

Amaka in New York



Olachi Okoroafor

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Cover Design inspired by Nwachi Okoroafor

Foreword

I count myself fortunate to have gone through the rigors of trying to get my stories published. Little did I know that we would be using that experience less than ten years later, and I will be writing the foreword for my daughter's first book.

At the tender age of four, Olachi had developed an inclination for writing and telling stories. She grasped concepts in grammar and composition very quickly and always wanted to apply them. When she was approaching ten years of age, she told me she wanted to write a book to raise money for the less privileged. That is how this story of Amaka in New York was born.

Olachi is a multitalented young lady who is kindhearted, empathetic, respectful, responsible, very intelligent, and amazingly creative. Reading through this masterpiece of hers, not only am I completely amazed by what she has achieved with her talent at her age, I see evidence of her personality and strength in her characters.

This book is engrossing and beautiful. Olachi takes us on a journey of what goes on in the life of someone being bullied, how it can be overcome, and how one can adapt to unpleasant situations. Inherent in her story is the challenge of accepting one's self for who they are and the beauty in diversity.

This book is a must-read and a must-have simply because Olachi lets us see life issues through the lens of a child in a beautiful way. Happy reading.

Dr. Rita Esuru Okoroafor

Author: Against The Perfect Will; Morning Does Come.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mom, Rita Esuru Okoroafor, for encouraging me, inspiring me, and helping me as I worked on this book.

Olachi Okoroafor

Chapter 1: The Move

Amaka looked out the cab window. The cab slowly stopped at the stop sign where she usually met with Grace and Tola to catch the school bus together. Amaka felt a pain she had never felt before as her friends waved their sorrowful goodbyes to her. Amaka returned their waves by trying to wave back as cheerfully as she could. What started as a cheerful wave quickly slowed and became droopy, like a balloon that had been popped.

As the driver pulled away from the stop sign, Amaka sadly turned her face from the fading view of her best friends and looked at her mom, who had her white headphones plugged into her eardrums. Amaka could hear her humming quietly to a song. The smell of coffee filled the cab. Amaka glanced up at the rearview mirror and saw the driver smiling cheerfully as he took a sip of his coffee. She wished she could feel cheerful. She leaned against the window, and though the jacket made her feel warmer on that hot day, her heart was icy cold. Amaka felt like she was in a world of her own. She caught her reflection in the window and saw that her face was pale.

"Oh, Mom, why do we have to move again?" Amaka moaned, bringing her head from the window to rest on the comfortable headrest. "This is the 9th time we've moved since I can remember. I have made such good friends here, and it really hurts me to leave them."

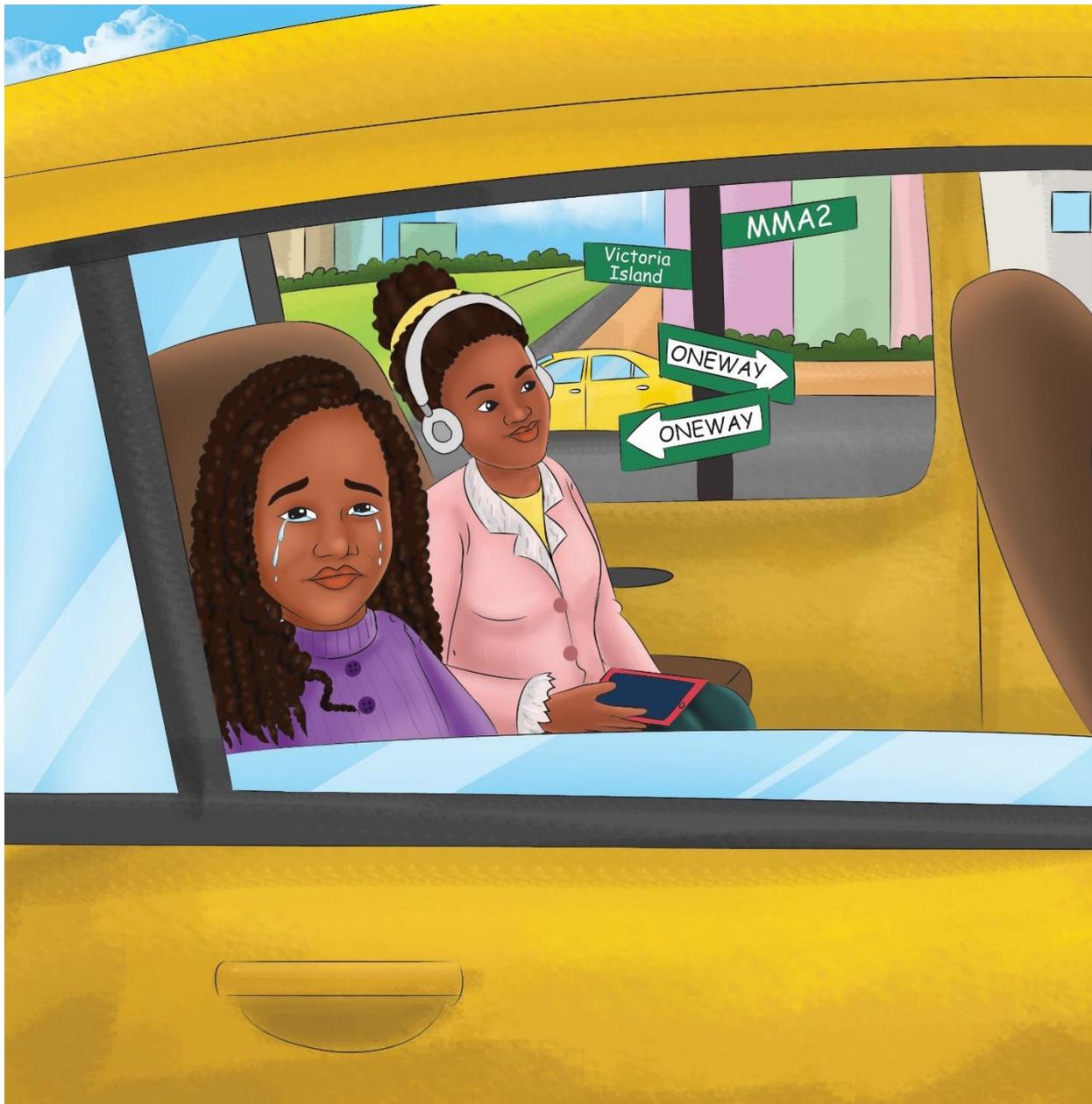
Amaka's mom took her headphones out of her ears and looked at Amaka.

"Oh, sweetie, it's my job that makes us move," she said. "Blame it on my job, not me. Besides, if we weren't moving, we'd continue living with apartment-mates. I'm sure you'd like a place with more privacy and space, wouldn't you?"

Amaka nodded slowly. The last two homes they had lived in were apartments, and she did not like the noise and people always poking their noses in their personal lives.

"But mom, why do we have to leave Lagos? The weather in Lagos is great all year round, and my best friends in the world are here." She paused for a moment. "I read that sometimes the weather in New York is freezing, and it is such a big place. I can easily get lost. And I do not know anybody there."

Amaka exclaimed, crossing her arms and looking down at her shoes with a frown.



"Oh, honey, I've explained this a hundred times. My job makes us move, and this one is a big move. I could not resist it," her mom said, trying to explain why they were moving. Amaka could sense that her mom was looking at her intently, but she did not take her eyes off her shoes. "You know what, Amaka?" Her mom continued with a different tone. "Don't let me have to explain this again. We are already on our way, and I do not want to start feeling bad." Her mom put her headphones back on then immediately took them off again.

"Amaka, listen. It's your favorite song! Would you like to listen to it?" her mom asked.

She was ready to shout, 'Why should I listen to whatever song that's playing? Why should I care? Huh? Huh!?' But Amaka knew better. 'Think before you speak,' she thought, remembering her late dad's voice. Thinking about her dad made her sigh.

"No, thank you, Mom," Amaka said instead.

Amaka's mom shrugged and put her headphones back on. Amaka decided to look out the cab window to stop the tears that were coming. She saw people staring at the car. She saw the candy shop, where she always bought her favorite kind of candy: Lollipops. She saw her tall brick-walled school, where she had played with Grace and Tola. She remembered the last words from Grace when they hung out the previous day.

"I hope you'll have good friends when you go to New York City," Grace had said.

'How can this year get any worse?' Amaka thought as she felt warm, easy tears building up in her eyes. As she glanced in the mirror, she could barely see her brown eyes. They were filled with tears.

At the airport, Amaka saw organized desks and flight monitors too. She felt the warmth of her mother's hand holding hers. It made her feel protected. She heard excited children. She smelled a pleasant smell coming from a lady's mug of coffee.

"Stay here, Amaka," her mom commanded. "Do not move from this spot, and do not talk to strangers."

"I know, Mom. I'm ten," Amaka reminded her.

"Of course, dear. Just stay there," Amaka's mom repeated, making Amaka slap her forehead.

After Amaka's mom checked in, she came back and said, "Our flight begins boarding in five minutes. Are you ready?"

Amaka took a deep breath. She was about to leave all her memories in Lagos and make new ones in New York.

"I---I'm ready," Amaka stammered, hoping she sounded confident.

Her mom nodded. They both pulled their hand luggage and moved towards a line of people also waiting to board.

The flight was about thirteen hours. Once Amaka and her mom were seated on the plane, Amaka drifted off to sleep and dreamed of the home, school, and friends she had just left behind.

Chapter 2: Amaka Goes to a New School

Four days after they arrived in New York, Amaka and her mom walked to Amaka's new school. A cold wind was blowing, but Amaka felt warm in her thick coat and by holding her mom's hand. As they strolled along, Amaka could hear birds calling from almost leafless trees. She smelled the cool, crisp smell of winter's air, which was new to her. She saw people walking fast, some of them typing on their phones. Others wore sleek, black business suits. There were also lots of cars, and she counted sixteen taxis. Amaka saw footprints in the snow and tall buildings, motels, and hotels. She was in awe of all of it.

"Amaka, look!" Her mom exclaimed. Amaka looked up to where her mom was pointing and saw the Statue of Liberty from afar.

"Wow! It is beautiful," she said, gaping at the sight before her. Then they swiftly continued walking while Amaka's mom explained how Amaka would take the school bus to get home in the afternoon. Soon, Amaka and her mom reached Maple Elementary School.

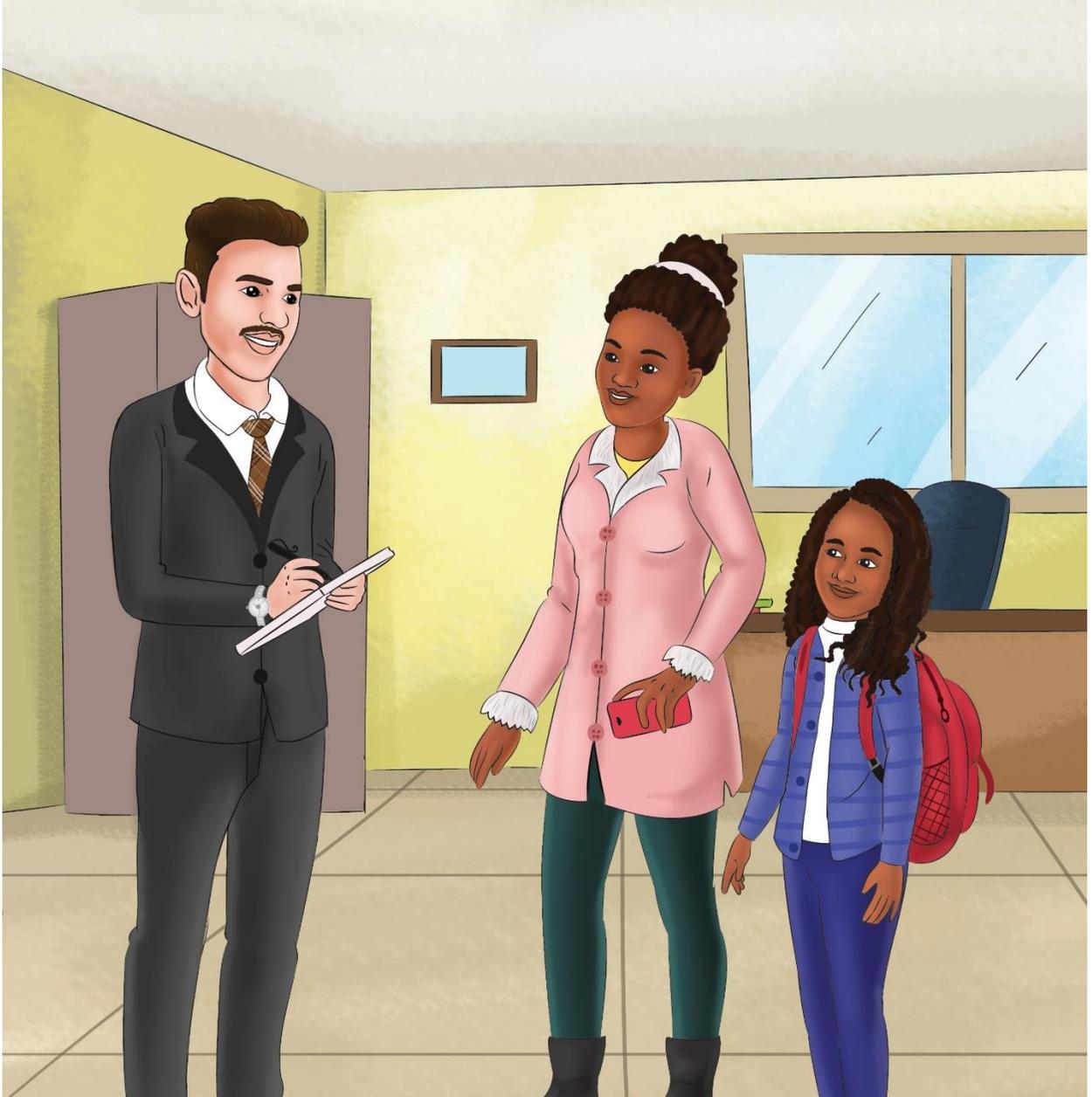
"Are you ready, Amaka?" Her mom asked.

"Yup," Amaka replied nervously. Amaka tightened her grip on her mom's hand, took a deep breath, and walked toward the school. There were lots of kids talking and chattering loudly. Suddenly, she hoped she looked good enough in her casual clothes. Under her coat was a white turtleneck top, a blue striped sweater, her blue jeans, and her colorful lucky socks. She felt another cold breeze fly past her face and smelled someone's fragrant perfume.

'The teachers are probably trying to smell good for their students,' Amaka thought with a small smile. Her mom led her into the school, where they bumped into a kind-looking man with brown hair and a brown mustache. He was holding a black pen and a notebook. There was a silver watch on his hairy arm. He was wearing a brown plaid tie, a black suit, and brown leather shoes.

“Hello. I am Mr. Doug, Maple Elementary School’s principal,” he said and shook Amaka’s mom’s hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Doug. I am Ada Chike, and this is my daughter, Amaka Chike,” her mom said.



“Nice to meet you, Amaka. You must be the new student. I will show you where your class is, okay?” Amaka nodded. Mr. Doug led Amaka and her mom to a class with, ‘Welcome to 4th Grade in Room 20.’ written on the closed door. Mr. Doug knocked three times.

A woman opened the door. She was a short woman with straight, blonde hair that reached her shoulders. She wore black leather boots, a blue turtleneck blouse, and thick red pants that matched the red of her heart-shaped ruby necklace.

"Hello, Ms. Taylor. We have a new student for you. Her name is Amaka Chike," Mr. Doug said to the woman.

"Welcome, Amaka. I have been expecting you," Ms. Taylor said with a broad smile. "And nice to meet you...!"

The woman then looked up at Amaka's mother.

"Ada. Please call me Ada," Amaka's mom said to Ms. Taylor. The grownups talked some more. Amaka stood by and waited patiently, rocking on her heels back and forth. She could not wait to see her new classroom and her new classmates.

"Goodbye, Amaka," her mom finally said. "Have a good day at school. I packed you your favorite lunch. Be good." Her mom hugged Amaka tightly. Amaka hugged her too, feeling a little embarrassed. Then her mom walked away from the classroom and down the hall. Amaka watched her mom leave. She could feel Mr. Doug and Ms. Taylor watching her intently. Amaka looked up at them. They were smiling at her. Amaka smiled back. She hoped she would have a good day at school.

Chapter 3: Amaka Meets a Bully

Amaka stepped inside her new classroom and immediately noticed the light yellow with colorful polka dots all over the walls. She looked at the smiling faces sitting in front of her and felt a little nervous.

“Well, Amaka, please hang your backpack over there,” Ms. Taylor said, pointing at the golden hangers at the back of the classroom, “and when you’re done with that, I’ll introduce you to the class.”

Amaka did as she was told and came back to the front of the class. There were 20 wooden Chair Desk Combos, with 13 students staring at her and four boys at one corner of the classroom whispering together and glancing at Amaka now and then.

“Class, class?” Ms. Taylor asked, frowning at the boys in the corner.

“Yes, yes?” the class replied in unison.

“We have a new student. Her name is Amaka Chike.”

Amaka hoped that the class would say, “Hello Amaka,” but instead, they all just stared at her.

“Class...?” Ms. Taylor frowned.

“Hi, Amaka,” they all said. Three of the four boys who had been whispering earlier said something to the freckle-faced boy in the group.

He grinned and then looked at Amaka and said, “Another girl in this class. Boys are smart, but girls, girls, aren’t.” While the other three boys chuckled, all the girls glared at him.

“Martin Russel, be respectful,” the teacher warned him.

Amaka wanted to turn into a grain of salt. Or maybe shrink to nano size. She knew that the boy had directed his statement at her. She felt her cheeks get warm, then hot, then burning. Her knees began to shake, and her palms were very sweaty. Amaka looked at the floor.

Just then, another boy from the group stood on top of his table and exclaimed, “Hey. I’m Romeo, y’all! I’m cool, ‘cause I love blue! But you can’t like blue ‘cause you’re black, right muddy girl?” The whole class started giggling. Ms. Taylor’s frown deepened, and she glared at the class. A couple of students caught her eyes and stopped laughing.

Amaka felt her easy tears welling up in her eyes, murmured something about going to the bathroom, and ran out of the classroom, making the class stop abruptly. The four that were talking about her were still laughing and holding their tummies.

Amaka could hear Ms. Taylor talking sternly to the class, though the sound faded as she ran to a building with "Library" written all over it. She sat at a corner behind the building and bent her head between her knees. There she started crying and let her tears flow.

Amaka was sobbing uncontrollably and wiping her eyes when she sensed Ms. Taylor standing over her. Amaka looked up then looked away when she saw the concerned look on Ms. Taylor's face.

"Amaka, I know you feel bad about what happened---"

"They called me black and muddy girl. Muddy? Is it because I am the only dark-skinned girl in class?" Amaka blurted out, her eyes filling with tears again. "Back in Nigeria, no one will call me black or muddy because I was one of the lightest in my school." She wiped her nose that was running.

"Trust me, dear, they are ready to apologize. We do not like such words in this school. But will you forgive them?" Ms. Taylor asked. Amaka was silent for a few seconds, then slightly nodded her head and wiped her eyes that were starting to feel puffy.

"Okay," Ms. Taylor said calmly and held out her hand to Amaka. Amaka held on to Ms. Taylor's hand as she pulled her off the floor. It made her feel strong and protected, just like when she used to hold her father's hand. Together she walked with Ms. Taylor back to the classroom. As soon as they entered, the class automatically said, "We're sorry, Amaka."

"I---I forgive you. All of you," Amaka stammered, her cheeks going red as she walked to take one of the three empty seats at the back of the class. Amaka knew that she may not be able to forgive Romeo and his friends.

Later after school, Amaka got her homework and backpack from her locker in the hallway and headed towards the exit to get on the school bus. But Romeo and his friends spotted her and had other plans. They blocked her in the hallway.

“Yo, muddy girl,” Romeo said to Amaka. “Where do you think you’re going? Huh!?” “Um, I---I was just heading toward the bus,” Amaka stammered, feeling uncomfortable. She looked around and did not see anyone who looked like they could rescue her from Romeo and his gang.



“Well, too late. You’re not going anywhere!” Romeo exclaimed. Amaka saw people getting on the school bus. She tried to run underneath Romeo, but Romeo blocked her. Amaka felt trapped. She could not miss the bus. This was her first day of school, and she did not know her way around just yet.

"Please let me go," Amaka looking at Romeo and the other three boys with pleading eyes. "I don't...I don't know my way around here..." she added. Romeo was not moved. Instead, he moved closer, and the other three boys did the same.

"Well, you aren't going home with the bus today," Romeo said. "We do not want you to get the bus dirty, muddy girl." All four boys burst out laughing. Once again, tears filled Amaka's eyes.

Amaka heard the school bus doors close; they were leaving without her. "Now, you may go." Romeo grinned, his blue eyes sparkling with evil. "And if you report me or anyone of us to anyone," Romeo stepped forward and whispered in Amaka's ear, "it'll be much worse for you in this school."

Amaka dashed out the hallway and towards the exit, running after the bus.

"Hey! School bus! Please! Wait for me!" Amaka yelled. She jumped up and down, trying to get the driver's attention, but he kept on driving. When Amaka realized that the bus had left her, she started sobbing. Luckily for her, she remembered the walk to school that morning with her mom and just retraced their steps as she continued walking. 'Today was the worst day of my life,' she thought. 'If Dad were alive, he would have never sent me to this stupid school filled with unkind people. He would have never sent me here to New York.' Thirty minutes later, she saw her familiar brick-walled house. She entered the house and ran upstairs to her mom's room. Then she knocked on her mom's door twice. Though she could hear her mom's voice, her mom did not open the door.

"Mom? I'm home. I---I had a rough day at school, and---"

Her mom opened the door and peeped.

"Honey, I'm on an important call," her mom said with a low voice. "You can tell me all about your awesome day later, okay?" Her mom said.

Poor Amaka felt sad. It seemed like her mom did not hear her. She wanted to share her pain, but she had been turned away. She felt that she could have gone to see her friends Grace and Chioma if she had been back in Nigeria. But now, she had no one to talk with.

"Alright, Mom," Amaka said. She ran to her room and locked the door, and in there, she let all her emotions out.

About the Author

Olachi Okoroafor is ten years old. She loves reading and writing. She lives in California with her mom, dad, and three siblings. Amaka in New York is her first book.



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For enquiries, please contact:

Sarah Lupa: sarah.lupa@accomplishpress.com

Marketing: marketing@accomplishpress.com

Accomplish Press

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