



Imitation of Life

Fannie Hurst

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A bestseller in 1933, and subsequently adapted into two beloved and controversial films, *Imitation of Life* has played a vital role in ongoing conversations about race, femininity, and the American Dream. Bea Pullman, a white single mother, and her African American maid, Delilah Johnston, also a single mother, rear their daughters together and become business partners. Combining Bea's business savvy with Delilah's irresistible southern recipes, they build an Aunt Jemima-like waffle business and an international restaurant empire. Yet their public success brings them little happiness. Bea is torn between her responsibilities as a businesswoman and those of a mother; Delilah is devastated when her light-skinned daughter, Peola, moves away to pass as white. *Imitation of Life* struck a chord in the 1930s, and it continues to resonate powerfully today.

The author of numerous bestselling novels, a masterful short story writer, and an outspoken social activist, Fannie Hurst was a major celebrity in the first half of the twentieth century. Daniel Itzkovitz's introduction situates *Imitation of Life* in its literary, biographical, and cultural contexts, addressing such topics as the debates over the novel and films, the role of Hurst's one-time secretary and great friend Zora Neale Hurston in the novel's development, and the response to the novel by Hurst's friend Langston Hughes, whose one-act satire, "Limitations of Life" (which reverses the races of Bea and Delilah), played to a raucous Harlem crowd in the late 1930s. This edition brings a classic of popular American literature back into print.

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