**An Imitation of Life** by Laura Solomon ISBN 1-904529-43-7 Published by Solidus

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*'...City Scar with Pigeons, Two Old Ladies Share Tea...,*' captions of famed photographs by the giantess Celia Doom. One black eye and one white, with a humpback she calls a wing. A gigantic, abandoned baby years before left in a banana box on Lettie and Barry's front step. Every page reveals another oddity, shock or icky fact, but humour also sparkles. Imitation of Life is however not for the squeamish and it's almost unbelievable such a neglected child, aging at three times the usual rate, could blossom as she certainly does albeit strangely. Luckily, the story's so fascinating it's easy to be swept along, even if my eyes were often wide with horror, squirming at yet another awful thing Celia, or one of the other weirdos, did. Every character patently alive with obvious idiosyncrasies, failings and occasional saving graces.

Lettie, for instance, when she discovers her enormous new baby's fangs tear through plastic bottles, devises a cunning way to feed the child and does her utmost to care for Celia. There's also best friend Jacob who likes to blow things up, then a magician uncle who appears and disappears as he pleases, (but gives Celia the camera that saves her sanity and makes her famous), two wild grandmothers and many others. I especially enjoyed Solomon's take on two scurrilous art dealers. Surprises in the adept plot keep on coming too.

At times I found the prose overwritten, Celia pens this story herself however and could employ a flamboyant writing style. Repetitions eventually, I thought did mainly serve to emphasise drama and action, effectively. Celia's cynical, artistic, self-aware and determined, a giantess who manages life in complex ways. Rundown Provencia's tattered streets and ramshackle places inhabited by people only just hanging on, add extra tension to a crazy tale where anything can happen and probably does.

Recommended, but be warned, rather a grotesque narrative even if with quite a few laughs while some human decency does shine through the murk.