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TRAGIC CON ED TWIST FOR HARLEM CANDLE GIRL

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A Harlem dad whose family's electricity had been cut off because of outstanding bills finally paid half the money Monday afternoon — but it wasn't quick enough to save his 7-year-old daughter.

Tragic first-grader Massira Diarrasuba died at the family's apartment on St. Nicholas Avenue near 124th Street later that night in a blaze caused by a candle that had been lit in her dark bedroom.

"There was a candle in the room because there was no electricity," said grieving cousin Cisse Djakaria.

Massira's dad, Salim, a restaurant worker, had recently confided that he owed Con Edison \$1,500, said building superintendent John Aguirre.

Con Ed spokesman Mike Clendenin confirmed electricity to the apartment had been cut off at 1:45 p.m. Monday.

Two hours later, Salim Diarrasuba appeared at a local Con Ed branch to pay \$700 — almost half the outstanding bill.

Clendenin said an order to restore electricity within 24 hours was issued two hours later.

Tragically, it was not in time — firefighters responded to the scene of the fatal fire at 10:45 p.m.

The blaze was so fast and furious that little Massira never had a chance to escape, relatives said.

FDNY sources confirmed the candle probably caused the blaze in the second-floor apartment, but that it was under investigation.

"The family is very nice people. They are very hardworking," said Aguirre, who added the dad was at work when the fire broke out.

At a friend's house, Salim Diarrasuba was barely able to talk.

"She was very curious. She had a lot of questions and she went to the mosque a lot," the dazed dad said of his tragic daughter.

Relatives said Massira's mom, Mariam, was in the living room when the fire broke out. She tried to save her daughter, but billows of black smoke overcame her.

The fire gutted the apartment that the Diarrasuba family said they shared with relatives from the Ivory Coast.

"The father is down, the mother was crying all night. Everything was burned in the apartment," said Djakaria, the cousin. Funeral arrangements at the West 116th Street Al-Aqsah mosque were still being made.