



# Dorothy Dandridge

*Donald Bogle*

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Dorothy Dandridge -- like Marilyn and Liz--was a dream goddess of the fifties. All audiences ever had to do was take one look at her -- in a nightclub, on television, or in the movies -- and they were hooked. She was unforgettable, Hollywood's first full-fledged African American movie star.

This definitive biography -- exhaustively researched -- presents the panoramic dimensions of this extraordinary and ultimately tragic life. Talented from the start, Dorothy Dandridge began her career as a little girl in Cleveland in an act that her mother Ruby, an actress and comedienne, created for her and her sister Vivian. By the time she reached her teens, she was working in such Hollywood movies as *Going Places* with Louis Armstrong and *A Day at the Races with the Marx Brothers*. She also appeared at New York's Cotton Club in a trio called The Dandridge Sisters, but soon went solo, determined to make a name for herself. She became one of the most dazzling and sensational nightclub performers around, all the while breaking down racial barriers by integrating some of America's hottest venues.

But she wanted more. Movie stardom was her dream. And she got it. Dandridge broke through the glass ceiling of Tinseltown to win an Academy Award nomination as Best Actress for her lead role in Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones*. Other films such as *Porgy and Bess*, *Island in the Sun*, and *Tamango* would follow and the media would take notice. In an industry that was content to use Black women as comic mammy figures, Dorothy Dandridge emerged as a leading lady, a cultural icon, and a sizzling sex symbol.

She seemed to have everything: glamour, wealth, romance and success. But the reality was fraught with contradiction and illusion. She became a dramatic actress unable to secure dramatic roles. While she had many gifts to offer, Hollywood would not be the taker.

As her professional frustrations grew, so did her personal demons. After two unhappy marriages -- her first to the great dancer Harold Nicholas -- a string of unfulfilling, love affairs, and the haunting tragedy of her daughter Lynn, she found herself emotionally and financially -- bankrupt. She ultimately lost all hope and was found dead from an overdose of antidepressant pills at the age of 42.

Drawing on extensive research and unique interviews with Dorothy Dandridge's friends and associates, her directors and confidantes, film historian Donald Bogle captures the real-life drama of Dandridge's turbulent life; but he does so much more. This biography documents the story of a troubled but strong family of women and vividly recreates Dandridge's relationships with an array of personalities such as Otto Preminger, Sammy Davis Jr., Pearl Bailey, Harry Belafonte, Diahann Carroll, Peter Lawford, Ava Gardner, and many more. Always at the center though is Dorothy Dandridge, magnetic and compelling.

Donald Bogle -- better than anyone else -- goes beyond the surface of one woman's seemingly charmed life to reveal the many textured layers of her strength and vulnerability, her joy and her pain, her trials and her triumphs.

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