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3 Young Daughters Killed, Woman Injured in Md. Blaze

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A charred baby bottle sanitizer and other items in Elsie Nuka's [Burtonsville](#) apartment tell part of the story about the hours leading up to a fire that killed her three young daughters yesterday morning.

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The 30-year-old Cameroonian immigrant rose early, probably about 3:30 a.m., to prepare baby formula. Chanelle, 4, Megan, 2, and MaKenzie, 4 months old, were asleep in their mother's room. Their father, Ignatius Foncham, was away, as he has been for almost a month. He is in detention on the Eastern Shore as he awaits deportation to [Cameroon](#).

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Friends gather at the Windsor Court Apartments in Burtonsville, home of Cameroonian immigrant Elsie Nuka. The fire started in the kitchen. (By Pouya Dianat -- The Washington Post)

Nuka had been feeling ill Wednesday and had told a neighbor that she probably should go to a hospital. But she was, for all practical purposes, a single parent and the family's sole breadwinner. Time was scarce, so she didn't go.

From the Extras

As the baby formula heated on the stove, she apparently crept back into bed, firefighters said. The stove's

flames appear to have reached a plastic bottle sanitizer plugged in the wall near the stove. Smoke seeped through the ground-level, two-bedroom apartment.

At some point, firefighters said, Nuka apparently dashed out of bed and ran to the kitchen, yanked the wire from



the socket and ran to the bathroom to dump it.

Then she entered the bedroom and tried to grab two of the girls before passing out on the floor, firefighters said.

The smoke awoke a man in the unit above. He ran down and banged on the door. There was no answer. When firefighters arrived minutes later, he thought he had good news for them.

"No one was home," the man said, according to Montgomery Fire and Rescue Service spokesman [Pete Piringer](#).

Firefighters burst into the apartment, then doused the flames as they searched for victims. The girls had not been burned but had inhaled a lethal amount of smoke. They were taken to three hospitals, where all were pronounced dead. Nuka, who was suffering from smoke inhalation, was taken to the Maryland Shock Trauma Center in [Baltimore](#), where Piringer said she was "clinging on to life."

Friends and relatives stood outside the apartment yesterday morning. Some wailed, some wept.

"She was going through depression and shock," Constance Bih, Foncham's cousin, said, referring to Nuka's reaction to her husband's fate. "I just tried to encourage her."

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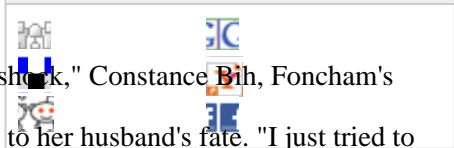
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