Beatrice Louise Marshall . . . aka Bea, Aunt Bea, Miss B

"It's no wonder," I said. "It's no wonder at all. Look at this. Just look at it. He's on half the pages in this album. That's why she's down there. Not for the others. For him."

Jack sat in his rocker by the door, wearing a pair of seer sucker trousers and an opened collar white shirt. He had been awake only half an hour, had washed his face, and had had Janey to fix him another drink--Jack Daniels on the rocks. Merle was in the swing with a pink Pea Picker and a fan. Janey had just brought me the picture album, and now she stood behind the chair looking over my shoulder. There was no breeze, none at all. The dahlias and the sun flowers against the fence bowed from the heat. There was just a little touch of scent from the sweet olives left of the gallery, and Janey was blocking most of that off.

"It's too hot," I told her. "Go somewhere and sit down."

Another rocker was half way across the gallery, and Janey went and sat over there, away from the rest of us.

"She can get herself into a lot of trouble," Jack said.

"Hunh," I said.

"I told her that myself," Merle said.

"Sure," Jack said. "But you also called them. You're an accessory, you know."

"She told me to call them," Merle said. "If I didn't, count me out as a friend."

"Good," Jack said. "Maybe they'll put both of you in a cell together, and y'all can hold hands the next twenty years."

"That's not funny," Merle said. "I don't think it's funny at all."

Jack didn't say any more. I heard the ice cubes in his glass.

"Hunh," I said. "Just look at this. I didn't realize he was everywhere. She has him everywhere. Hunh."

"Which one are you looking at now?" Merle asked, from the swing.

"He and Grandpa Nate," I said. "He driving the buggy down into the quarters, and Grandpa sitting behind him all in white, and a white Panama. He's nine or ten, I reckond. Hunh."

"That picture has to be seventy years old," Merle said.

"Closer to seventy than anything else," I said. "Just look at this stuff. He's in here much as Grandpa, much as anybody. He's even in the background shots, like a fence, like a tree, like a cloud. Janey, you ever looked through this album?"

"Yes, ma'am," Janey said. "He's everywhere, all right."

"Well, well," Jack said. "They finally caught the old coon."

"Did they?" I asked. "Hunh."

"They got him now," Jack said. "By the big toe. But when he holler, they won't let him go."

"I wouldn't be too sure," I said. "Hunh."

"They got him," Jack said. "Either Mapes or Fix. But they got him. Yes, they got him. I used to tell him one day his foot would slip. Not only did it slip now, it slid."

"Candy is still there," Merle said.

"That won't help him this time," Jack sad. "No, they got that old coon at last. By the big toe."

"Hunh, I wouldn't be too sure," I said. "They tried it with Grandpa Nate. They tried it with Daddy Dan, and they tried it with Brother. Now they have Sarah-Candace on their hands."

"It was a different world then," Jack said. "Even when Brother was alive the world was different. They got him now, though. I told him they would get him one day."

"Jack and Mathu never did get along," I said. "Hunh."

"No," Jack said. "He was too damned uppity."

"He wasn't uppity, Jack," I said. "He just stood as a man. Do you know who told him to always stand as a man?"

"A nigger must know his place," Jack said.

"Grandpa Nate," I said. "Your grandpa and my grandpa. And Daddy Dan, and Brother did, too."

"They spoiled that nigger, and now they're all gone," Jack said. "And now Mapes or Fix got him in a trap. By the big toe."

"I wouldn't be too sure," I said. "Hunh."

"A hundred dollar bet," Jack said. "They got him, and they go'n hold on."

"A bet," I said. "Merle, you want any of that money?"

"No," she said, and patted her bosom quickly with the fan. "No. No."

"You, Janey?" I asked.

"No, ma'am," Janey said, and looked down at the floor.

"Just me and you," Jack said. "Drink to it."

He raised his glass. I got mine off the little TV table by my chiar and raised it to him and drank. Then I set it back down to look through the album some more.

"He goes for life," Jack said. "Too bad he's too old to die in the chair."

"You're on," I said, looking through the album. "Hunh."

"That's if Fix don't get to him first," Jack said.

"You're on," I said. "Mapes can't afford that. Hunh."

"Or the boys on the lane," Jack said.

"Mapes can't afford that either," I said. "You want to raise the bet, or are you just bluffing?"

"Make it light on yourself," Jack said.

"All right," I said, looking at him. He was sitting over there ginning with confidence. "A hundred against Fix," I said. "A hundred against the boys on the lane, and a hundred against life.* Or should we throw in our share of this place?

"And if he get either, or either get him, which I'm sure will happen before mid-night, as sure as my name is John Henry Marshall, you'll pay me three hundred dollars--is that the bet?"

"That's the bet," I told him. "Hunh."

"That's like taking candy from a baby," Jack said. "Unless you know somethsng about this world I don't know?"

"It's possible," I said. "Hunh."

"I've never made three hundred dollars easier in my life," Jack said. "Merle, you're my witness. And you, too, Janey. Remind me to give you one or two bucks when I collect."

Neither one of them answered him. I went back to looking through the album. I was looking at the picture of him as a boy with Grandpa Nate--because it was Grandpa Nate who named him Mathusala--Mathusala Jack. Later, the ones in the quarters shortened it to Mathu, and Mathu is what he was called all his life. He was same age as Brother, two years older than me, and four older than Jack. We all grew up together, played together, and fought one another. Both Grandpa Nate and Daddy Dan told him to hit back when anybody insulted him, and that meant me or Brother or Jack. Daddy

Dan also told him if he stayed out of the graveyard, he would keep him out of the pen. No harm would ever come to him long as he was right, Daddy Dan told him. But until Grandpa died, he was Grandpa's boy. He was made driver at eight, and he was at Grandpa's beckonding call until Grandpa died in twenty-two. Grandpa taught him to ride, to fish, to hunt. They hunted all over this State, into Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi. They hunted bears, they hunted snakes, alligators, wildcats--everything. Later, he would become a guide for sportsmen from cities and the North--and even from England and France. They all loved him and respected him and said he was great as any guide they had followed anywhere. There were pictures of him with sportsmen round camp fires, there were pictures of him and sportsmen with their kill, but there were more pictures of him with the family--from Grandpa, the first Marshall, to Sarah-Candace, the last. Because, you see, before Grandpa, this place was not called Marshall, but Montigue. Great Grandpere, Grand Mamon's papa, was Colonel Francois Michel Jourdan deMontigue, and he had inherited this land from his father who had received it from a general de Napoleon as commendation for great service. Grandpa Nate didn't come into the family until after the war--and a Yankee at that. As a Yankee soldier he had seen Grand Mamon, a young maiden of sixteen, in New Orleans in sixty-three, and vowed that when this war was over, and if he were still alive, he would come back to

Clarissa

her, come hell or highwater, which he did in sixty-seven. He came back, he wooed her, he courted her, he fought other men, both Southerners and Yankees, for her, he won most of his fights, and all of Grand Mamon"s little heart. He took over what was left of the plantation, and resumed clearing the land, planting, and harvesting, the same system he had, ostensibly, fought so hard against. When Great Grandpere died in seventy-seven, the same year the Yankees left the South, Grandpa Nate changed the name from Montigue to Marshall, and it has been Marshall ever since.

It was Sarah-Candace who put the album together. Before, the pictures were everywhere--in shoe boxes, in hat boxes, wrapped in brown paper and stuffed in chest of drawers, in desk drawers, and some were even found in trunks in the stable. Once she started collecting and organizing the pictu4es--she must have been twelve or thirteen at the time--it became for her, not a chore, but a work of love, an obsession. I suppose you might say(since both of her parents died when she was quite young) that the bases of her education about the family has been from the pictu4s, my talking to her, and she listening to him down there in the quarters. Because she spent as much time alone with him as she ever did alone with me, and probably twice as much as she did alone with Jack. Ever since she was a small child she was there with him. As Grandpa Nate had

taught him to ride, to fish, to hunt, he in turn would teach her the same. Her first herse was a Shetland pony called Snook. Snook was callico, and as wild as anything in captivity could be wild. After plowing up a portion of the pasture to softened the ground, Mathu got one of the boys in the quarters to half-break Snook, before putting her on. She didn't have time to gather the reins, before she was off. Mathu plucked a clod of dirt out of her mouth, cleared out her ears, brushed the dirt out of her hair, felt to see that neither her legs or arms were broken, and set her back on Snook again. The second time she stayed on twice as long as she did the first time, which totaled to about one half of a second. Mathu stucked his finger far back into her mouth to pluck out more dirt, he cleaned out her ears so she could hear him when he spoke to her, he just touched at her hair, knowing she was going to be right back down ~~there~~ on the ground again, he worked her legs and arms to see if they were all right, and swung her back upon Snook. And down she came, back to the ground where all must go, whether you're big or small. Janey, Emily, and I watched from the West Gallery, with Janey and I both holding Emily back who wanted to go out there and rescue her only child. We kept telling her that the earth was soft, and that Clay, Sarah-Candace's own daddy, was right there leaning on the ~~xxxx~~ rail watching it all--but this did not stop Emily from trying to reach her child.

She moaned. She had wanted to give him a son as he had wished for, but it was God who saw fit that the child should be female and not male--and she saw no reason to kill the child, or to try to change her sex, to get back even with the Master, or with her, the mother. She pleaded with us to have mercy, she threatened Janey, she tried bribing me--but we paid her no attention. We knew that Sarah-Candace would have to do it one day, so why not now. After the sixth or seventh fall, and when it seemed that Snook was just getting warmed up good, Mathu turned to Clay. Clay was chewing tobacco. He chewed a while longer before spitting, then chewed again before saying anything. "Up to her," he said. "She'll have to live with it, not me. I had to break mine without help." "Get me back up there," she said to Mathu. "Ride that sonofabitch, I will; or kill me, ~~let him~~ he must."

She was fishing before she was riding, and hunting not long afterwards. She started out with the BB gun, later the rifle, then the shotgun. She could stop a rabbit at twenty paces, with the dogs only a few feet behind. She learned to wing shoot geese and ducks as well as anyone else on the place--except him. She played with all his children, with all the children in the quarters. Probably half of them down there were his, because God knows they ~~xxx~~ sure looked

like him enough. He taught her fair play, regardless of skin color. He told her about the times that he had fought with Jack and Brother. Whenever she came upon a picture she did not recognize, she came either to me, or went into the quarters to him. Sometimes his stories varied. They were not lies. They varied. Maybe he was only adding something that he had forgotten to say before. She sat on his porch and listened. She knew that he knew things about I men lives that I did not know, and she always wanted to know about the men in her family. I could tell her about the gentle things gentlemen did, but he could tell her about things that went on in the fields, and about fishing and hunting, and about women who were not gentlewomen. Of course he told her these things when she was much older and could understand.

But she would race the children in the quarters, sometime on feet, and other time on horseback. And it was he who told her, whether she won or lost, she should take it well--as a lady should. I taught her how to sit at the table with the napkin on her lap, and how to use the knife and the fork, and how to raise thecup and the glass; but he taught her how to ride, how to fish, how to prop the gun against the shoulder and lead the game and how to squeeze the trigger and not jerk it. He taught her this, and he taught her how not to be angry if she lost a foot race or a

horse race. When she was small he would sometime ride her on his back. But he never rode her alone. There was always a black child, too. Sometimes he would carry three of them--one on his back, one under each arm.

He was always there. He was there as the earth is there, as the river is there, as the trees are there. Not a day passed when we did not see him there. He called her Candy from the beginning, and everyone else did the same, except Emily. Emily did not want her only child to have a nickname, and until she died she refused to call her anything but Sarah-Candace. In the evenings she would stand out on the back gallery or in the backyard and call to her in the quarters. But because the words "Sarah-Candace" did not travel as well as the single word, "Candy" did, Candy would not hear her, and would find excuse to stay down there just a little bit longer. Sometimes it would be pitch black before he would bring her home. That was before she had Snook or Ripp.

When she was born, the plantation had long past, and the land had been sectioned off for sharecropping. Originally the land had been ~~dived~~ divided among blacks and Cajuns, but by the time she was born the Cajuns had acquired most of the land, and the blacks worked only a small part of it. While she sat on the porch, back against a post, knees drawn up together, her hands clasped together over her knees, her chin resting on her hands, she listened to him talk about the fields;

how at one time there were as many as thirty women and children hoeing the cotton, or the cane, or corn, singing as they worked, while another dozen men plowed another xxxxxx section of the land. He told her about the great contest between the cane cutters, the contest between cotton pickers, and she listened to it all. Not all the time were his stories the same, but she knew they were truer than others, because no one else had stories like that to tell. Surely not Jack and certainly not I. Because Jack had never been a field man(he had always handled the store and the books) and I, of course, had stayed at the house. Clay, her daddy, was killed in a plane crash when she was very small, so she went either to Mathu or her Parrain, Gilbert Charles, and since he came to the house so infrequently, she went to Mathu and listened, though his stories did vary. By now she had discovered the pictures and had begun to organize them chronologically, and combining the pictures with what we told her she tried to reach a conclusion of how it must have been the seventy-five years before she was born. With Jack and me, she understood family history, the house, and the store. But since Jack did not know the field, did not care about the hot sun, and I did not either, and since the ledgers did not satisfy her curiosity, she went back into the quarters to Mathu.

At about the same time she started organizing the pictures in the album, she started taking him a bottle of

White Port. When he refused to give her any, she started taking him a bottle with a quarter or a third already gone. He liked vodka, and she took that, too, but with a small portion already gone. There were pictures of his drinking, and she sitting on the porch, on the floor, back against the post, watching him. No pictures of her drinking with him until much later.

The young man she would one day marry was a Cajun, but she hated those who leased the land. Looking at the pictures in the album, she saw none of Cajuns working the land before nineteen thirty. She saw the Cajun overseer on horse back, but she saw no Cajuns walking behind plows. She saw women in long gingham dresses and straw hats over bandannas hoeing the cotton and the cane. She saw men in overalls and jumpers cutting and loading the cane for the mill. She saw children dragging long cotton sacks between the xxxx rows. But all these were black. Even when she looked inside the ledgers, before thirty, the only Cajun name she came across was the overseer's. Yet, when she was growing up in the fifties, she saw that the Cajuns had most of the land, and the blacks had little or none. And she asked why. Jack told her about machinery and about war. But she did not understand, and he tried to explain it to her. He told her that the Cajuns made better crop with the tractors than the blacks did with mules. And that the war had taken most

of the young black men, leaving only the old people who could not do the work. This was not satisfactory to her, and she went into the quarters, taking a bottle with a third already gone, and sitting and listening.

No, he did not try to turn her against them--no, he did not. But he told her how it was before they came to Marshall. When she asked him about machinery and about war, he told her that the Cajuns had gotten the better land from the beginning(which was true) and that by having the better land from the beginning they were able to grow better crop from the beginning, and therefore able to buy machinery. Machinery made even better crop, and that was how they were able to eventually take over the whole place. Even if the war had not taken the young black men away, he told her, they still would not have been able to compete with the machines. Strong backs, no matter how strong, could not compete with the machines, he told her. But why were they given the better land in the beginning? she asked him. You'll have to get that from them at the front, he told her. She asked me,and she asked Jack. Jack told her not to listen to everything Mathu said. She went to the ledgers and the ledgers supported what Mathu had told her. She came back to Jack. Jack told her he had nothing to do with the fields, other than to keep record. He told her that Brother, who was her grandpa, and Clay, her father, were the field people, and it

were they who had portioned off the land, saying who should have this or that. I had nothing to do with it, he told her, but kept books. But I thought they liked the people in the quarters? she asked him. They did, Jack told her. But still we must take what the land can give to us, and machines could and still can give us more than man's back, and that's the long and short of it. It happened long ago, he told her. And you can't do a thing about it today. Give them a place to live out the rest of their days, and let it go at that. It won't be long before it all will be nothing but a memory anyway.

I closed the album and laid it in my lap and looked out at the dahlias and sunflowers against the fence. Left of the gate were the marigolds, still in bloom. And still farther left, between the gallery and the pasture, were the sweet olives. In the outer yard, the Spanish moss hung as limp as old curtains in a closed room. It was just too hot to be October.

I thought to myself: poor Sarah-Candace. Poor, poor Sarah-Candace. She was born a little too late. And not quite late enough.