



# Children of the Quicksands

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[Diana Barnes](#) [3]

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Efua Taroré grew up in a little town in Nigeria, and had imaginary adventures with her friends in the nearby countryside, also sneaking to the forbidden lake where the banks were like quicksand. She used these memories when, having moved to Germany, she started writing stories. Her 6 year-old daughter had come home from school saying that she had learnt that children in Africa were hungry and suffering. She was appalled at the misleading information that the class was getting, and asked her daughter to remember their happy holidays in Nigeria and to tell her classmates about them. Unable to find stories for children that showed a more positive side of Africa, she began writing, won a prize for a short story, and then produced this, her debut novel.

13 year-old Simi, short for Oluwanifesimi, is sent to stay for a school holiday with a grandmother she has never met before. Her life in Lagos with her friends had been like most other children's experiences, but in Iyanla's village of Ajao there is no phone signal or internet, indeed no electricity at all, nor running water, and therefore a very basic shower and toilet, and, although at first Simi finds this hard, she begins to appreciate other aspects of village life. Iyanla is a 'wise woman', helping people with their problems and using herbs for healing, and also a priestess, interacting with Oshun, goddess of the Yoruba culture. Forbidden to go into the forest because children have disappeared, of course Simi is tempted to go in, and discovers a lake surrounded by quicksands that suck her in until she pops out into another country beyond. It's a scary place, and she is able to return, but when another girl, Morayo, goes missing, and her new friend Bubu goes into a trance in the forest, she is eventually told the story of the lake, and the reason for the antagonism between her mother and grandmother is gradually revealed. When a local politician decides that the lake must be filled in to prevent any more losses, the villagers are anxious at this prospect, and another new friend, Jay, (Jide) the chief's son offers his help. Simi, the only child who has the ability to return from the forbidden lake, is determined, against all advice, to go through the quicksands again to try and sort it all out.

This is an engrossing story, an excellent debut novel, and it's great to feel so involved with another culture. There are some Yoruba words, which are all explained, and the interaction with the gods, who sometimes act as capriciously as Greek or Roman deities, is intriguing. Perhaps we can hope for more stories set in Nigeria for young people from this author?

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