



Dorothy Jean Dandridge

November 9, 1922 - September 8, 1965

Died: West Hollywood, California

Interment: Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California

Dorothy Jean Dandridge died in her West Hollywood apartment on September 8, 1965. She was forty-two. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 9, 1922, she learned a stage before she learned a classroom: her mother, Ruby, put Dorothy and her sister Vivian on the road as the Wonder Children, then the Dandridge Sisters, singing for a living while other girls were still being told to keep still.

Hollywood wanted her face and rationed her parts. She played nightclubs on both coasts, took what the studios would give a Black leading woman, and in 1954 made *Carmen Jones* - Otto Preminger's all-Black *Carmen* - with a voice that was partly hers and partly dubbed, and a presence that was entirely hers. She became the first Black woman nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress. The statue went elsewhere. The country had seen what it was not yet willing to hire again. *Island in the Sun* and *Porgy and Bess* followed; so did parts that asked her to be ornamental and grateful.

She married the dancer Harold Nicholas, later the restaurateur Jack Denison. Her daughter Harolyn needed more care than a touring life could give. Money came and went with the bookings. Friends remembered a precise, almost formal courtesy offstage and a refusal, onstage, to shrink. Cleveland was the birth. The work was night trains, soundstages, and rooms that billed her as an exception.

She was found on the morning of September 8. A private pathologist and the Los Angeles County coroner did not agree on the immediate cause; the file still holds both accounts. A private funeral was held at the Little Chapel of the Flowers. She was cremated. Her ashes rest in the Freedom Mausoleum at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale - not in West Hollywood, and not in Cleveland.

Services

Died in West Hollywood, California, on September 8, 1965. Private funeral at the Little Chapel of the Flowers. Ashes in the Freedom Mausoleum, Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California.

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