

The Blues Walked In

Kathleen George

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Spanning ten years, this inspiring biographical novel illuminates the personal life of jazz singer and civil rights activist Lena Horne.

Lena Horne was a woman to be reckoned with. She lived a long, eventful life, but this novelization focuses on her early years of adulthood. Lena in Kathleen George's *The Blues Walked In* is just as strong and relentless as she was in reality. Her story is as intimate as it is inspiring.

At age eighteen, already having garnered a reputation for her singing in New York, Lena moves in with her father in Pittsburgh, where she performs in jazz clubs throughout the city's Little Harlem district. Chapters alternate between Lena and her friend Marie, a young Lebanese woman grappling with her own ambitions as she helps her family earn money. While Lena is the main focus of the novel, their stories are equally interesting.

In the midst of segregation, both young women deal with racism and career setbacks, but their gumption helps move them forward. Love interests, family dramas, and all the pros and cons of rising fame add layers of tension to the already engaging story.

A great portion of the text is composed of dialogue, with conversations flowing naturally, true to their time and place. The dialogue not only bolsters the vividness of the setting but drives the plot forward and reveals the nature of the characters. Lena and Marie have many commonalities and differences, and their journeys intersect and veer off often throughout the story. One of the central relationships—that of Lena and her father—is fraught with disagreements over their personal choices. Her father is a gambling kingpin, which adds extra danger to the plot.

The ten-year span of these two young women's lives is conveyed beautifully in this lovely novel about what to do when you want "to be somebody."

AIMÉE JODOIN (May/June 2018)

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