



a
novel

pillow

ANDREW BATTERSHILL

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Good old head, I'd had it a long time. It was a little soft now, a little pulpy, and more than a little tender ... I could still use the head. I could use it another year anyway.

– Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*

To restore consciousness apply restoratives, twist and pull the ears, rub the neck, chafe the hands, pat the face, pull the arms and legs, and apply ice to the spine. When consciousness is regained find out if the boy knows his own name ... wrap the individual in warm blankets and give him some hot tea.

– Edwin Haislet, *Boxing*

I do not understand why, or how, I am still living, or, for all the more reason, what I am living ... and yet I am living, I have even discovered that I care about life.

– André Breton,
preface to the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*

/
getting a sweat on

Pillow spent the last half of his run throwing straight punches up into the air, smiling and imagining three cheetahs charging, gathering momentum across the empty plain of the sky. He saw the way their hips moved, and he pictured the way their faces looked up close: calm and still, being pushed on hard by the wind. As he cooled down and stretched on the thin, fading strip of grass between his apartment and the sidewalk, Pillow came back to himself a little and laughed. But he couldn't help it. It's normal to be excited when you're going to the zoo.

Pillow was of the mind that going to the zoo was just about the best thing a person could do with a day. He'd been as a child, but the way he figured it, when you're a kid you're sort of maxed out on amazement: tall buildings are amazing, cars are amazing, subways are terrifying and amazing, grown men's feet are terrifying and amazing, and so on. According to Pillow, you're sort of getting screwed by going to the zoo once when you're eight. What they should do is let you get used to the human world, be at full size in it for a while, let the awe fizzle a bit and then bring you to the zoo. Because snow just isn't the same after you've seen two polar bears, and you can't really understand how nice it is that orangutans hold hands with their feet until you've held hands as an adult, as someone who knows for sure how soft and warm and soothing someone else's skin can be.

While he'd been boxing (and cheating) professionally, Pillow had worked out an arrangement with one of the zookeepers to buy the leftover anabolic steroids they had for gorillas who stopped making testosterone in captivity. When he started working for Bretton's syndicate he'd made the introductions, and now once a month Pillow would go to the always-abandoned picnic area behind the Giraffe Park to drop off the money and pick up the shipment.

Pillow took the stairs three at a time, hitting a short hop at the top of each landing and switching his feet briskly in the air. He swung into the open courtyard hallway and saw a cake-slice boat sinking into a turbulent sea of icing.

Every third Wednesday, a box with a small wrapped parcel in it and an envelope taped to the lid would be propped up against his front door when he got in from his workout. The envelope had his money in it, and he wasn't allowed to open the parcel.

Pillow's monthly \$1,000 payment was actually more like a \$975 payment, because he thought it only right to pay for the zoo (tigers don't come cheap), but he didn't believe in memberships.

As he pulled his car into the lot, Pillow craned his neck painfully to look into the cheetah enclosure. Between the thin metal diamonds of fence he saw an empty patch of brown grass. Pillow wished he had more time to spare.

At first he'd tried to pace himself at the zoo, looking at one section a month, but by now he'd seen it all, many times over, so his path depended on what kind of animals he felt like staring at for a long time. There were the animals that Pillow was pretty sure were dinosaurs, like the rhinoceros with what looked like armoured plates going along his sides with a slot for the tail, or any of the crazy lizards. Another option was the animals that reminded him of people, like monkeys or, in a weird way, turtles. There were the slow, big and sad animals, like elephants or warthogs, and he could watch them just shuffle around, listlessly making marks in the dirt and sniffing their food instead of eating it. On the other end of things there were the fast animals, the giant cats and so forth; he could watch them run and still keep track of them, even the cheetahs, who ran faster than he'd believed legs could move a thing.

Most of the things Pillow really liked to do were obviously morally wrong. He wasn't an idiot; clearly it was wrong to punch people in the face for money. But there had been an art to it, and it had been thrilling and thoughtful for him. The zoo was also evil, a jail for animals who'd committed no crimes, but he loved it. The way Pillow figured it, love wasn't about goodness, it wasn't about being right, loving the very best person, having the most ethical fun. Love was about being alone and making some decisions.

A lot of the happiest seconds of Pillow's life had happened in places like the zoo. Places where wonder coated the ceiling, and

twenty different kinds of piss coated the floors. Places where you could watch a pinnacle of animal movement and dexterity from a distance, with loud, horrible people beside you shouting obnoxious things at abused animals whose hurt was their entertainment.

To Pillow, none of that meant he shouldn't be happy when a gorilla looked him in the eyes and crossed its feet at the ankles. It didn't make that something he could have imagined on his own.

That day he was a little pressed for time. He had to meet Breton and Louise Aragon about a job, so he paid and beelined to the giraffes, barely stopping to watch a wolf or two while they were sleeping. As he entered the picnic area, he peeked between the trees toward the giraffes and saw that they were all eating. Pillow would have happily spared a few minutes if they'd been playing in the fake river, or passing a ball around, but he didn't feel like watching anyone else pig out. The drugs were waiting under a park bench, and Pillow casually swapped boxes and went to climb the fence out of the zoo. Pillow always climbed the fence out, wanting to keep a low profile. He wondered if anyone noticed that he'd walk in the front door and never back out.

Pillow knew he'd missed out on good animals for the month, but he was careful to spend an extra second straddling the top of the fence on his way out, looking at the giraffe's face just above the line of trees, its huge purple tongue sprawling graphically in all directions, its head bobbing and tipping around as it took steps he couldn't see.

The crime syndicate Pillow had swiftly and easily and sadly flowed into after his neurologist had told-not-asked him to retire made a lot of noise and very little money, and was skewed heavily to the crime end of organized crime, rather than the organized side.

The head of the syndicate was a mid-sized player named André Breton. He and his boys bought and sold drugs, made book, loan-sharked and had started two riots for fun. Breton's syndicate were mostly recruited from his days as a Marxist firebomber in Paris. They'd done low-level hack terrorist stuff until they caught too much attention and bolted the country for a spot in the superstructure and the cash to pay for pretty paintings. Breton was supposed to be a tastemaker: rich people called him in to tell them what art to buy. He used it as a way to launder money and move bribes.

Most of the time, the Breton crew hung out and got high, talked about their dreams and played parlour games until Breton gave them something to do. And tonight what Breton had given Pillow and Louise Aragon to do was guard-dog a deal to buy some stolen coins.

As often happened, Pillow ended up having to wait around outside his apartment, kicking the toe of one shoe with the heel of the other, as he waited for his ride to some place they hadn't bothered to tell him in advance.

Most of what Pillow did was watch people exchange money. He'd make collections and stand behind Breton at deals, watching the cash and making sure nobody got out of line. It wasn't usually to muscle anybody. He was supposed to be a former boxer, violence just an impression he made. The heavy wet work was handled by Breton's two favourites, Don Costes and Louise Aragon.

Pillow was in a very minor, but reasonably comfortable, spot in the organization. He knew what he was to them and what he wasn't: he wasn't particularly useful but he had uses; he wasn't exactly trusted but he was liked; he wasn't going to make much money but he wasn't going to cost them much either. Plus, he had used to be a celebrity, which is always worth a very sad and very tiny bit.

After what felt like a long time, Louise Aragon pulled up in a car so old and so black and so heavy it might actually have been a Model T. She screeched to a stop and kicked the huge, steel passenger-side door open. Pillow swung himself into the car and settled in already slumped.

‘How do you do, Pillow?’

Pillow stayed still, suggesting a shrug with just the way he breathed. ‘You have really flexible legs.’

‘Thank you, sir. I’ve never stretched a thing. Sometimes one is just a marvel.’

Pillow nodded evenly, then turned to look at the dark sky framed by black metal through plate glass. He felt the car moving under him, in the way that you can feel things that move faster than your legs carry you and it just feels like sitting down.

Louise was one of Breton’s go-to people. She was thirty-something and half-sad in that way fun people without a whole lot of luck get. She was the kind of friend Pillow had, which is to say a very friendly acquaintance.

‘Do you want to know where we’re going, Pillow?’

‘I’m more curious about those legs – you don’t stretch ’em even a little?’ Pillow feinted like he was going to tickle her leg, reached up and snapped her bra strap when she brought her hand down to defend the leg.

Louise laughed. ‘Bark like the dog you is, Pillow, bark like the dog you is.’

‘Does introducing you to your wife buy me any leeway, Louise, huh? I think it gets me a little and I take space where I find it. Space is everywhere, and we need every little, tiny inch of it.’

Louise flapped her hand like it was a talking human mouth, or possibly a very stupid and hungry bird mouth, then she put both hands back on the wheel and refocused on her incredibly erratic driving.

Pillow rolled his shoulders back and took to stretching them. His shirt lifted up, and Louise poked his bellybutton. She had her bangs pulled back tight. Her haircut looked like a wave that had been ironed.

‘So, just to get it out of the way,’ she said, ‘we’re going to Mad Love. And as always, I am deeply sorry.’

Mad Love was the bar where a good deal of the money and brain cells Pillow had held on to after fighting had gone to die. It was one of the dingiest places he’d ever seen or smelled or touched. The place, like a lot of things, gave him a headache that would make other people’s headaches jealous.

‘Well, that’s a bummer. I guess you should maybe tell me what I’ll be doing there.’

‘What you always do, my man: look tall and try not to fall asleep.’

‘I don’t look tall, I *am* tall, and I don’t make any promises about sleeping.’

Louise screeched the car to a stop in an alley that looked like every other alley. ‘Can you at least promise to dream well then?’

Pillow pulled one long strand of hair loose from her head and let it flop unevenly down the middle of her face. ‘For you, I’ll try.’

Louise looked at Pillow for an extra second and smiled at him in the way you’d smile at a picture of a really cool building that’s already been torn down.

If you're almost anyone, being talented at one thing will ruin you for all the other things. Had he, after a life of not doing much, stumbled into his work at the syndicate, it's possible that Pillow would have paid his dues, learned all the angles and taken pride in the nuances of his job. But that hadn't happened. Instead Pillow had been elite at a thing he loved, and it had been one of those things you can't do forever, or even all that long. So he knew what talent was, what it felt like as you used it, and he knew, now, how it felt to do everything else.

Since retiring, Pillow had done a lot. He'd confirmed that avoiding cocaine had (while he'd done it) been a good idea. He'd gone on a pretty good streak at the sports book, then a really terrible streak at the sports book, and then he'd stopped going to the sports book. He'd put three people in the hospital. He'd waited out ten thousand cluster headaches. He'd watched deals and checked perimeters and patted people down. And he hadn't been good enough at any of it to start to care.

Tonight, for instance, he'd absently checked the alleys, he'd absently noted the colour of the cars on the street and he'd absently been keeping half an eye on the back entrance, somewhere between sitting and lying down on a folding chair next to the bar, his legs crossed at the ankle, under the dirty-yellow glow of the half-burned-out lights of Mad Love.

Louise had explained, and Pillow had listened in the spinny and unprofessional manner that was usual for him. And Bataille was now half an hour late, which was making Louise nervous and Pillow mildly curious.

The boxer rotated his ankle in a circle until it made pretty much exactly the sound of two pool balls hitting each other from across the table. It was a technique he often used in place of clearing his throat to start a conversation.

'Yes, Pillow, what?'

Pillow jabbed a finger at Louise's suitcase. 'So how much have you got there?'

'Have you ever known me to name a number?'

‘I know it’s less than two hundred grand. Just me and you? Bataille showing up late. Gotta be less than that. Then again, ol’ Georges is a hand-over-fist gambler, and a fist-somewheres-else sex freak, and he’s got to be into Breton for at least a hundred large.’ Pillow moved his head from side to side, as if weighing it against itself. ‘Hundred fifty’s the line, and I’ll bet the under. Y’know what they’re giving me? To be here, I mean.’

Louise wiped her forehead aggressively. ‘I really don’t care. Would you please just be helpful. This whole thing is weird. Bataille’s late. Just be helpful.’

‘Now four hundred bucks might sound like a lot, y’know, for a night. But how many nights do you get? And how much is the man in the suit taking for himself?’ Pillow stretched his arms to their full length, splayed his fingers. ‘Working with your hands, you’re always just working for tips. Putting your neck out there for one, two, half of one percent off the top, when the man feels like giving it to you. When he wants to look like he feels generous. You get me?’

Louise spun all the way to face him in her chair. ‘Can you go outside and look around? We’re sitting here, he’s late. We’re just sitting here, that doesn’t feel like a set-up to you? A little, maybe?’

Pillow shrugged, pulled his knees back toward himself and rested his elbows on them. ‘I’m sleepy.’

‘Are you okay, Pillow? We can call someone else.’

Pillow’s smile was about as thin as sauna blood. He finally hoisted himself up. He walked with a relaxed gait that seemed to generate power only from the hips, as if the bottom half of his body had somewhere to be in about an hour and the top half would just as soon stay home.

Pillow ducked out to the parking lot. He looked out across the street, empty and lifeless except for the street lights and the neon spinning and fading out into the cleared-out, half-cold air of the dead night. The back entrance and alley probably needed checking, but he had a headache and was enjoying the air and the view, so Pillow stayed still and right where he was and tried to distract himself by casually trying to figure out the situation he was in right now.

Bataille worked at the rare-coin archive, he had for years. Pretty much the same years he'd been shovelling chips onto the tables and paper money straight into the hands of sex workers. Bataille had finally stolen some coins worth something. The four coins he'd stolen were misprints: they were supposed to be these old Gaulish ones that showed centaurs, but some illiterate coin-maker guy had gotten confused and done them as horse bodies with four human arms for legs, instead of the other way around.

Pillow thought about how it would feel to be a misprinted centaur. You get the big dumb head, the huge shitty lungs and heart, the colicky stomach, all toppling around on the tiny arms of the smartest animal around. He imagined being that misprint and meeting some real centaurs, seeing them and knowing – not in words because you've got the stupid horse brain but in the shallow, skittish and profound way horses know things – that you were the bad end of that coin. The centaurs jaunting around all proud, doing math equations while they galloped. It was the kind of reverie that Pillow often distracted himself with in the long hours he was supposed to be paying attention to dangerous details in the real world.

He was just beginning what would have probably been a lengthy internal debate about which kind of assholes centaurs have when one of those dangerous details skidded, as if from nowhere, into the parking lot. The car stopped a few feet away from Pillow, and he dropped instinctively into an athletic stance, but forgot to pull his gun or make any move to alert Louise, which were the things he was supposed to do.

A man fell out of the driver-side door and kicked up desperately from the ground, finally closing the door as a very skinny, sick-looking man in the back seat reached forward to scratch at the window. Pillow jogged over and helped the old man to his feet.

Georges Bataille gave off the same general impression as a scrap of paper that had been loose in someone's pocket for a very long time. He had a full head of razor-thin white hair swooping out to the side. He was holding one of his hands tightly with the other, his suit tenting at the back like the world's cheapest parachute.

‘Thank you, Pillow.’

Before Pillow could respond, the man locked in the car flailed his arms ineffectually at the back windows, making a hollow scratching sound. Pillow finally recognized him as Antonin Artaud, a clinically insane morphine addict who hung out around the periphery of Breton’s world. Mostly he just talked crazy, occasionally made a scene and hit people up for money. Every time Artaud moved his arms, Pillow thought about skeletons and hand puppets, and hand puppets who were also skeletons.

‘Don’t you thank shit, Georges. You’re late, Louise is pissed and you need to tell me what this back-seat situation is. Homeboy is not an invited guest.’

‘I know, and I’m sorry.’ Bataille took a breath and then spoke quickly, probably eager to get the details out before his suit jacket caught too much wind and carried him all the way out to sea. ‘I was late. I miscalculated badly. You see, I’d left this young girl locked in an antique bureau, and just an hour before I was to –’

Pillow reached over and palmed Bataille’s face. ‘Georges, Georges, Georges, no. That is not the level of detail I’m looking for here, my man. Dude in the back seat, coins, go.’ He released the older man’s face and patted him on the head.

‘That’s Artaud in the back seat. I let him stay with me for a few days, I showed him the coins and he’s stolen them. He was passed out when I left, so I don’t know where he took them, but he’s the only one who knew where they were. So I brought him to you, and now he’s reacting as a threatened and deeply wild beast.’

Pillow clicked his mouth evenly. ‘That was super-concise actually, thanks. Okey-dokey, so let’s get your man into the bar and, uh, see what Louise thinks.’ Pillow bent over to make a visual appraisal of the inside of the car. Artaud flung a limp, loose arm at the car window. Pillow waved at him.

‘Why’s he wearing a priest outfit, Georges?’

‘He says he has the spirit of a god and the body of a priest.’

‘Fair enough, I guess. So, here’s the plan. I mean, we want to get him out of the car before he remembers that cars are locked from

the inside, y'know? I already got my miles in today, so I'm not in the mood to chase him. He's a little agitated, you're kind of, like, an old, weak librarian, no disrespect, so I'm just going open the door and grab him. I mean, he looks like he wants a fight, but there's no way he's got more than fifteen seconds of gas in him.' Pillow threw a short flurry of punches into the air, then bounced on the balls of his feet a few times. 'Stand back, big boy.'

As soon as Pillow opened the door, Artaud crawled halfway out, supported himself against the door frame and tried to stab him with an incredibly shiny and sharp dinner fork. Pillow swayed back, pivoted around the door and push-kicked Artaud in the chest, so he flew back into the car, his arms and legs collapsing toward his sternum like it was a tiny, sudden black hole. Pillow slammed the door and turned toward Bataille, wagging his finger loosely.

'Okay. To sum it up, you're at home, you're doing some kind of horrible sex thing and you realize that you're late for a stolen-centaur-coin sale, and your lunatic friend in a morphine coma has stolen your centaur coins, so you decide to pack him up and bring him to the buy of the coins he's stolen. I get all that, ish, y'know? But why do you give him a dinner fork? That's ... that's where I'm lost on this one.'

'He must have had it in his sock.'

'How is that the first thing you say? Just right to the sock? "Hey, sorry I almost got your eye stabbed, Pillow." Nope? Just out with the sock idea.'

'The foot is the most human part of the body. Think of apes.'

'Okay, I'm about done with you. You know I love apes, you know that about me, Georges, but now is not the time. So, since this is a majillion percent your fault, you're going to help me with this situation here. I need both hands, so you open the door, I'll handle Artaud, and you stay out of the way, sound good?'

Bataille's hair flapped like a tarp being used as a tent in a very gentle wind. He moved beside the car, and Pillow positioned himself on the other side, took two deep breaths, then nodded for Bataille to open the door.

Artaud did most of the work himself, launching himself out of the car face-first, making a flailing backhand jab at Pillow with the fork as he fell to the ground. Pillow dropped onto the lunatic's frail chest with both knees, grabbed Artaud's wrist and bounced it against the pavement until he finally let go of the weapon.

Pillow got off, and Artaud didn't stand but rather rolled on his side and coughed pneumonically into the pavement. Pillow reached down and scooped the guy up, throwing him over his shoulder like a strangely proportioned bag of potatoes. Bataille followed them inside. Halfway across the parking lot Artaud got some energy back and started kicking and flailing a bit, but there wasn't much horsepower behind it, and Pillow just kept walking. It felt like carrying an animate easel.

Seeing him tell the story from a third-party vantage, Pillow thought Bataille looked and sounded a lot more like a TV-movie actor than a person explaining real things that had happened to him. His hands were moving all stiffly, jutting out when he wanted to make a point, raising awkwardly to poke at his temple to show he was upset. He occasionally glanced involuntarily over at Pillow, like he was the camera you're absolutely not supposed to look at. Pillow was kind of intrigued by it, imagining what it would be like to go through life so awkward you looked like someone inexpertly pretending to do all the things you were really doing.

There hadn't been any rope or anything at the bar, so they had just held Artaud still in his chair until he finally quieted down a little and realized that Pillow could keep subduing him pretty much indefinitely. Now Artaud was sitting quietly at a table, staring intensely at the beer taps, occasionally poking without looking at a bloody spot on his priest collar and tasting the blood. His teeth were starting to stain red.

Louise finally finished up with Bataille, and she turned around to look at Artaud. She moved over to Pillow, stood on her toes and helped herself up on his shoulder as she spoke quietly into his ear. 'We're going to talk to him a few minutes, and when he tells us where the coins are, you go get them and I bring the cash home. Yes?'

'You going to pay Artaud?'

'Not more than we have to, ten grand maybe.'

'Sure, you want me to do it?'

'Would you? He is quite creepy.'

Pillow patted her on the back, moved over behind Artaud and clamped down hard on his shoulders. 'Hey there. Here's the deal: we're going to give you ten grand, you're going to tell us where the coins are, I'm going to forget that you tried to stick me with a fork that time, and everybody's going to go home with most of the blood they have in them right now.'

Artaud nodded and didn't turn around. 'I'm reminded of the first rule of improvised comedy – it's a good rule, in that it works best when you break it: yes, and?'

Pillow spun the chair with Artaud in it, shoved it onto its back two legs and held Artaud suspended like that for a second. 'You are going to focus, you are going to pay attention and you are going to talk deal with us, or I will hurt you badly enough to change your life. Not the way you need it to change either, that other way.'

Pillow let go of the chair and Artaud lurched forward, then straightened himself. He reached his arm back and laid it on the top of the chair, where it rested like a long, deflated balloon. He looked up at Pillow, his eyes swimming like a seven-year-old dropped off a fishing boat. 'A deal. How about this, I'll make you a deal, shit lips, I'll make you a really good deal. You give me a quick five minutes to myself, as you stand there in your dreary, life's-just-one-long-graveyard-shift-and-then-you-die circus tent of a white T-shirt, you give me a couple minutes and a little bit of privacy maybe, and I work myself up a feverish, Priapus-the-protector-of-livestock hard-on, and then you bring yourself over, jump on it, lift your ankles to the sky and spin yourself in a circle a good six or seven times, and then you get up, thank me, leave the room and shoot yourself in the mouth. That's my offer. You're welcome.'

The shit-talker in Pillow found the whole thing pretty funny. He made eye contact with Louise, who was less amused. Bataille looked like a movie extra who is really just a person on the street they filmed by accident – his face almost looked blurred out for legal reasons. Louise finally spoke. 'Pillow, time is a thing here. Let's turn it up a little.'

Pillow earnestly did not enjoy hurting people who weren't fighting back. Artaud *had* tried to stab him, but it hadn't come close enough to feel like a real attempt. 'I'm kind of curious where he's going with this one.'

'Oh, for ...'

Artaud sprang to his feet and pointed a bony, quaking finger at Bataille. 'You don't understand the favour I'm doing. Cruelty is sometimes ugly but it has energy, does it not? Isn't that the best we can ask?' Artaud closed his eyes and turned his face to the roof, raising his hands evenly along his sides. 'I'm a cursed man, because

the only place I feel truth is in my veins. I'm cruel because I love all animals.' He opened his eyes and looked down. 'I'm saying these things to you because cruelty is the only language a squealing sow truly understands.' Artaud lunged in Bataille's general direction, and Pillow wrapped an arm around his neck and pulled the lunatic roughly behind him as he put his arm out toward Louise, looking to parry whatever reach she made for Artaud.

'Easy there, sugar bear, he's fragile. I got this.'

Louise reached up to point at Pillow. 'He's going to get his balls cut off if he doesn't tell me where those coins are.'

'Whoa, whoa, whoa. Easy, man. No harm, no foul. Let's keep everyone's sex bits out of this thing.'

Louise was a few inches away from them, still mad-dogging Artaud, and before Pillow could even drop his hand, Louise fell, spouting blood from her neck and teeth, and the air smelled like smoke.

Pillow released Artaud and moved for the bar, tripping over a chair. He knew he was hearing gunshots, but it sounded like steel pipes hitting each other. He got to his knees and threw himself behind the bar. Still sprawled out, he saw the briefcase with the money in it and pulled it toward him with his foot.

Artaud moved through the room, waving his arms around like a car-lot inflatable stick person with a leak in it, screaming, 'I am tired of always butchering meat and never getting a bite!'

Pillow took a deep breath and looked over the bar. He reached for the gun tucked in the back of his pants, gripped the handle and changed his mind. Pillow had never fired a gun at someone, and this seemed like a hopeless time to try it out. A man with a ski mask was using an arm the size of a rhino's leg to pin Bataille to the bar. The other ski mask was taller and skinnier, and was moving in toward Louise's body with a gun still trained on her, looking a bit like a cop on a realistic television show. There was blood on the floor. Artaud was still loose, running toward the skinny ski mask now.

Almost casually the ski mask threw out an arm and caught Artaud with the butt of the gun. Artaud fell oddly slowly, like a tree blown out of its roots. Pillow rubbed his eyes, took a breath,

fumbled with the briefcase's latches and finally got them open. He gripped the open briefcase and threw it as hard and as high in the air as he could. It hit the ceiling hard, and the bills spread out and drifted down slowly, the way leaves fall off a tree that's just been hit by a car. Pillow vaulted the bar and hit the fire escape at a run, losing his legs as he met the pavement in the alley. He scrambled to his feet and took off sprinting. He reached the street, crossing it diagonally and without looking.

He was a beautiful runner.