



The Black Rose

Tananarive Due

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Born to former slaves on a Louisiana plantation in 1867, Madam C.J. Walker rose from poverty and indignity to become America's first black female millionaire, the head of a hugely successful company, and a leading philanthropist in African American causes. Renowned author Alex Haley became fascinated by the story of this extraordinary heroine, and before his death in 1992 he embarked on the research and outline of a major novel based on her life. Now with *The Black Rose*, critically acclaimed writer Tananarive Due brings the work to inspiring completion.

"I got my start by giving myself a start," Madam C.J. was fond of saying as she recounted her transformation from the uneducated laundress Sarah Breedlove to a woman of wealth, culture, and celebrity. Madam C.J. was nearing forty and married to a maverick Denver newspaperman when the wonder-working hair care method she discovered changed her life. Seemingly overnight, she built a marketing empire that enlisted more than twenty thousand bright young African American women to demonstrate and sell her products door-to-door.

By the time she died in 1919, Madam C.J. Walker had constructed her own factory from the ground up, established a training school, and built a twenty-room mansion at Irvington on the Hudson, New York, called Villa Lawaro.

A dynamic, brilliantly creative businesswoman, Madam C.J. also became a tireless activist in the fight against racial oppression and a key figure in the antilynching movement. A stalwart "race woman," she worked with black leaders like Booker T. Washington, and her legacy inspired poets like Langston Hughes. Yet she paid a steep emotional price for her worldly triumphs. Betrayed by her husband, plagued by rumors of her beloved daughter's scandalous behavior, Madam C.J. suffered the private pain and disappointment all too familiar to many successful women.

In the tradition that made Alex Haley's *Roots* an international bestseller, Tananarive Due blends documented history, vivid dialogue, and a sweeping fictionalized narrative into a spellbinding portrait of this passionate and tenacious pioneer and the unforgettable era in which she lived.

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Lorenzo Logan:

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