



★ **The Edge of Water**

Olufunke Grace Bankole

Tin House Books (Feb 4, 2025)

Softcover \$17.95 (272pp)

978-1-963108-05-7

Shifting between Nigeria and the US, Olufunke Grace Bankole's novel *The Edge of Water* is about the separation and reunion of mothers and daughters.

Esther details her experience of motherhood through letters to her daughter Amina, who immigrates to New Orleans just before Hurricane Katrina. She gets there with Esther's help, despite a prophecy from Iyanifa forbidding Amina from leaving Nigeria. Intercutting the women's tales are the voices of Joseph, Esther's first love, and American-born Laila, who yearns for her maternal predecessors in Nigeria.

In this confessional novel, relationships between women in Nigeria and the diaspora are portrayed with brutal honesty. With justified rage, Esther refuses to pardon her mother for facilitating her forced marriage to her rapist. Divorcing him and relocating herself and Amina to safety, Esther is a strong-willed, if acerbic, single mother. Nonetheless, Amina reveals the inadvertent hypocrisy with which Esther upholds oppression. She beats Oyin, Amina's half-sister, after discovering her premarital sex and despairs over Amina's inability to find a marriage partner.

Amina's longing for America is juxtaposed to her contested perception of her motherland's limitations. Oyin criticizes her entitlement, and Esther, though resenting her disregard for traditional maternal authority, admits, "This is a yoke you have shaken." The geographical and emotional complexities of immigration magnify channels of interpersonal, technological, and mystical communication. Gossip ostracizes Esther but also brings news of Amina, whose messages home are scant. Phones fail during environmental disasters but also reconnect individuals from Nigeria. Laila latches onto her mother's surviving personal artifacts; Iyanifa's interposed prophesying on scattered shells reaches into past and future lives.

The Edge of Water is an aching novel about lost connections and misunderstandings in which Nigerian women attempt to reconcile with each other and their experiences.

ISABELLA ZHOU (January / February 2025)

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