

INSTANT MESSAGES by Laura Solomon (Proverse Hong Kong, November 2010)
Reviewed by Mary Parsons

"Best" is an ironic surname for the family of the fifteen-year-old twins Melanie and Olivia (the narrator) and their scarcely-depicted parents. The other important character is Green Frog (GF), a stuffed toy frog that lives in Olivia's pocket and with whom she has conversations. At one point Green Frog asks "Aren't we meant to be the kids and they the adults?"

The quality of the writing is quite good, but there is little description or detailed observation of character. The one who changes most is the smelly and unwashed Stinky Bev, whose transformation, at least in appearance, is due to Olivia, so that he washes and appears clean; he wins the Snooker Central first prize and dares, rightly or wrongly, to go to bed with Olivia.

There is a hint of something more constructive, however, when Olivia plays Caliban in the school play, *The Tempest*. Someone making a film set in Peckham who has seen the school production wants Olivia to audition for a part in (perhaps significantly) Shakespeare's last play.

The book ends with a reconciliation between the twins, sitting in the back yard, facing the future. Olivia has burnt Green Frog and no longer believes that "A heart beats within his green felt chest, a brain ticks in his fuzzy head." (p. 7) She has grown up.

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