
MAN OF THE SOUTH



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Dedication

To my brothers, David and Daniel



About the book

Festus and his wife in search of a child tricks single Uju into becoming a surrogate mother without her consent. They steal her child and throw her out of their house. Vengeance becomes her only solace. They can't imagine what she has in store for them.



MAN OF THE SOUTH

The Courtroom is filled to the brim, every space is occupied, despite the functioning air conditioning unit, Court 5, High Court of Lagos State Igboere, is still so hot, or maybe it is just me but damn right I am boiling inside. I can see them, yes Festus and his wife seated amongst the crowd of people. In spite of the crowd, I can see their interlocked hands.

Yes hold on to each other because when I get out of this, I am coming right after you both.

I would have sneered at them but my lawyer has asked me to pretend like I am unconscious of my environment because he is claiming I am disillusioned. So I have to pretend like I have lost my mind. Well to some extent it is a good pretence, so that when I come for their hearts the world would forgive me because I am not in my right mind after all.

I stare blankly at the walls and from the corner of my eyes I see Chisom, Festus' wife enter the witness box. I want to hiss but that will give me away and Barrister Ejike will not be too pleased. He is a good Lawyer and would do anything to win his case. Am I glad hired him? Absolutely!

“... is Uju...”

I turn sharply as I hear my name drop from Chisom's mouth. I am so angry that I want to fly at her and strangle her. I see her lower her eyes like she is afraid of me.

"She tried to run my husband and I down in front of our house on the 24th of March this year." I heard her say almost in a whisper.

That's right, be afraid, tremble and scuttle right to the protection of your husband. I wonder why I had previously thought you were the strong woman.

Don't judge me, you have no idea what this woman and her husband have done to me. I am not concerned about the lies that are pouring out of her mouth and trying to convince the judge that I am this evil beast, they have no idea yet what I can be. I hear the prosecution telling her to speak up so the Judge can hear her but he has no idea about the full story and since you don't know I will tell you.

In January last year I was at Ebeano store, you know the big supermarket in Lekki? I was walking through the store, trying to purchase some items for the house. So I see this stand where they are doing this promo, buy one, refer someone and get one free. So I move closer, one of the smiling sales rep come to me to get me to come closer and partake in their product. I think it is a new product because there aren't so many people in their stand.

They are selling ice creams, cakes and chocolates. I am not too much of a chocolate lover but you see cakes and ice creams? I could go the world over just to get them. The sales rep is telling me that the cakes go for seven hundred Naira while a bowl of Ice cream is five hundred Naira. I checked the money in my wallet and remembered that I already made budgets on each kobo, well I would probably have a thousand Naira left after all the purchase. Also I am not a big on buying on impulse, but this was cake. Then I remembered that the sales Rep had said I could refer someone and get the other option for free, also the promo would last for the week.

I buy the ice cream which is the cheaper of the two options and start heading out but then I begin to consider how senseless it would be to have this ice cream alone and get the cake another day. Then I see this handsome tall dark man. He is cute but two things, I don't date married men and secondly I have just broken up from a bad relationship and I was not looking for a rebound.

I walked up to Mr. cute and smiled, I desperately need this cake so I tell him.

“Hi handsome, would you be interested if I told you that there is this stand in the store that sell really nice and cheap cakes, ice creams and chocolates?”

Mr. handsome smiled back and asked, “Are you their marketer?”

“Me? No, no, definitely not. I am just a satisfied customer and I think your wife would love that as a gift.” I replied and play with my hair, giving him my most charming smile.

“Ok, lead the way then.” He told me and I jumped to the offer, at least I would get to collect the cake immediately.

I led him back to the stand, my bag of ice cream in their branded bag in my hand. As soon as we got to the stand a sales rep took over from there while I went to another one of them to claim my cake. It was placed in a bag and handed over to me. Gladly I carried my win and placed in the trolley before rolling out. But not before I had checked to be sure that Mr. handsome had bought his own. He had brought chocolates and ice creams.

I paid my bills at the counter and headed out to my small car with the trolley in front of me. Without wasting time, I packed the items into my trunk and entered my car and was about to drive out of the car park when I saw Mr. handsome flagging me down. I groaned and put my car in reverse. I was not ready for that conversation, I had already gotten what I wanted.

I screeched to a halt when he got to the back of my car and there is no way I could have moved without running him over and I was not ready to mess my fine blue car with any blood or brain matters.

I waited and he came to my window trying to catch his breath so I rolled down.

“Hi, sorry for making you stop like that, but can I get your number?”

I watched his mouth until he asked for my number and suddenly the alarm in my head go ‘bla, blarr, blarr!’

“It... it is not what you are thinking. I believe you are a great marketer.”

I guess my face must have betrayed me so I smiled. He was right, I was a marketer in a multi billion dollar company, I guess the skill was already embedded in my blood, which was why it had been easy to get him buy a product I wasn’t even selling.

“So, it is just for business. My father has a company that I am running and I would love your expertise advise on branding.” He added when I didn’t respond.

I breathed in relief, I was not ready to get in the middle of any marital drama. I gave him my number and drove off.

The following three months I got to know Mr. handsome better, I found out his name was Festus and he was from Cross Rivers State. I also found out that he was married to an Igbo girl and they had been married for five years without a child and they had grown apart. He even took me to his home one day and I witnessed Chisom’s onslaught on his ego.

I heard her for myself as she abused him and called him impotent. My heart went out to him. I formed my own opinion about her that moment. She hadn't even acted like she cared that her husband brought in another woman into the house and all his pleas to at least wait until his visitor was gone fell on deaf ears. I didn't eat anything in their house that day as Festus took me out a few minutes later apologising profusely for what I had experienced.

On my own I invited him to my house because I couldn't begin to imagine the emotional trauma he was going through having a wife with that kind of killer mouth. I had heard of men who suffered domestic abuse and for the first time it was real. He had been so broken that day that I couldn't exactly explain what happened but one thing led to the other and we ended up in bed together. We were not sorry it happened. For me it was like I needed to prove it to his wife that she was wrong and didn't know what she had.

I got pregnant too quickly but I was overjoyed because I was sure that Festus was mine. We had bonded after our first time together and it happened every other day after that. We had something beautiful, or so I thought. He asked me to move into his house. At first I thought it was awkward considering his wife's temper but when he assured me that it was all mouth and no bite and that my pregnancy would shut her mouth also that I would

make her ashamed she had called him impotent. I was all too happy to show his wife that she had lost a good man. He also assured me that he wanted to be sure I didn't suffer any lack.

So off I went, I packed my bags and moved into his house. Yes, we stayed in the guest room and he shared the room with me in the first three months by then madam was still throwing herself around like she owned the place and didn't care that her husband was having any affair with me right under her nose. There were days he would go to her room but he had assured me he was just doing it so that she would peacefully grant him a divorce so that we could get married since he couldn't legally marry me while being married to her. He took care of my bills and I didn't have to worry. I even resigned my job because he said he didn't want me to be stressed at all and trust me being a marketer was the definition of the word stress.

Most of my friends didn't know where I had disappeared to and my family? They were worried sick plus I hadn't tell them I was pregnant for a married man and living in his home. How could I? I only assured my mom I was all right and would come home soon.

Festus was ever the gentleman, he cooked for me, washed and ironed my clothes. He even got a hairdresser and beautician to take care of my hair and nails for the nine months I was pregnant.

The turn started on the eighth month of my pregnancy, I must have missed madam's wahala because she was not in the house from the fourth month. At first I hadn't noticed that she suddenly disappeared or maybe I thought she got jealous and just left. But sometime within the sixth month I asked Festus about her and he said she travelled. What was my business? I was glad she was gone and I hoped that she would never return and if she did, Festus and I would have become man and wife.

Towards the end of the eighth month she suddenly reappeared in the house again and she was more beautiful than the last time I saw her. She seemed rested and there was a glow around her that I felt myself get jealous of her and I felt panic squeeze my heart till it felt like if I kept watching her the blood would stop flowing and I would die.

One day she came with Festus to my room and I wondered what was going on, they were sharing these glances like they had something they wanted to tell me. I watched them with keenness as they took their seat. I kept trying to get Festus to meet my eyes but no, he couldn't meet my eyes but he could look into Chisom's eyes without fear. Then madam started.

“Uju...”

My eyes almost popped out of its socket to realise she knew my name and could even talk to me like I existed.

“I want to sincerely thank you for giving my husband this child. You may not understand the ridicule I have had to face because I can’t give him a child.”

Wait a minute! Did I miss something? My thoughts were running wild and I was beginning to wonder if I was imagining things.

Who was the one giving who ridicule again? But I didn’t voice it out, I just kept looking at Festus to see if he supported his wife, maybe she had something on him that he was afraid she would expose and only his eyes could communicate it but he still refused to meet my eyes.

“I just want you to know that my husband’s child would not suffer any lack.”

I frowned wondering what that meant but she didn’t say any other thing. Festus did though but he had been looking past me when he talked.

“Thank you for doing this.”

Doing what exactly? I had screamed in my head but before the words could form in my mouth I saw them interlock hands and get up to leave.

For the remaining two weeks before I delivered, I watched them laugh, play, gist and eat together and I wondered where the bad tempered and ill-mannered Chisom had gone. Several times I

came out and saw them kissing but would double back to avoid them knowing I had seen them.

I believed so strongly that this would wash over and Festus would come back to me seeing I was the woman who took away the insults his wife had thrown at him. He would realise soon enough that I was the woman for him so I acted like I was not bothered. It took all my life's energy to do so.

Then the delivery came and I had a beautiful baby boy. I was overjoyed when the nurses placed the child in my arms and when he held on to my finger my heart melted and formed again, turning me in pieces. It was the most beautiful feeling. But the nurses took him away very quickly, claiming they were going to get him cleaned up. I didn't worry, there was nothing to worry about, my prince was here and when his father saw him, I was sure he would remember how we made him.

Festus and his wife came in came in with my baby cooing and shooing him, Festus had him in his arms and my heart warmed to him but instead of acting like we had the child together he had told me thank you and they had left with my child.

I had thought they were going to clean the child up but they didn't come back that day. And when I asked the doctor he stared at me like I was insane and asked if they weren't the parents of the child. Ok, I thought I would go crazy.

“Who had the child? Who are you calling the parents?” I had screamed.

The doctor apologised and said that they had showed him a document I had signed to be their surrogate mother and which was why he had allowed them carry my child and even written the birth certificate in their name. Hmm, I couldn't believe what I had been hearing. I had been robbed, of a child and in broad daylight!

I can't remember what happened after that but I must have passed out because when I came around two days later, my family members were around and fussing over me. I think mum must have talked and talked before my eyes opened because she had been so grateful and appreciative of me for hearing her. By the time they had calmed down I had to tell them my ordeal. My mother almost went off the roof hearing I had been pregnant not to talk of that they had taken the child. Her first grand child. I had to beg my brothers to allow me handle it because I know them those two guys? They have the temper of a mother hen!

So one week after I had been released from the hospital. I went to their house to collect my child and have a peaceful conversation with them and you wont believe it. They had kept my belongings at the gatehouse and left an instruction with the gateman not to let me in. So I waited outside for them, Festus must have forgotten that I knew his routine of taking a walk in

the evenings and true to my expectation they were taking a walk, hand in hand, whispering and smiling at each other.

I didn't see my baby anywhere but I was not ready to talk. The sight of them living the happily ever after at my expense infuriated me, and my heart burned with hatred. I don't know when I started the car but it all happened so fast and the next thing I knew Festus was on my bonnet while Chisom had jumped out of my way and was screaming. I screeched to a halt and reversed with speed, he fell off my car and I drove off.

The following day two police men where at my house to arrest me for trying to kill a man and his wife with my car.

"The court is now adjourned." I heard the Judge say and the Judge get to her feet amidst the shout of "Court!"

I watched with dark eyes as Chisom and Festus left the courtroom hand in hand. I smiled because I knew the doom that awaited them not too far away from the courtroom. They should have chosen my wrath over my brothers.

Author

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She is readily available for discussions on her social media platforms listed below and is always open to constructive criticisms and sharing new ideas. Thank you for being a part of her world.

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Chinelo's Books

Novels:

Murder at Dawn, 2013

Behind dark clouds, 2015

The Ivorian Miracle, 2018

Series

Mrs. Unmarried, An Ice for Heart Series 2017

Novellas:

Room 287, 2018

Short stories:

Beneath this skin, 2017

Cheating on the sidechick, 2017

Just like me, 2017

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Help, 2018

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The cunning beggar with the living imagination, 2018

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