

PASTOR'S DAUGHTER

By

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1.

The Pastor

PASTOR IKECHUKWU WAS the leading preacher of his day. His name, Ikechukwu, meaning: God's power, couldn't have been accidental. Many believed it was prophetic.

His ministry of more than four decades had drawn millions of followers globally. Every other preacher in the country was somehow connected to him as a spiritual son. None of them towered above him.

In fact, his intertribal marriage to Yemi, a converted beauty queen, cemented his position as a national bridge builder.

Yemi's calm and very accommodating disposition, since her conversion, was attributed to Pastor Ikechukwu's tireless prayers and discipleship effort to make her a model Christian. The female members of the church emulated her much, inspired by her modest appearance and her graceful carriage.

There was hardly any family in the country that didn't have a member in his church. Pastor Ike, as those of his generation loved to shorten his name, was tall, dark and finely built.

Those who wouldn't listen to him as a faith leader, couldn't resist being drawn for his looks.

His books were bestsellers. They contained teachings he said he received from God through frequent visions. His TV and radio shows had the highest viewership.

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When he spoke, even the president listened. Several world leaders travelled far and near to consult him quietly; they wanted to hear the voice of God and sometimes seek divine intervention in consolidating their hold on political power. Only recently, a new president in Southern Africa publicly acknowledged Pastor Ikechukwu in his inaugural speech, declaring that his party, The People's Power Party, had won the general election, not so much at the ballot, as it had been by the prayers of Pastor Ikechukwu, whom he said prophesied to him that the presidency would fall to him without struggle. It came to pass.

A prominent journalist, who profiled him, two years ago, likened Pastor Ikechukwu to Elijah of old, and declared him to be the prophet of his time. Although he was not ostentatious, Pastor Ikechukwu had a private jet which he used to travel around the world for his ministerial assignments. He had a trademark smile in all his pictures

on memorabilia: car stickers, billboards, shopfronts, wristbands, t-shirts, teacups, etc. Many took these around because they believed it was a way for them to “tap” some of his powers – the anointing, they called it. Some even put them on their bed frames to ward off bad dreams and nightmares and to attract favour from God. In short, during the church’s monthly thanksgiving service on the first Sunday of every month, members regularly testified to how they received miracles by merely gazing at Pastor Ikechukwu, while he preached!

Pastor Ikechukwu grew up in extreme poverty, but his life circumstances had changed remarkably. His daughter, Amaka, knew nothing of the hardship he experienced as a child. She also didn’t know why he was such a man who fasted more than he ate. Unlike him, Amaka was born in an environment where her needs were met before she could even ask. Unlike him, who became a preacher after years of personal

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struggling with the purpose and meaning of his life, Amaka grew up in a home where the answers to all such questions were already established. Prayer and fasting were routine. People regularly spoke in tongues – at will. Food and all manner of provisions flowed in continuously. They hardly ever shopped.

2.

Amaka

BEING THE DAUGHTER of such a great preacher, so much was expected of Amaka. In church, as in homes, parents told their children to emulate Amaka's good behaviour. What no one had noticed was that Amaka was not specifically accountable to anyone. She mostly had her way; whatever she wanted stood. She was a girl for whom freedom became an undoing.

While Amaka did her best, personally, to be her parent's daughter in church and on social media, she desired for a day she would have things her way. On her Instagram handle, she posted a daily scripture verse which usually had hundreds of thousands of likes. Every youth in the church somehow had something he or she had to learn from Amaka's public life. Amaka thought this life kept her bound.

In private, she desired freedom and wanted to be someone else. Quietly, she developed tendencies that were unaligned with the life befitting the home in which she was raised. All through her childhood, Amaka grew up accustomed to her parents frequently attending seminars and suchlike programmes, within and outside the country. Her mother, especially, was always at one women's meeting or the other, in different parts of the world. Her father's speaking engagement was even fuller and church attendance kept multiplying, with

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new branches opening up in many parts of the world, remote and urban.

That meant Amaka's care was transferred to the domestic assistants and older sisters from the church who were part of the household. But none of them was bold enough to discipline Amaka firmly. She got away with a lot of things. At a point, wrong became norm. They made sure to please Amaka so she could say good things about them to her parents. They even laughed at her jokes when they were not funny.

Overtime, Amaka's conflict with herself worsened, and, deep down, she came to dislike the church itself, believing it took her parents away from her. She felt deprived of quality family life. One of her mother's assistants represented her parents at the PTA meetings and other school activities requiring parental presence. Amaka wondered how her parents could be this far from her.

She felt enslaved to the expectation of behaving in specific ways, because she was a preacher's daughter. But in doing this, the accolades came in. She felt contradicted. She couldn't be whom she wanted to be. She became really bored and lonely. Sometimes depressed. At the teenagers' church, she had a special seat and couldn't mingle with everyone else. When she did anything, it was to either preach or lead prayers. Pastor Sarah, a youth pastor, was responsible for helping her spiritual growth. But even that didn't change anything. Pastor Sarah was rather interested in subtly probing Amaka for information about her parents' activities and whereabouts.

3.

The Youth Camp

ONE SUMMER HOLIDAY, the church hosted a camp for teens and young adults. It was one meeting that offered Amaka, her first chance of freedom. For the first time, she would leave home, mix up with other children and sleep out. Nothing else could matter as Amaka looked forward to this paradise. She wanted to make friends with persons her age and actually do interesting

things she could only think about while she was locked up at home.

Amaka arrived, chauffeured by a driver assigned to take her there. She began to scan the environment as soon as she alighted from the vehicle. She couldn't wait for the events to get started. During the breakout sessions, she found what she had been yearning for. She got the moderator to assign the people she had handpicked - friends from her school - to form her assignment group. Amaka knew that she couldn't achieve the naughty things she had in mind with actual church members. Even if there were, she hadn't met them to form a bond with them.

The games and other group assignments that required intensive interactions soon started. They were activities that gave her space to unleash. The camp was her only chance. She knew that after it, the opportunity could be lost permanently or for a very long time. Like a

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bird once caged, but now free to flutter and fly, Amaka planned a trip to the horizon.

When night came, she and her friends sneaked out of the camp hostel to the back of the building where one of them brought out alcohol he had smuggled in as table water. He passed it to Amaka. She took it, uncovered the bottle and perceived it but quickly shut it back. She was shaking. She knew she always wanted this but coming face to face with it, fear came over her.

"Amaka, you wanted this now." Joseph's voice was firm, his face nearly shaping into a frown as he made to pull out a cigarette from his breast pocket. "See me see big girl o. So, you see now that you've only been boasting. Now what? Fear? I guess so. You are nowhere close to maturity then." Joyce's laughter was a jab of sarcasm she hurled at Amaka while clapping her hands at bely-level, as if in resignation. Amaka wouldn't let her self be turned into a laughing stock in such a humiliating way. She was going

to prove that she had it. Sneering at them, she uncovered the bottle, and took the first sip. She felt like a fire was spreading in her heart already. She managed to suppress her reaction - "Arghhhh," which came out of her mouth uncontrollably.

"What's that called." She coughed, her mouth and nose racing into a contortion. "What do you call that? What's its name?"

Her friends heard but merely exchanged knowing glances. Moments later, Amaka realised something had happened to her. She felt a boldness that made her think she had become unbeatable.

She added two more sips, having mastered the impact. Her words were no longer as clear as they were at the beginning. But she didn't mind, going on to empty the whole bottle into her stomach. She raised her right hand and gave everyone a high five. They looked at each other, knowing that Amaka had become visibly woozy. As they helped her into a chair, she pleaded

in barely audible words, "Can we do this more often?"

That night Amaka was drunk, unaware that addiction could not be overcome overnight. Her father often preached that it was better for an individual to never taste alcohol than to fight to stop it.

But this was not a road Amaka had taken before. In life, what some count as liberty may be enslavement in disguise. Amaka didn't know this. All that mattered, as far as she was concerned, was that she was finally getting herself loosed from the meaningless strictures her parents put on her.

That night, her friends put her back in the hostel without anyone detecting anything.

Amaka woke up the next morning with a staggering ache in the head. She felt sick and kept vomiting. She was rushed to the hospital. The doctor detected alcohol in her system. She denied it. Her guardian,

fearing that she could be reprimanded and replaced with someone else, also covered it up, not telling Amaka's parents.

Tolu, Jennifer and Femi - Amaka's camp friends, became her new world. Joining them afterwards were Josephine and Florence, who were children of other high-ranking ministers in the church. They too, like Amaka, were tired of rules. They wanted to explore life in ways their parents would rather not approve.

4.

The Free Bird

AMAKA HAD FLUTTERED her wings during the camp meeting; now she was ready to fly. Her relationship with these new friends was to continue – at whatever cost. Her parents didn't mind, anyway. They heard of names that were familiar. In the emerging culture, they were called pastors' kids or PK. That was entirely acceptable. Their parents were fellow pastors in the senior cadre

of leadership. Amaka was always looking forward to their gangouts which made them come over during the weekends. Her parents were really pleased with this arrangement. In fact, it relieved them and gave them joy since she was not allowed to make friends at school. Those at school would lead her to be unequally yoked, or so they thought. The ones who came to the house should be better. The right kind of children, yes?

But the gangouts were not a good thing, certainly. Tolu and Femi always smuggled in the spirits, conveyed as homemade fruit juice, while Josephine had the vape in good supply. No one searched them. Who dared question the children of the leading names in the biggest church in Africa? In fact, they were ushered in specially, accorded absolute veneration. In the section of the house where they had their thing, everyone drank, smoked and danced freely to American rap music and hardcore Afrobeats, with the loudspeaker on low volume.

5.

A New House

THE MINISTRY RESPONSIBILITIES grew bigger and more persons sowed into her father's life. They moved to a bigger, more expansive house. This only played into Amaka's fantasies of rebellion. She could now sneak out with the help of one of the domestic helps without her parents knowing. They were hardly home anyway.

Amaka partied very hard. She did so

because it gave her happiness that filled the vacuum she felt within. But the happiness was always gone too often so she needed to party much more. It was the burden of an only child without parents who were looking out for her. She was alone and lonely. Her parents had chosen missionary work over her, she thought. She cherished her new family even though all they did was smoke, party and get drunk. Amaka was only 17 but had become addicted to spirits.

Soon, it began to show. Her academics suffered a setback because she wasn't concentrating any more. Somehow, Pastor Sarah who started to take notice, became worried. She decided to observe Amaka closely, and, one morning, caught her sneaking back to the house, partly intoxicated. She was shocked to find out the practice had been going on for long. When she confronted the head of security who also investigated the matter, they found out that the camera facing the direction

where Amaka's peeps usually parked their car when they came, had been switched off by Amaka herself.

They found out also that Amaka usually entered the back of Tolu's tainted Prado whenever he came in with Jennifer and the rest. No one ever noticed. She bribed one of the security personnel to always open the back door for her, upon her return in the early hours of the morning since any vehicle, coming in at that time, would definitely raise suspicion.

Her a'level exams were fast approaching. But Amaka didn't really care. She was not bothered because she was going to hire an impersonator or just altogether join her friends in doing what they'd always done: sit together and exchange answers.

6.

Save Me, Lord

A MONTH BEFORE the exams, Amaka and her friends were invited to a bash on the outskirts of Lagos. Of course, she snuck out as usual and entered Tolu's car. Pastor Sarah's investigation hadn't resulted in any consequences. His brother drove.

They arrived at the party and realised it wasn't a place for them. They were minors compared to the other people there.

The laser beams were blinding. They saw middle-aged men, mostly dead drunk. A few staggered as they tried to be on their feet and dance to music that was AS LOUD AS LOUD COULD GET. It was a mad house, a theatre of disorder. In some dim corner, a man stood boasting how he could drink two cartons of beer and still be in his right mind. Before he could finish what he was saying, he began throwing up.

The air was literally dark. Giant billows of smoke floated in waves. It was suffocating. Only very few were in their right minds. It was unlike the other parties the group had been to attending.

Florence, who linked them up with the invitation, stepped out of the group, hoping she could spot the host. There was no trace. She tried making a call but the network seemed jammed or was in a glitch.

Amaka and her friends looked increasingly confused and could tell they had to leave that place before something

untoward happened. As they made to leave, an old memory verse from one of her father's sermons came to her mind:

Exodus 23:2

“You shall not follow the crowd in wrongdoing”

It was at once soberising. She felt she was wrong; had been wrong, with everything she had sought to do against the high expectations placed on her. But Amaka was now very certain something the magnitude of an earthquake could break under their feet. She felt a head-pad settle upon her head even though she couldn't feel it when she put her hand on her head. It gave her chills. The last time she felt this was when her dad still had time for family devotions. But it was usually a sign something was about to happen. She turned to her friends to say they needed to leave.

“Let's go... Sorry I meant to say I want

to use the rest room." She picked her pace and walked as briskly as she could. The change in what she said from what she wanted to say was fear. One of the bouncers had walked up in front of them to offer them the "welcome package." It was not something they'd seen before. Florence and Femi quickly took two cups and drank.

By the time Amaka came back, Femi could barely stand and Florence leaned on Tolu for support. The bouncer had left, placing the tray on a nearby table so everyone could drink before he'd take it back.

Amaka saw his back as he strode into the room where he had brought the drink. There, voices seemed to be rising, as in a disagreement.

But Amaka was now firm.

"Let's go."

They followed her. Perhaps they felt what she felt. But who'd stay back anyway, when Amaka was on the move? In the right

and wrong places, Amaka was their leader.

She could still feel the cold head-pad on her head, only now it felt like a man's hand. She looked up and couldn't see it physically but she knew it had been there from the time the bible verse from Exodus came to her mind. It was even stronger now with all five fingers fully, stretched out like an octopus over her head.

In the frenzy of escape, she remembered her father, mother and the church - and prayed that God will deliver her from the distress unscathed. She vowed to do right, once she was out. They were about to enter their vehicle when they heard a rain of gunshots at close range. They hurried even more and entered their car, making to quickly exit the premises. They could hear those who'd been hit by the bullets, crying, "h-e-l-p, h-e-l-p."

Amaka's heart beat faster and harder than ever before in her life. She and her friends, Femi, Tolu, Florence, all of them

were agitated. Luckily, Tolu's driver came with them and stayed back in the car. He wasted no time putting the vehicle in reverse, immediately, swerving as he made to exit the car park. Somehow the gunshots sounded even closer. Amaka's worst fear happened. A bullet, piercing through the rear windshield, went straight to hit Joseph where he sat in the front seat. It was a headshot.

The driver, fearing that he too could be hit, dived, depressing the brake pedal. The vehicle careened forcefully, screeching as it went until it collided with a tree.

The airbag ballooned out and exploded. The vehicle was partly mangled. The last thing Amaka remembered was that she screamed, "the blood of Je..."

Amaka and her friends could have died in that accident. They were unconscious with the entire car shut. Eyewitnesses gathered around the scene and evacuated them to a hospital. Once they were admitted, the

doctor on duty notified the police because of the headshot.

"A bullet wound is a serious matter," he told his nurses, "a failure to notify the police could leave this hospital facing criminal charges."

The accident scene was cordoned off. But before the police could conclude their investigation, the vehicle burst into flames.

Amaka was in coma for a week. She woke up praying, "Dear Lord, have mercy on me, and deliver me from this situation. Forever, I promise that I'll serve you. Lord, if you save me, I'll never come this path again. Not with my mind. Please Lord..."

She went on praying out loud and found her lips moving when she came to full consciousness.

She was in wrist and leg braces, though the doctors were hopeful she would walk again and soon enough. She was the luckiest of the lot. Femi was in a wheelchair. Tolu needed crutches. Everybody had a

sorry story.

Amaka wished she could turn back the hands of time. She wished she could go back to the time before the youth camp, and no longer pretend to be a Christian girl but be a true Christian girl who would live by the truth her father proclaimed to the world. She regretted the shame she had brought her family and the damage she had done the reputation her parents had worked so hard to build through the decades. Her mind was full and tears rolled down her face. Amaka now hated her own hypocrisy.

The severity of their injuries was alarming. The police knew they needed to act sooner than later. An officer, a sergeant, was sent to the hospital to take Amaka's statement and those of her friends. The nurse casually announced that the police were on their way and told Amaka to get properly dressed. Within minutes, a tall, grim-faced officer walked into the room,

accompanied by the nurse. He had a recorder and writing material. He started by stating his name and explaining his mission. He asked Amaka to narrate the incident and begin by stating her name.

"My name is... erm... I'm Amaka..."

The sergeant looked up completely shocked and interrupted her unconsciously.

"Are you the daughter of Daddy Ikechukwu?" Tears filled her eyes again.

"Yes, I am."

The officer was confused but saw the semblance upon looking closely. He was a member of the church and looked up to Pastor Ikechukwu as a role model. He too had an only daughter whom he always told to emulate Amaka. He cried; his voice became raspy.

"Go on, Amaka. What happened?" Amaka stated her full name again and spoke for about 30 minutes. She was occasionally absent-minded. She knew she would eventually face her parents. It was

the one moment she dreaded. She was not the only one who was worried. Everyone else around her was.

Both her parents were still in China. The police officer told her that the case was still being processed and declared that he'll reach out to her again if he needed to. Her mind had been off him long. She merely waved at him as he and the nurse walked out.

A week later, the hospital discharged Amaka. Pastor Sarah drove her home. It was the longest 30 minutes they'd ever shared together. There was dead silence.

In the evening, after helping Amaka settle back in her room, Pastor Sarah alerted the church's public relations unit to be on the lookout and initiate damage control where necessary.

Pastor Ikechukwu couldn't wait till they came back. He called the house to speak with Amaka. He was thoroughly disappointed. He said he had wanted for Amaka to be

like Sarah Jakes Roberts, the daughter of Bishop T.D. Jakes. Amaka's mum was more struck. She cried uncontrollably, saying her enemies had succeeded.

Whether it was the nurse or the Sergeant, no one could say. But word began to spread in the church that Amaka was involved in an accident on her way back from a club, high on drugs, skimpily dressed, permanently crippled, etc.

After another week passed, the PR Team sent Pastor Sarah a link to an Instagram post, asking what they should do. Amaka's face was the thumbnail of the video. The caption read: "Pastor Ikechukwu's daughter in hospital after nightclub shooting incident."

Amaka's photo was used as the thumbnail, even when the story had little mention of whatever she did that was criminal.

Amaka's mother who had had to return home ahead her father, read the story and

thought her world was coming to an end. She immediately called her father to see the 'shame our daughter has brought upon us.'

"Amaka!" he yelled via a video call to register his rage. His voice was firm with its trademark baritone, "How did you get into all this?" Her mum cut in, "What were you thinking, sneaking out and attending a party like that?" Father and mother were devastated.

Amaka didn't answer. She just looked down. In part, she was happy to be alive and strong. She was grateful also that God heard her prayer and saved her. But she kept asking herself if things needed to get this bad for her to come to herself.

"Can't you talk? What were you thinking?" Her mother yelled again, a tear came through her eyes, a slow tear.

Pent under the pressure of the questions pelted at her, she thought her parents were unfairly piling the blame. She finally retorted, "why do you suddenly care?"

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Her parents were perplexed. "What do you mean? We pay for everything you ask for," her mother said, wondering what gave their daughter the boldness to confront them.

"Not like that. I wish I could say it differently but you both have never been there for me. Too bad. You're always going round the world preaching without taking deliberate steps to watch your backyard. Does it not stink already? Can you say confidently that you know me? My real parents all these years have been the housekeepers, the cleaners, the cooks and all the other caregivers who are hired. How could they have cared enough? If there was anything like shame, it couldn't be mine when it's apportioned."

There was dead silence. Amaka was still boiling, "You want me to be like Pastor Sarah Jakes but you never put in the work. Or do you? You just assumed I will be okay when you won't have a hand in how that

happens. You've built others' homes, yours is in shambles."

Her parents still couldn't utter a word. Her mum broke the silence and cried, moving closer to Amaka's bed and seating near her daughter.

The family began from that day to retrace its steps. Her parents withdrew from excessive travels and whenever they could, took Amaka with them.

By the time Amaka got to the University a year later, she had become an entirely changed person. She boldly confessed Christ and evangelised the campus all she could. Having learnt her lesson, she made a new set of friends from the students' fellowship. With them, she prayed regularly. They were friends who committed themselves to being ambassadors of Christ on and off the campus. All the while, her watchword didn't change. She came to be famous for it:

You shall not follow the crowd in doing wrong.

The End