



Zora Neale Hurston, portrait by photographer Carl Van Vechten, 1880–1964, Library of Congress.

## The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!

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**Editor's note:** This is the third installment of the life story of Mrs. Ruby Jackson McCollum of Live Oak, Florida, wealthy widow who has been sentenced to death for the recent slaying of her alleged white lover, Dr. C. LeRoy Adams. A heart attack claimed the life of Mrs. McCollum's husband, Sam, shortly after the slaying of the doctor.

The maternal instincts which swept over Ruby Jackson when she a child were to play the key role in her later life. Dean L.F. Morse of Fessenden Academy says that by the time Ruby passed puberty, "she was a very pretty girl, but seemed unaware of it."

Boys and even grown men began to give her looks, but she went on being quiet and reserved, a good student in school and busy about the home and church. She didn't seem to realize that she was possessed of a power that made itself felt upon the men and boys who saw her. How fatal it was to be, time alone was to tell, as the world now knows.

Ruby's mother allowed her to start receiving company when was eighteen, and she seemed satisfied to wait until then with utmost calm. While she was seventeen, a local youth made an open bid for her heart and hand and boldly made an earnest proposal of marriage . . . only to be turned down.

Her reasons: they were a sure indication of what was to come in her heart and what was in her mind: the young man just didn't attract her. He lacked the different strengths she admired in a man. Utterly female, she wanted to be conquered and have a great store of strength to lean upon.

He lacked the "get-up" that she hoped for, and, she felt, a lack of mental vigor, too. "I could not see myself loving a man who could see ten things and not even understand one. I wanted a man who could see one thing and understand ten, a mate [who] could cope with life and give me protection."

During this period she was seldom allowed to go to Ocala, the nearest sizable town, but she found activities around Martin where she lived. She became extremely active in church work and was a delegate to the Sunday school conventions and the district conferences.

Her close friends were the heart of all the activities in Martin. Ruby organized a singing-band made up of her brother, Clemon Sarah Davis, Tommie Lee Ward, Helen Smith, and herself. Ruby sang lead and the group became widely known in the area, singing for churches and other such gatherings.

Upon her graduation from Fessenden Academy, Ruby taught school for a year at New Chapel, a small community not too far from Ocala. She must not have cared much for this experience because there is no comment about it, nor is there any comment about why she did not continue after that one year. She just taught school for one year, period.

But it was about this time that new shape of things to come began to make itself felt within her. Internally she began to sense a lack. There was no one around whom she could drape her intense feelings, her great capacity for love.

She had made a tremendous discovery! She found that she had a singular power over men: It was no trouble at all to bend them to her will. She was one those females who appear now and then in human history. Something drew men to her and bound them.

Ruby had confidence in her powers, but it was a disappointment in a way. She moved men but so far no man had ever moved her! It was in this period around eighteen that she began to have recurrent dreams. There were four to the series. Of these, only one was clear so that she could remember the details upon awakening.

In this dream she found herself in a strange community and entering a large, beautifully furnished home. She was not only expected there, she was welcome. A muted, throbbing rhythm said over and over "Come to me. Come to me." Somehow it seemed to be her home. Love and satisfaction radiated the place.

This dream troubled Ruby. Walking around the little four-room house that was her home in Martin, she could not imagine why she would dream of so much comfort and luxury being hers. At that time Ruby Jackson had never heard of the sub-conscious. It never occurred to her that she might have wishes that had never emerged into the conscious.

She saw as a prophetic sign, though how such a thing was to come about, she had no idea. The years were to prove her right! Years later in Live Oak, she was to recognize the house the moment she saw it. It had been built by a

Negro bolita banker, whom her future husband—Sam McCollum—was to defeat and come into possession of the nine-room house!

At eighteen Ruby was full of internal conflict. As yet she had been attracted to no man. She been trained to despise and fight against physical pleasures and desires as sinful things inspired by the devil. She had had that background at home.

So, naturally, she was distressed to find that so many men leered at her. Young and old men of her own race could not seem to pass her unnoticed; white men winked their eyes at her and followed her, or secretly nodded at her to please follow them. The only part she liked was the secret knowledge that she had power over men.

Now, with her shapely and well-developed body blooming, she felt herself a woman. She had laughed and worked and suffered to a certain extent. There had been a hurt in her life which she had revealed to no one. Her tears had been in utter secrecy. Now she began to feel emptiness in her existence.

She felt like a blossom on the bare limb of a pear tree in the spring . . . opening her gifts to the world, but where was the bee for her blossom? Yes, numerous men had gazed on her with open desire, but so far their looks had raised no mingling-blood call in her.

She wanted beauty and poetry mingled in her life, something to make her everyday side-meat taste more like ham. Sometimes, deep, deep in the mood of her strange yearning she would picture herself reclining on soft grass in a beautiful rose-scented setting on a white moonlit night.

Ruby Jackson was now ready for life and love!

*Courtesy Pittsburgh Courier Archives.*