



Bail

LEE COLE

THEY PICKED HIM UP on a two year old bench warrant and I got one of those automated calls from the jail, asking if I'd accept the charges. I had to work in the morning, painting an old house in Lowertown, and though Louis was a holdover from a part of my life I was trying to move past, I figured I couldn't leave him twisting in the wind.

He wouldn't tell me over the phone what put him there, just that it was a long story and that bail was two thousand dollars. He said his grandmother would put up the money, if only I drove her down there.

"Can't she drive herself?" I said.

"She's a little old lady who's never been in a fucking jail before."

"Why not your brother? Why not Connie?"

Louis breathed into the receiver. "My brother won't come for me," he said. "Connie's not an option. My grandmother can't stand her." I realized then that I wasn't the first person he'd called. I wasn't even the third or fourth.

Louis lived at his grandmother's place, in a room above the garage. The house was way down by the county line, almost to Leeder Bottoms. I bought some gritty coffee at the Shell-mart and drove out there, past the subdivisions and the trailers, past the flooded fields. I fiddled with the radio dial, conjuring voices of preachers through the static, telling me, in one way or another, that to see heaven, I'd have to be born again. I tried to watch the road, but the pools of rain were glowing. They looked like rippled mirrors out there in the tobacco, all of them reflecting the same moon.

When I pulled up, Louis's grandmother was standing out front in a black, knee length raincoat, hugging her purse. She lived in a farmhouse no bigger than a double-wide with vinyl siding over the old clapboards and a big propane tank out back. Louis tried to keep the place up after his granddad died. He put up the new siding, painted the shutters, patched the roof. He kept the hummingbird feeders filled with syrup. That was his way of paying rent, I guess—doing little things like that.

I swept the fast food wrappers and cigarette cellophanes from the seat and reached to swing open the door for her. She looked at my Buick like it was some foreign food I'd asked her to eat.

"How are you tonight, Mrs. Hardin?" I said.

"It's one in the morning," she said, by way of an answer.

"I guess it is." My voice deflated in the air. Mrs. Hardin sat there with her mouth taut and her purse pulled close as we drove, the air around her smelling thickly of makeup and perfume. It must have taken her an hour to get ready, just to go to the jail. I checked my speed on the road, put on the classical station. It was something baroque and stately. Handel, maybe.

The jailhouse in Paducah is small—just a white brick box, enclosed by razor wire. It's an eyesore alongside the pillared houses and antebellum churches. The courthouse stands beside it, colonial and authoritative. Garden lights shine up on the red brick at night and homeless men gather by the fountain. There were a few drinking from pint bottles in paper sacks that night when we parked. Mrs. Hardin kept her eyes fixed on them, and I heard the leather squeak as she hugged her purse a little tighter.

She looked like she'd stepped out of the 1940's, clicking up the sidewalk in her raincoat, a scarf to cover her hair. I held the door for her, touched her arm reassuringly as we entered. She didn't seem to notice. We stood in line for a while in something like a lobby, washed out with fluorescent light. There were a few haggard looking people sitting in chairs, wadding tissues in their hands. The cop at the desk was separated from us by glass with wire mesh, but the rest of us were all together. He spoke through a speaker. The processing area for incoming prisoners was open to our view, just behind the "lobby." A man and a woman were cuffed there, hurling abuse at each other. There were green bruises around the woman's eyes and she had all this tangled hair piled on her head. She rolled her shoulders in a rhythmic way, like some kind of tic, and clapped

her flip-flops on the tile. The man beside her sat with his knees wide and his belly sagging between them, a BREATHE RIGHT strip across the bridge of his nose. His ear was cauliflowered and dark blood stained his bowling shirt. “She gave me the clap!” he kept yelling. “She’s got the clap!”

“That’s a lie!” she said. “That’s a fucking lie!”

“She’s a whore,” he said. “She’s got a rotten pussy.”

Some cop with nitrile gloves told them to shut up, then went back to scribbling on his clipboard. Mrs. Hardin kept her eyes fixed on the window. Her mouth was drawn up, and in the hard light, I could really see the creases in her face. I wanted to tell her she could wait outside, but she didn’t trust me with her money any more than the prisoners or the homeless by the fountain. When it came time to pay, she took a big envelope from her purse labeled “emergency,” thick with twenties and fifties, and handed it to the cop at the window, saying she was there for her grandson, Louis. A few minutes later, he came out, squinting one eye from the light and rubbing his wrists where they’d been cuffed.

Louis rode in the back with his knees sprawled out and an unlit cigarette dangling from his lip. “I’m sorry you had to do this,” he said. He sounded like he meant it. I could tell he’d been crying and I figured he was feeling pretty low. I saw him in the rearview, staring out the window with glassy eyes.

“We’ll worry about all this in the morning,” Mrs. Hardin said. “Tonight, you just sleep.”

I thought I’d just drop them off and that would be the end of it, but Louis squeezed my shoulder when we pulled up and said, “Come in for a minute, Billy Boy. We should talk.”

“Aren’t you going to bed, Louis?” his grandmother said.

“Not yet,” he said.

I followed Louis, and Mrs. Hardin went off the opposite way, toward the house. Her heels crunched in the gravel, then stopped suddenly. Louis and I both turned.

“Are you just going to keep going on like this?” she said.

“I don’t know,” Louis said softly. I suppose that was the honest answer. He sucked in air, held his stomach tight. He was holding back what he could. I had

to look down at my shoes.

Mrs. Hardin turned and climbed the porch steps to the house without looking back, holding to the rail. Louis stared for a long time at the place where she'd been standing, flexing his fingers and working the bones in his jaw.

"Maybe I should leave," I said finally. He cut his eyes over, as though he'd remembered suddenly that I was there.

"No," he said. "Come upstairs. I could use the company."

I had to be at work at 8 o'clock, but I didn't want to leave him alone. Maybe I didn't want to be alone either. My mother's boyfriend, Chuck, got me the painting job as a favor. His crew was in high demand, restoring the Victorian homes in Lowertown. It was the latest in a long run of odd jobs since I'd dropped out of school in Louisville, where I'd studied the piano seriously for a few years. I'd worked on a tree farm, as a line cook at Wilma's Diner in Melber, and then briefly at the paper mill in Wickliffe, when they needed seasonal help.

When I started on Chuck's crew, it was on the condition that I stay sober. I had suffered a bad seizure on Easter Sunday, coming down off a three day Xanax binge, and busted my head open on the corner of my mother's glass coffee table. Everybody always talks about their moment of clarity, and I guess that was it for me, coming to with my mother screaming, "He's dead! He's dead!" and Chuck peeling open my eyelids, telling her, "He's still with us."

Painting houses was the first job that paid anything more than chump change, and I had big plans. I knew a guy from my time in Louisville who lived in New Orleans with his wife and their newborn daughter. He was always telling me I should come down there, that it was like a musician's paradise. He told me I could crash for a few weeks while I figured out something permanent. I had a picture in my mind of a banana tree and a pink stucco cottage, and all the cold beer and boiled crawfish I could eat. All I had to do was get there, and that meant painting for a few more months, staying out of trouble. It was hard work, and I didn't much look forward to waking in a few hours to spend my morning standing on a ladder, squinting up at the eaves with a chipper in hand and flakes of lead paint falling in my eyes. I told myself I'd stay for only a few minutes.

The garage where Louis lived was really a converted gambrel barn and his

room was in the loft. I followed him through the lower part, which held old farming tools and smelled of kerosene and wet hay. An old tractor, that had belonged to his deceased grandfather, sat in the center with its tires rotted and flat. There were disc harrows and tobacco pegs, old spools of chicken wire. Bleached antlers and traps for various animals were hung along the walls.

We climbed the wooden stairs to his room, Louis lighting the way with his cell phone. The loft wasn't so bad—the walls had sheetrock, the floor was carpeted—but it wasn't the Ritz either. A little window unit wheezed in the corner and stirred the air as best it could. A brass bed sat below the window with a broken snow globe and a stick of incense on the sill, and against the rear wall, above a chintz sofa, Louis had plastered photographs and posters and magazine clippings of all his heroes. I recognized a few—Hank Williams, Townes Van Zandt, Ramblin' Jack Elliott. Bob was up there too, only Louis called him Bobbie Zimmerman, like they were old pals from way back, before he changed his name to Dylan. When Louis first came down from New Jersey, after his mother passed, my friends and I used to joke that he was overcompensating just a little for his Yankee roots with all the hillbilly stuff. “We don't all play banjos and tie our pants with rope, you know,” I told him. We'd heard enough bluegrass to last us a lifetime, preferring instead the Talking Heads and Sonic Youth. But Louis loved all that old time music. His mother had sung Pete Seeger songs to him instead of lullabies. He was an old man, even at age thirteen when I met him.

He cleared away a guitar and a few record sleeves from the couch and offered me a seat. Lady, his old, arthritic Collie, hopped down from the bed and limped stiffly to where I sat. I let her lick my hands while Louis lipped a cigarette and called Connie. He held the phone between his cheek and shoulder and moved around the room, collecting all the sticky beer cans that made the room smell like sour bread. “You can come on over,” he said into the phone. “She's gone to bed.”

Louis pulled up a cane chair and sat across from me. He clapped his knees. “So,” he said. “Here we are.”

“I can't stay long.”

“I know, I know,” he said. “You don't want to lose that job. That's a good opportunity.”

“I guess.”

“You ever ask your stepdad if they need a carpenter?”

“He’s just my mom’s boyfriend,” I said. “It’s never felt like the right time to bring it up.”

“Right.” He took a long drag, sucking with his cheeks, and looked at the floor like he was thinking hard on something. “Well, you tell him I’m good. Tell him I’m a hard worker. When the time’s right, I mean.”

“I can’t make any promises,” I said. If it had been anyone else, I would’ve said something to Chuck. But Louis couldn’t hold down a job for more than a month. He’d just stop showing up, go back to selling pills or Mexican brick pack. The painting gig was my last chance. I didn’t want Louis to ruin that.

“I’m gonna need something when I get out,” Louis said. “Could be several months from now, but I’ll need all the help I can get. Course, it all depends on the trial, but I’ll have the public lawyer. It doesn’t look good this time.” He rubbed his thighs like they were cold. “Doesn’t look good at all, man,” he said. He tapped his cigarette into the broken top of the snow globe. Ashes sifted down on the rooftops of the tiny village.

“What was the warrant for?” I said. “You never told me.”

“I got caught shoplifting a vacuum from the Walmart a couple years back and never showed up for my court date. They pulled me over cause my taillight was out, saw the bench warrant, and then...” He snapped his fingers. “It was off to jail.” He laughed a little then, like he couldn’t quite believe it. I knew that look. I’d seen it in my own face. You stand above yourself and look down, and you think, *Am I the one to have done these things? To have lived this life?* Then your heart gets tight with fear, presses up against your ribs, and another voice inside says, *Yes, that was you.* “With all my priors,” he said, “those prescriptions I forged, the possession charge when I was a minor—they’ll put me in The Castle up at Eddyville, for six months at least. No ankle bracelets this time. No probation.”

“Louis,” I said, “why’d you steal a vacuum?”

He looked at me like I was stupid. “My carpet was dirty,” he said.

We waited for Connie. Louis paced and smoked, voiced what he was thinking. He’d stand, and then sit again, till his knees started jumping and he had to move. He went from one wall to the other. Finally, he sat still and took quick

drags, picking bits of tobacco from his tongue.

"I gotta get my shit together," he said. "Starting tomorrow, I'm not gonna make any more excuses. I'm gonna get straight. I'm gonna get to work."

"Tomorrow, huh?"

"Tomorrow's a beautiful thing, Billy Boy," he said. He reached out and clapped my shoulder.

"Easy for you to say," I said. "You don't have to be up at eight."

"Don't be ornery," he said. "I haven't seen you in months. I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to tell you how much I value our friendship."

"Come on."

"I'm serious," he said. "Look at me." He held out his open palms. "I'm stone cold sober and I'm telling you that I love you and that you're a true friend. You were there for me tonight. That's what counts in this life. Being there for a buddy when he needs you."

"Let's not get carried away."

"You can't even say it can you? You can't even say you love me too. Your old buddy."

I rubbed my face with my palms. "Louis, it's two thirty in the morning. All I want to do is sleep."

"Just stay a little longer," he said. "I don't want to be alone here."

"Connie will be along any minute."

"That's not the same," he said. "Just a while longer. Just an hour."

I said all right and eased back in the sofa while Louis picked at his guitar. He started playing a Merle Travis song, "Nine Pound Hammer," sang the words under his breath. *Roll on buddy, don't roll so slow. How can I roll, when the wheels won't go?* I caught myself grinning, singing it with him. I couldn't help it. Lady curled against me and rested her chin on my thigh. Her sad eyes flitted about the room.

Connie came in twenty minutes later and I could see from the way her face sagged that she was high. They kissed sloppily and held each other for a little longer than I found comfortable.

"Do you have it?" I heard him say. She fished around in her backpack and held up a pill bottle after a minute or two. She glanced back at me and hunched her shoulders. "It's all right," Louis said. "He'll find out one way or another."

"Find out what?"

Without a word to me, Connie unscrewed the lid and rattled a few tablets out on the table.

“That’s plenty for tonight,” Louis said.

I knew Connie pilfered Xanax from her mother, but these were Percocets. I’d done enough to know.

“Let me tell you what’s going to happen,” Louis said. “In the morning, my dad’s gonna find out my grandma—his 84 year old mother—bailed me out, and he’s gonna come down here mad as hell, maybe with the sheriff, who knows. But this my last night here, you can believe that.”

“Maybe not,” I said. “Maybe you can work something out.”

He gave a half-way grin, looked at the backs of his knuckles. “You don’t know my dad,” he said. “Point is, we’re gonna do one for the road, just to hold us over till I can get some Opana from my brother tomorrow.”

“What about the rest?”

“I’ll have to put the bottle back where I found it,” he said. “In the medicine cabinet up at the house.”

I looked to the window and saw the farmhouse framed there, lightless and quiet.

“I see,” I said.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he said. “She’s got a million of these up there, a whole treasure chest. It’s all from a knee surgery five years ago. She doesn’t even need them anymore.”

I couldn’t say much. I was just as guilty. All the pills I ever took came from a person in pain. Maybe they were needed, maybe they weren’t. But somebody’s name was always on the bottle, and it was never mine.

“So you’re putting it back tonight?” I said.

“After I sleep a while,” he said. “Unless you want them.”

“I don’t know,” I said. I thought of my pink cottage, my tree with its glossy green leaves. A picture postcard—a place that probably wasn’t even real except in my mind. I might have said yes if he’d given me a moment longer to answer.

Louis picked at the guitar while Connie broke down the pills. He sang a few by Bill Monroe, and one by Jean Ritchie I knew—“The L and N Don’t Stop Here Anymore.” His nails clacked against the rosewood and struck the copper,

sent the songs drifting past me. Old songs, about a Kentucky we never knew. Songs about hollers and coal mines. I watched Connie drop the tablets one by one into a plastic cup with cold water in the bottom, swirling them around. “Gotta get the acetaminophen out of them,” she said. “That shit’ll kill you.”

Louis brought out coffee filters and poured the water through into an empty glass once the filler had settled.

“What happened to tomorrow?” I said. “What happened to getting your shit together?”

“Tomorrow’s a long way off.”

Connie piled the wet powder on the table with her fingers, narrowing her eyes, stopping occasionally to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear or to wipe her nose with her wrist. Her nails were all different colors—pink and green and black.

They swallowed the bitter water, pressed their thumbs to the bottom of the glass and rubbed their gums. They did this like it was anything else—like they were peeling oranges or counting money. After ten minutes or so, the lines in Louis’s face went slack. He tried to pick but his fingers were clumsy, wouldn’t behave the way he wanted. He set the guitar aside.

“Do you want one, Billy Boy?” Connie asked me.

“I can’t,” I said. I wanted to. I wanted that same fluttering warmth behind my eyes, that feeling of sinking into a place without time. I wanted to be there with them, but I didn’t let on.

“He’s working, honey,” Louis said.

“I’ll take his then,” she said. “Do you want another, baby?”

“No,” Louis said. He sat up, cleared his throat. “I want to be able to talk to my friend. We’re gonna have ourselves a conversation.”

Connie took another swallow and slunk down in her seat. She looked at me, cocked her head sideways. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“He picked me up from the jail, remember?” Louis said.

“No, I mean why are you in Paducah? What are you doing here?”

“I paint houses that are falling apart,” I said.

“I thought you were in college. I thought you played piano.”

“All my piano work has been pro bono,” I said. I waited for a laugh, but she just stared with her mouth open and drew a pack of Salems from her back pocket. “That was a couple years ago,” I said finally.

“Oh,” she said. She lit her cig, blew the smoke behind her shoulder. “Well welcome home,” she said.

I pulled Lady’s ears, let her fur pass through my fingers. I felt little knots and tumors under her skin, all over.

“So how mad was she?” Connie said.

“She was disappointed,” Louis said. “Obviously.”

“She thinks it’s my fault. She thinks I’ve ruined you.”

“She thought the same thing about Mom when it came to my father,” Louis said. “They hated each other.”

“Why’s that?” Connie said. She blinked slowly, touched her tongue to her lip.

“Because she was a Jewish girl from New Jersey who sang Joan Baez songs and never shaved her armpits. She was my grandmother’s worse nightmare. She didn’t even come up to see her in the hospital when she was sick.”

“That’s awful,” Connie said. “She’s a bitter person. I can tell that about people.”

“Don’t say that,” he said. “You don’t know a goddamn thing about her. She’s just been here her whole life, is all. She doesn’t know any better.”

“Jesus, okay,” Connie said. “You’re the one that’s always complaining about her.”

“That’s different,” he said. “She might be the only decent person I know. Her and Billy Boy anyway.” He winked at me.

“I’m not decent?” she said.

“You’re all right.”

“Just all right?”

“I wouldn’t kick you out of bed for eating crackers.”

She balled up her fist and socked him in the shoulder.

“Christ!”

“That’s all I’m good for then?”

“I’m only kidding.”

She stood up and went to the brass bed. She sat with her back against the wall and a pillow across her knees. “I’m going to sit over here,” she said. “You two can be decent together.”

Louis shrugged and went back to plucking idly. Connie’s head dipped a few times. She’d jolt awake and then slump again, until finally she drifted off altogether, leaving Louis and I alone.

“Do you want a beer? Something to eat?” Louis said. “I can run up to the house and bring you some leftovers. There’s date nut bread up there.”

“No thanks,” I said.

He scratched at his lip, looked around the room for something to present itself. “What if we picked a few together?” he said. “Played some of the songs we used to play? How would that be? You could play my Martin and I’ll switch to the Fender.”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Your head’s so full of theory, it’d do you good to play some simple songs.”

“I don’t remember any.”

“That’s horseshit,” he said. “But suit yourself. We’ll just listen.”

He put on a record and sat on the bed beside Connie. The soles of his feet stuck out over the edge, scuffed and dirty. His eyelids eased down and fluttered, and a pang of jealousy cut through my chest. I wanted what he had—a reprieve from pain. Why was it me every morning on a ladder instead of Louis—knees sore, paint flecked on my cheeks, hearing the coal barges blare their horns on the Ohio?

“I ought to be going,” I said.

“Just stay for a while,” he said, his words slurred, as if he couldn’t quite work his mouth the way he wanted to.

“It’s been a while already.”

“You’ll call me tomorrow though, right?” He leaned forward, shook his head as if to wake himself up.

“It is tomorrow.”

His mouth twisted into a pained smile. “I guess it is, isn’t it?” he said, trying to laugh at himself. He looked at me and then looked away, so I wouldn’t see his eyes welling. “I don’t know what to do,” he said. “I wish somebody would tell me what I’m supposed to do.”

I touched his shoulder. “Get some sleep,” I said.

“You’re gonna hate me now. I can see it in your face.”

“I don’t hate you.”

“You don’t love me though,” he said. “You can’t say it. You’re too good.”

I let my hand fall. He was right, of course, and I considered saying so, just to hurt him somehow.

“I have to go,” I said. “I have to.”

Louis let himself fall back against the wall. The dog hopped over and scrambled up onto the bed. She situated herself, nuzzling against him, and they looked at me, both of them, like they were waiting for something to happen.

“Go ahead,” Louis said. “You’ve wanted to leave since you showed up.”

I sat in my Buick for a long time, watching the farmhouse, feeling a strange, hollow sadness. Everything I cared about seemed faraway and flimsy—the painting gig, New Orleans. I could say that robbing her was what I had in mind when I went back, but I’m not sure if that’s true. The porch light was on, casting the house in a kind of blue, ghostly light, and I sat there thinking about the old woman sleeping and the silence inside. Maybe that’s all I was after—a place to be quiet for a little while, to collect my swarming thoughts. Or maybe some part of me knew I wanted more than that.

I pelted up the hill, past Mrs. Hardin’s fake animals, frozen and staring. Once, there had been Holsteins and chickens picking beetles from the grass. Now there were ceramic rabbits, plastic deer. The birds were made of porcelain.

I stopped to listen on the porch for any sign of life inside, but only the wind chimes moved a little, clinking hollowly. The rusty spring on the screen door whined when I pulled it open. Inside, the air smelled of the day’s cooking—date nut bread and bacon—and something was chirping in the darkness, making sounds like a bat. I waited, listening, letting the objects of the room take shape. The squealing noise grew louder, and I searched for its source, worried it might be some kind of alarm. On the end table, two hearing aids sat in a glass candy dish. I picked them up and held them in my palm, the tiny speakers whistling with feedback.

To my left was a hallway, where I imagined I’d find the bathroom. I touched my fingers along the walls and felt for each step like a blind man, as though at any moment I might come to a ledge and step off into open space. I heard her—not quite snoring but breathing nasally. It seemed to come from the end of the hallway. With my left hand, I felt a doorframe, and stepping through it, the sole of my boot came down on linoleum.

A single toothbrush sat in a cup on the vanity. There were other sad things—a bottle of *White Diamonds* perfume, liniments smelling of menthol, partial dentures resting in a dish of water. The branches of a pear tree outside clacked

tentatively against a small window behind the tub. With my cell phone light, I searched the mirrored medicine cabinet. Louis had been right. It was a pharmaceutical treasure trove. I saw the names on labels I recognized: alprazolam, diazepam, gabapentin, tramadol. I saw the telltale warning—"Don't combine with alcohol."

Without a second thought really, I stretched my shirt and began collecting the bottles, not bothering to check the labels. This was not so much a decision as it was a surrender. Some of them were useless I'm sure—to me anyway. But I'd sort them out later. My heart throbbed at the prospect. The notion that she might need them for some ailment didn't matter to me. I was high already, thinking of the future, blood whirring in my brain, and somehow, a bottle slipped from my hand. In reaching for it, the bottles piled in my shirt spilled out and went clattering onto the floor. They plinked off the toilet bowl, rattled against the tub. They spun like tops on the linoleum. I looked at them when they were still and tried to understand what I'd done, what chains of cause and effect would be set in motion, but they were covered up by the bloodspots pulsing in my eyes.

A door whined open, and a wedge of light fell across the hallway, spilling partly into the bathroom. I stood just outside of it in the shadow, my knees close to buckling. She stepped into the doorway in a housecoat, her eyes small and gleaming, and for a crazy moment, I looked around for something I could hit her with—the basket of seashells above the toilet, the can of air freshener—anything. I thought of the lid on the toilet tank. It was heavy—fifteen pounds at least and hard as stone.

"I know you're there," she said. "Don't think I can't see you."

She stood stock still at the threshold, shoulders squared. An old woman peering into the darkness. You could kill her, I thought. You could crack her skull and leave her bleeding. You could kill Louis, too, and Connie, press pillows over their faces while they slept like babies, dreaming their dope-dreams. You could leave and never return, and no one would know who you had been, and all of it would be forgotten. It seemed for a moment almost possible.

"I remember when you were born," she said, her voice barely a whisper. "Your eyes were shining. I was the first to hold you after your mother."

The light blazed silver in her hair, and though her face was obscure, I somehow knew she was not afraid. "I'd give you my last dime," she said. "I'd give you everything, if I knew you'd turn your life around."

I wanted to confess, to tell her everything, but I couldn't bring myself to speak or move. I felt the same way I did the morning I woke from my seizure, my mother screaming, "He's dead! He's dead!" I knew I wasn't, but I couldn't tell her. I couldn't make my body do anything. So I just lay there, my pantleg wet, blood in my mouth. It was an empty, helpless feeling, one I swore I'd never have again. But there I was. Same old story. A voice inside says, *Am I the one to have lived this life?* And the other voice says, *Yes, that was you.*

Mrs. Hardin walked away, her slippers chuffing on the carpet. She clicked out the light. I was free to go, to paint my crumbling houses, to leave Louis behind. To go on dreaming vainly of faraway, tropical places. But it was hard, taking the first step. Birds were beginning to twitter outside and the first pink glow of morning was lightening the tobacco fields, but I remained as long as I could, till the shadow receded and my face was no longer hidden.