



# The Life Fantastic

*Liza Ketchum*

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*Will Teresa find fame or lose it all?*

It's 1913 and vaudeville is America's most popular form of entertainment. Thousands of theaters across the country host vaudeville troupes. In Brattleboro, Vermont, fifteen-year-old Teresa LeClair—who has a “voice like a nightingale”—remembers the thrill of singing onstage as a child. But her parents have given up life on the road, and her father has decided that Teresa, blessed with perfect pitch, should drop out of school and work in the tuning rooms of the organ factory.

Determined to escape the life her father wants for her, Teresa wins an amateur singing contest in Brattleboro's opera house and steals away on the night train to New York. She hopes to become a star on Broadway's “Great White Way,” but has no idea of the challenges that lie ahead. There she runs into Pietro Jones and his father, talented African-American dancers. Teresa and Pietro become competitors as well as unlikely friends.

At a time when young black men could be lynched for simply looking at a white girl, Pietro understands, better than Teresa, the danger of their relationship. Teresa's quest to find her voice onstage and in her life, far from the support of her family, takes place against a complex racial backdrop of American history.

## The Life Fantastic Details

Date : Published January 1st 2017 by Merit Press

ISBN : 9781440598760

Author : Liza Ketchum

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Young Adult Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Life Fantastic for online ebook

### Teenreadsdotcom says

THE LIFE FANTASTIC is an exploration into the spirit of Vaudeville during the early 1900's, through a look at the life of Teresa (Resa for short) as she comes of age.

Born into a Vaudeville family, Teresa's parents have since fallen out of the performing life. Now, entering her teenage years, Teresa longs to experience the thrill of singing on the road. However, her father has other plans, despite her obvious talent. Determined not to allow her to follow in their footsteps, Teresa's parents refuse to let her anywhere near a performance venue, intending for her to find a steady job at one of the nearby businesses. Unable and unwilling to accept this stifling future, and feeling the pull of a life on the road, Teresa runs away to New York to try and prove herself on the Vaudeville stage.

The only problems? She finds herself with an unexpected stowaway and it turns out that becoming a star is harder than she ever imagined. Along the way she meets many different actors, including Maeve, her "mentor" of sorts and close friend, and Pietro Jones and his father, both talented Vaudeville dancers. African American Pietro exposes Teresa to the harsh racial prejudices of the early 1900s and makes her question social norms as she works to prove herself onstage and find her place in society.

Overall, THE LIFE FANTASTIC is a fairly quick historical read that lends itself to younger readers. While racial prejudice is an issue that permeates the entire story in a thought-provoking way, the other conflicts that Teresa deals with, both internal and external, are often "glossed over" --- resolved quickly to keep the tone of the book lighter in a way that appeals more to younger teens. Also, despite her age of 15, Teresa's actions and thoughts make her seem slightly younger than her given age, another reason why the novel may not resonate with older teens, but rather younger ones. The only real weakness of the book was its occasional lack of elaboration --- it feels at times as if scenes and characters are not always described as well as they could be, keeping the reader from fully immersing in the story.

For example, the book might have benefited from more development at the beginning of the novel to help the reader bond with Teresa, the main character --- without this connection, Teresa's struggles and accomplishments do not resonate as much with the reader. However, Liza Ketchum creates a story as vibrant as the era itself, and the performers' continual effort to find new jobs and prove themselves to every new audience in the hopes of one day finding stardom gives the book an exciting flavor --- there is always something to be done, somewhere to go, something to dream of, that propels the characters forward.

But perhaps the greatest strength of the story is the historical accuracy tangible in the novel. The language and the action of THE LIFE FANTASTIC proves that the author did her research: more than this, though, Ketchum manages to capture the unique flavor and tone of the era of Vaudeville --- the bond of shared dreams and challenges that connected performers as a family. The excitement of the era carries into the novel, making THE LIFE FANTASTIC a fun and quick read for younger teens.

Reviewed by Rachel R., Teen Board Member

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### Erikka says

I liked the world building and the setting (Vaudeville in the 1900s), but the characters were really wooden and unappealing, the plot was choppy and unrealistic, and I don't feel the "play in 3 acts" format or the

"entr'acte"s added anything to the story. The main character was extremely immature and somehow avoided having anything truly bad happen to her which would have made the plot have some weight. It was almost like an advertisement to runaways: "Leave for New York! You'll become famous and always find people to help you! Don't worry about being raped or murdered--you'll be fine! Running away is it's own reward!" And while I admire the inclusion of race relations in NYC and the theater world during this time period, I feel like it wasn't as impacting as it could have been. The MC was too oblivious to race issues and the black dancers involved didn't have a big enough role to have the impact they could have. Again, with nothing at stake, where's the plot?

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## **Forever Young Adult says**

**Graded By:** Stephanie

**Cover Story:** Bright Lights, Big City

**BFF Charm:** Big Sister

**Swoonworthy Scale:** 2

**Talky Talk:** Half Sung

**Bonus Factors:** Vaudeville, Historical Setting

**Anti-Bonus Factor:** Blackface

**Relationship Status:** Hot Pennies

Read the full book report [here](#).

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## **Erin says**

Historical fiction about a teenage girl whose father Doesn't Understand Her and so she runs away to make it big on the vaudeville stage. Totally an easy sell to kids, especially theater kids who just want to sing and dance and perform. I liked it enough!

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## **Aubrey Smith says**

I won a copy of this book from Goodreads. Overall it's a decent story, but gets a little boring here and there.

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## **Kate Stericker says**

As others have said, The Life Fantastic is an interesting read but seems most appropriate for a middle-grade audience. The amount of detail about the vaudeville era was impressive, but it may have been this focus on incorporating as much historical information as possible that left the narration feeling stiff and the plot a little lacking.

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## **Liz says**

Teresa is a 15 year old aspiring singer in 1913 Vermont. Her parents were both vaudeville performers who settled down after Teresa's younger brother, Pascal, was born, and taking on care of Teresa's great grandmother. It's hard for the family to make ends meet. Mother runs a boarding house and Papa works in a reed organ factory. Teresa has the gift of perfect pitch, a skill needed in the factory. Her father pushes her to work there, but she runs away instead to New York City, hoping to give show business a try. This is a detailed description of life in vaudeville, including the societal tensions of race relations. The reader will gain a rich understanding of this time in America. Sometimes there are details that are not essential to the story, and can slow down the plot line.

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### **Chelsey says**

Teresa LeClair grew up on the vaudeville circuit with her parents, but once her brother was born, they retired to small-town Vermont to take care of her great-grandmother. Blessed with perfect pitch and a powerhouse voice, Teresa dreams of headlining shows herself. But when her father schemes to get her a job in the tuning rooms of an organ factory, she must choose to pursue performing, leaving everything behind, or die of boredom with her family. But is life on the road as fantastic as she remembers?

This was good historical fiction, in that it really sets the scene for the reader well, and 1913 vaudeville is fascinating. But the writing isn't very strong, and even though the characters are all older, this feels very middle grade. I liked that the author lists the songs she used at the end of the novel, and I'm definitely inspired to learn more about this time in history, though!

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### **Tanya says**

Really wanted to like this. Good research but bad dialogue and cardboard characters. When the heroine's friend is more interesting than the lead, you have issues. And believe me, the heroine was naive, whiny, and lucky she wasn't raped/murdered or both.

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### **Stephanie says**

3.5 stars.

If you've never known much about vaudeville, or if you're interested in learning more, then this is the book for you. Check out my book report at [Forever Young Adult](#).

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### **El says**

A charming tale of growing up poor and white in a time of rich theatre, vaudeville, and what it's like to love a person whose skin makes everyone else hate them. Excellent story telling, great visuals, and leaves you wanting more.

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## **Amber says**

Thanks to Merit Press for sending me a free copy of the book in exchange for my blog eat review.

I liked this one, but didn't love it. I was expecting a teen read, but it felt as though it was aimed at young readers (not a bad thing, just not what I was expecting). I enjoyed the history of the story, but wasn't blown away by it.

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