transferred to Pantiti in Lagos. There again, I was held for one month and 17 days. They told the police to torture me while keeping me in custody till I confess. And for six months they have kept my daughter away from me. They said I have no right to be with my daughter. Till now, I don't know anything about her whereabouts."

Stating their own side of the story, one of the in-laws and an elder brother of the deceased, Ichie Umeobiari, in a photo chat with *Saturday Sun*, said that all Rose said were all lies. "The truth is that she is the prime suspect for the murder of my brother. She is still being investigated by the SCID Pantiti and there is no way she would be seeing her daughter always when she is in police custody. Her daughter is safe with us, and we won't chase her away if she comes to see her little child. She was released, because they are awaiting the result of the autopsy. The first one was done in Awka, but the police wanted to do a second one to confirm.

"She claimed that my brother hanged himself, but the first autopsy disproved that. Rather that he died of internal injuries. We learnt she was dating their neighbour, and that any time my brother leaves the house for the shop, both of them would be

when she saw him dangling in the air.

But the in-laws have refused to believe the story and have called for her arrest, insisting that she is being economical with the truth.

They accuse Mrs. Umeobiaeri of infidelity and then murdering their brother, an allegation she vehemently denies.

Narrating the incident, Mrs. Umeobiaeri, a 33-year-old indigene of Orlu, Imo State, told *Saturday Sun* that few days before her husband committed suicide, she noticed that he was very restless and acting strangely.

According to her it all started on June 28, 2016 when her husband called her aside and told her that he was involved in some kind of shady business that would soon land him in big trouble. "We run a shop where we sell industrial scraps and tools at Aswani market. On that Tuesday, he said he was into buying stolen goods from one 13-year-old boy called Chimaobi. He said that Chimaobi had suddenly disappeared. And he feared that Chimaobi might have been arrested and that his name would be mentioned when police commenced investigations.

"He was sleepless at night saying that the police and OPC would come any time to him, and that he would be jailed, so I should take care of our daughter, because soon we won't see him again. I was confused because I strongly suspected he wasn't telling me the whole truth.

Again, I was seriously ill and felt he didn't tell me because of



The late Chukwuebuka with Rose and their daughter, Amarachi

my health. On Wednesday I went to church and they urged me to invite him for our Friday prayer session. He agreed to come with me.

On that day we all prayed together in the church, but he hurriedly left immediately, without waiting to consult the church leader for counselling. I ran after him with my daughter.

"When we got home, he said I should prepare beans for him to eat. He gave me N1,000 and said I should go along with my daughter. I didn't understand why he wanted me to leave with our daughter because the weather was hot, but he insisted that I should go. So I left for the market. On coming back, I went straight to the kitchen, while my daughter went to see her father

in the room. But the next thing I heard was my daughter screaming after seeing her father hanging from the ceiling. When I rushed into the room and saw my husband still struggling. I

was confused and wanted to go mad. I screamed and called on our neighbour to help me bring him down. We brought him down and rushed him to the hospital. I then rushed to call my church leader. Later that evening I was told my husband had died; the doctor said my husband died on arrival at the hospital."

In Igbo culture, suicide especially by hanging is a taboo, and Mrs. Umeobiaeri fully understood this. Accordingly, shock and trauma overwhelmed her and she just did not know how to relay the dastardly act to her

in-laws. "I didn't tell my in-laws that my husband himself because it is an abomination and I don't know how to give such information over the phone. I wanted to tell the circumstance surrounding my husband's death face to face when I got to the village.

So, I only told them that Chukwuebuka slumped and died."

This move could have been a costly mistake because when she met her husband's family and told them another story that their brother hanged himself. Nobody believed her. Rather "they started levelling different allegations against me. They accused me of murdering my husband and seized my daughter from me. I was locked up at the

disproved that. Rather that he died of internal injuries. We learnt she was dating their neighbour, and that any time my brother leaves the house for the shop, both of them would be having sex. One year ago, my late brother came to the village and told our mother that he wanted to divorce Rose because she is sleeping with their co-tenant. But my mother told him to be more careful and sure of his allegation. He might have caught her red-handed and she now decided to conspire and kill him. From the autopsy report, my brother was hit on the chest with a heavy object, and even there were no marks around his neck to show and prove that he actually hanged himself. The brother's corpse doesn't look like he committed suicide by hanging himself.

"It was all these things that made us suspect foul play, and I had to petition the police. That was why they detained her in Awka and Lagos.

I strongly suspect that my late brother was killed because he found out his wife's infidelity. Why was it just her and the neighbour that saw him dead? Why didn't they raise alarm to attract other neighbours? Why didn't they call the police? Why did she start with telling us lies that our late brother slumped? They told us he was found hanging and then they took him to the hospital, but the story is very suspicious. If she is not the one who killed him, she should at least tell us the truth about what actually happened so that we can go bury our brother, because as it is now we cannot bury him, since we don't know exactly what happened. If it is true that he committed suicide, we won't bury him, rather we would throw his body away. So we want to know the true position of things before we know how to bury him. That is our only concern."