

"What's wrong with them books you already got?" Mary said.

"Miss Jane is not in them," I said.

"It's all right, Mary," Miss Jane said.

"You don't have to say nothing less you want," Mary said.

"He'll just keep on bothering me."

"Not if you tell him stay 'way from here," Mary said. "And I can always borrow Etienne's shotgun."

"When you want start?" Miss Jane said.

"You mean it's all right?" I said.

Now, they just looked at me. I couldn't read Miss Jane's mind. When a person is over a hundred years old it's hard to tell what she is thinking. But Mary was only in her sixties, and I could read her mind well. She still wanted to borrow Etienne's shotgun.

"Is Monday all right?" I asked.

"Monday's good," Miss Jane said.

I had planned to record Miss Jane's story on tape that summer before school opened again. After the first two weeks I was sure I could do it. But during that third week everything slowed up to an almost complete halt. Miss Jane began to forget everything. I don't know whether she was doing this purposely or not, but suddenly she could not remember anything any more. The only thing that saved me was that there were other people at the house every day that I interviewed her, and they were glad to help in every way that they could. Miss Jane was

constantly turning to one of them for the answer. An old man called Pap was her main source. Pap was in his mid-eighties, he had lived on that plantation all his life, and he could remember everything that had happened in the parish since the turn of the century. But even Pap's knowledge could not keep the interview within the schedule that I had planned. And after school opened for the new semester all plans were changed, because now I could only interview Miss Jane on weekends. I would talk to her and the other people at the house for several hours, then I would leave until the following Saturday or Sunday. (I should mention here that even though I have used only Miss Jane's voice throughout the narrative, there were times when others carried the story for her. When she was tired, or when she just did not feel like talking any more, or when she had forgotten certain things, someone else would always pick up the narration. Miss Jane would sit there listening until she got ready to talk again. If she agreed with what the other person was saying she might let him go on for quite a while. But if she did not agree, she would shake her head and say: "No, no, no, no, no." The other person would not contradict her, because, after[#]all, this was her story.

There were times when I thought the narrative was taking ridiculous directions. Miss Jane would talk about one thing one day and the next day she would talk about something else totally different. If I were bold enough to ask: "But what