

★ **The Son of the House**

Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia

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While being held for ransom, two Nigerian women discover a life-changing connection in Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia's novel *The Son of the House*.

Nwabulu and Julie have an unlikely friendship. Julie manipulated her way into wealthy widowhood, while Nwabulu endured unspeakable hardship before finding success as a fashion designer. And yet, something more than friendly feelings binds these two women. Their secrets may have remained with them forever if they were not kidnapped and held captive together—and now those secrets threaten to rip them apart at the moment when they need each other most.

Despite their differences, Nwabulu and Julie have endured more than their share of hardship. For Nwabulu, having a son brought ruin and tragedy; for Julie, not having a son was just as disastrous. In their experience, the wants of men always supersede the needs of women, making for an intertwined narrative that is at times infuriating and always affecting.

As they await their fate in a small, dark room, each woman tells her story. Nwabulu relates a lifetime of abuse at the hands of her stepmother and employers, followed by a cathartic and well-earned contentment. Julie, though not always proud of the measures she took, is not ashamed, either. Their heartbreak and their resilience ignites every page. Metaphors add a poetic quality to the smooth, immersive prose.

As the story progresses, it is only a matter of time before the women's secrets are revealed. The story flits around the issue, brushing against it but delaying the ultimate confrontation. Tension mounts with the knowledge that, when the secret finally comes to light, it will add a devastating new dimension to Nwabulu and Julie's experiences.

The Son of the House is a compelling novel about two women caught in a constricting web of tradition, class, gender, and motherhood.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2021)

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