

# WELL NESS

*a novel*

*Author of  
THE NIT*



# NATHAN HILL

**ALSO BY NATHAN HILL**

*The Nix*

# WELLNESS

A NOVEL

NATHAN HILL



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THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK  
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For my parents

**COME WITH**





**H**E LIVES ALONE on the fourth floor of an old brick building with no view of the sky. When he looks out his window, all he can see is her window—across the alley, an arm’s length away, where she lives alone on the fourth floor of her own old building. They don’t know each other’s names. They have never spoken. It is winter in Chicago.

Barely any light enters the narrow alley between them, and barely any rain either, or snow or sleet or fog or that crackling wet January stuff the locals call “wintry mix.” The alley is dark and still and without weather. It seems to have no atmosphere at all, a hollow stitched into the city for the singular purpose of separating things from things, like outer space.

She first appeared to him on Christmas Eve. He’d gone to bed early that night feeling horribly sorry for himself—the only soul in his whole raucous building with nowhere else to be—when a light snapped on across the alley, and a small warm glow replaced his window’s usual yawning dark. He sat up, walked to the window, peeked out. There she was, a flurry of movement, arranging, unpacking, pulling small vibrant dresses from large matching suitcases. Her window was so close to him, and *she* was so close to him—their apartments separated by the distance of a single ambitious jump—that he scooted back a few feet to more fully submerge himself in his darkness. He sat there on his heels and stared for a short while, until the staring felt improper and indecent and he contritely returned to bed. But he has, in the weeks since, come back to the theater of this window, and more often than he’d like to admit. He sometimes sits here, hidden, and, for a few minutes at a time, he watches.

To say that he finds her beautiful is too simple. Of course he finds her beautiful—objectively, classically, *obviously* beautiful. Even just the way she walks—with a kind of buoyancy, a cheerful jaunty bounce—has him thoroughly charmed. She glides across the floor of her apartment in thick socks, occasionally doing an impromptu twirl, the skirt of her dress billowing briefly around her. In this drab and filthy place, she prefers dresses—bright flowered sundresses incongruous amid the grit of this neighborhood, the cold of this winter. She tucks her legs under them as she sits in her plush velvet armchair, a few candles glowing nearby, her face impassive and cool, holding a book in one hand, the other hand idly tracing the lip of a wineglass. He watches her touch that glass and wonders how a little fingertip can inspire such a large torment.

Her apartment is decorated with postcards from places he assumes she's been—Paris, Venice, Barcelona, Rome—and framed posters of art he assumes she's seen in person: the statue of David, the *Pietà*, *The Last Supper*, *Guernica*. Her tastes are manifold and intimidating; meanwhile, he's never even seen an ocean.

She reads inordinately, at all hours, flicking on her yellow bedside lamp at two o'clock in the morning to page through large and unwieldy textbooks—biology, neurology, psychology, microeconomics—or various stage plays, or collections of poetry, or thick histories of wars and empires, or scientific journals with inscrutable names and bland gray bindings. She listens to music he assumes is classical for the way her head sways to it. He strains to identify book jackets and album covers, then rushes to the public library the next day to read all the authors that rouse and unsleep her, and listen to all the symphonies she seems to have on repeat: the *Haffner*, the *Eroica*, the *New World*, the *Unfinished*, the *Fantastique*. He imagines that if they ever actually speak, he will drop some morsel of *Symphonie Fantastique* knowledge and she will be impressed with him and fall in love.

If they ever actually speak.

She's exactly the kind of person—cultured, worldly—that he came to this frighteningly big city to find. The obvious flaw in the plan, he realizes

now, is that a woman so cultured and worldly would never be interested in a guy as uncultured, as provincial, as backward and coarse as him.

Only once has he seen her entertain a guest. A man. She spent an appalling amount of time in the bathroom before he arrived, and tried on six dresses, finally picking the tightest one—a purple one. She pulled her hair back. She put on makeup, washed it off, put it back on. She took two showers. She looked like a stranger. The man arrived with a six-pack of beer and they spent what seemed like an awkward and humorless two hours together. Then he left with a handshake. He never came back.

Afterward, she changed into a ratty old T-shirt and sat around all evening eating cold cereal in a fit of private sloth. She didn't cry. She just sat there.

He watched her, across their oxygenless alley, thinking that she was, in this moment, beautiful, though that word *beautiful* seemed suddenly too narrow to contain the situation. Beauty has both public and private faces, he thought, and it is difficult for one not to annul the other. He wrote her a note on the back of a Chicago postcard: *You would never have to pretend with me.* Then he threw it away and tried again: *You would never have to be someone trying to be someone else.* But he didn't send them. He never sends them.

Sometimes her apartment is dark, and he goes about his night—his ordinary, hermetic night—wondering where she might be.

That's when she's watching him.

She sits at her window, in the darkness, and he cannot see her.

She studies him, observes him, notes his stillness, his tranquility, the admirable way he sits cross-legged on his bed and, persistently, for hours, just reads. He is always alone in there. His apartment—a desolate little box of unadorned white walls and a cinder-block bookshelf and a futon condemned to the floor—is not a home that anticipates guests. Loneliness, it seems, holds him like a buttonhole.

To say that she finds him handsome is too simple. Rather, she finds him handsome insofar as he seems unaware that he could be handsome—a dark goatee obscuring a delicate baby face, big sweaters disguising a waifish body. His hair is a few years past clean-cut and now falls in oily ropes over

his eyes and down to his chin. His fashions are fully apocalyptic: threadbare black shirts and black combat boots and dark jeans in urgent need of patching. She's seen no evidence that he owns a single necktie.

Sometimes he stands in front of the mirror shirtless, ashen, disapproving. He is *so small*—short and anemic and skinny as an addict. He survives on cigarettes and the occasional meal—boxed and plastic-wrapped and microwavable, usually, or sometimes powdered and rehydrated into borderline edible things. Witnessing this makes her feel as she does while watching reckless pigeons alight on the El's deadly electrified lines.

He needs vegetables in his life.

Potassium and iron. Fiber and fructose. Dense chewy grains and colorful juices. All the elements and elixirs of good health. She wants to wrap a pineapple in ribbon. She'd send it with a note. A new fruit every week. It would say: *Don't do this to yourself.*

For almost a month she's watched as tattoos spread ivy-like across his back, now connecting in a riot of pattern and color that's migrating down his slender arms, and she thinks: *I could live with that.* In fact, there's something reassuring about an assertive tattoo, especially a tattoo that's visible even while wearing a collared work shirt. It speaks to a confidence of personality, she thinks, a person with the strength of his convictions—a person *with* convictions—contrary to her own everyday inner crisis, and the question that's dogged her since moving to Chicago: *Who will I become?* Or maybe more accurately: *Which of my many selves is the true one?* The boy with the aggressive tattoo seems to provide a new way forward, an antidote to the anxiety of incoherence.

He's an artist—that much is clear, for he can most often be found mixing paints and solvents, inks and dyes, plucking photo papers out of chemical baths or leaning over a light box inspecting film negatives through a small round magnifier. She's amazed at how long he can look. He'll spend an hour comparing just two frames, staring at one, then the other, and then the first again, searching for the more perfect image. And when he's found it, he circles the frame with a red grease pencil, every other negative is x-ed out, and she applauds his decisiveness: when he chooses a picture, or a

tattoo, or a certain bohemian lifestyle, he chooses devotedly. It is a quality that she—who cannot decide on even the simplest things: what to wear, what to study, where to live, whom to love, *what to do with her life*—both envies and covets. This boy has a mind calmed by high purpose; she feels like a bean jumping against its pod.

He's exactly the kind of person—defiant, passionate—that she came to this remote city to find. The obvious flaw in the plan, she realizes now, is that a man so defiant and passionate would never be interested in a girl as conventional, as conformist, as dull and bourgeois as her.

Thus, they do not speak, and the winter nights pass slowly, glacially, the ice coating tree branches like barnacles. All season it's the same: when his light is off, he is watching her; when her light is off, she is watching him. And on the nights she isn't home, he sits there feeling dejected, desperate, maybe even a little pathetic, and he gazes upon her window and feels like time is zipping away, opportunities gone, feels like he is losing a race with the life he wishes he could lead. And on the nights he isn't home, she sits there feeling forsaken, feeling once again so bluntly dented by the world, and she examines his window like it's an aquarium, hoping to see some wonderful thing erupt from the gloom.

And so here they are, lingering in the shadows. Outside, the snow falls plump and quiet. Inside, they are alone in their separate little studios, in their crumbling old buildings. Both their lights are off. They both watch for the other's return. They sit near their windows and wait. They stare across the alley, into dark apartments, and they don't know it, but they're staring at each other.

THEIR BUILDINGS were never meant to be habitable. His was, originally, a factory. Hers, a warehouse. Whoever built these structures did not predict people living here, and so did not give those people a view. Both buildings were constructed in the 1890s, profitable until the 1950s, abandoned in the 1960s, and dormant thereafter. That is, until now, January 1993, when suddenly they've been seized and resuscitated into new purpose—cheap apartments and studio space for the city's starving artists—and his job is to document it.

He is to be the building's memory, capturing the wretchedness before the rehabilitation. Very soon, crews of workers—*worker* here being a word used pretty laxly to describe the poets and painters and bass guitarists who do this labor in exchange for reduced rent—will begin the cleaning and sanding and painting and waste removal necessary to make the place generally livable. And so here he is, in the foulest, most unmended reaches of the former factory, wandering with a borrowed camera and documenting the ruins.

He's up on the fifth floor, walking the long hallways, each footfall stirring up a fog of powder and filth. He photographs the dirt, and the allover rubble of collapsed ceiling tiles and plaster and brick. He photographs the elaborate graffiti. He photographs the broken windows, the curtains decomposed to fibrous ribbons. He's worried about stumbling onto a sleeping squatter, and debating whether it's better in this situation to be quiet or loud. If he's quiet, maybe he can avoid a confrontation. But if he's loud, maybe the squatter will wake and scare off.

He stops when something catches his eye: sunlight on a wall, streaking across antique paint that's peeling, slowly, crinklingly, with a thousand tiny fissures and clefts. A hundred years after its application, this paint is now liberating itself, and the texture reminds him of the surface craquelure of old portraits by Dutch masters. It also reminds him, more prosaically, of that small pond on his father's land back home, the one that would go dry during drought summers to expose the wet mud underneath, the mud hardening in the sun and cracking into jumbled little fractals in the dirt. The paint up here looks like that, like the riven earth, and he shoots it in profile so as to channel a viewer's gaze along its deep, exfoliated edges—less a photograph *of* something than a photograph *about* something: age, change, transfiguration.

He moves on. He decides to be loud, not confident he can effectively sneak while wearing these boots—thick and steel-reinforced, purchased cheaply at the Army/Navy surplus, necessary given the nails sticking straight up from the floor, and the broken glass that is the evidence of some raucous night involving shattered beer bottles. He should also be wearing a mask, he thinks, because of the dust in the air, the dust and dirt and probably mold and mildew and toxic lead and unfriendly microbes, a still and hazy particulate cloud that turns the sunlight coming in via windows to glimmering streaks that in landscape photography would be called God beams but are much more blasphemous here. Gunk beams, maybe.

And then there are the needles. He finds a lot of these, clustered in small methodical piles in some dark back corner, tenaciously amassed and emptied but for a scrap of dark sludge at the tips, and he photographs them with the shallowest depth of field this lens is capable of, so that the picture is almost entirely blurry, which he thinks cleverly evokes what it might have felt like for whatever poor soul was here, craving the needle. Heroin inspires an odd love-hate relationship in the neighborhood—people mildly complain about the hypodermics they find in the park, and about the abandoned buildings down the street known widely as shooting galleries for how many junkies can be found there. And yet? Among the artists who live in his building and who occasionally complain about the heroin, most of

them also sort of look like they do it. And often. They have that skinny, stringy-haired, sunken-eyed, colorless look of the frequently high. And in fact this was how he came to be living here; the landlord found him at his first gallery showing and asked: “Are you Jack Baker?”

“I am,” he said.

“You’re the photographer?”

“Yep.”

It was an autumn show at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. On display were pieces by the school’s incoming studio art majors, and among the roughly two dozen freshmen, Jack was the only one who worked primarily in landscape photos. The other students were expressionist painters of exorbitant talent, or they assembled elaborate sculptures from mixed objects, or they worked in video art, their installations built of complexly interconnected televisions and VCRs.

Jack, meanwhile, took Polaroids.

Of trees.

Trees back home, out on the prairie, growing as they did when they were exposed to the weather: tilted, their trunks swept sideways by the unyielding wind.

Nine of these Polaroids were taped in a three-by-three grid on the gallery’s white wall, Jack standing nearby waiting for anyone to engage with him on the matter of his art, which nobody did. Dozens of well-dressed collectors had passed him by when this pale man in a ragged white sweater and unlaced work boots introduced himself. His name was Benjamin Quince, and he was a graduate student, a master’s candidate in new media studies, now in his seventh year in the program, working on a thesis, which, to a freshman like Jack, all sounded like an unfathomable level of academic achievement. Benjamin was literally the first person to ask Jack a question, the question being: “So. Trees?”

“The wind blows hard where I come from,” Jack said. “It makes the trees grow up crooked.”

“I see,” Benjamin said, squinting behind big round eyeglasses, idly rubbing his chin of wiry patchwork scruff. His wool sweater was stretched



and honeycombed and doiled in places. His wispy hair was unwashed and hay-bale brown and of a particular length that required diligent ear retucking. He said: “And where do you come from?”

“Kansas,” Jack said.

“Ah,” he said, nodding, as if this confirmed something important. “The heartland.”

“Yes.”

“America’s breadbasket.”

“That’s right.”

“Kansas. Is that corn or wheat? I’m struggling to picture it.”

“You know the song ‘Home on the Range’?”

“Sure.”

“That’s basically where I’m from.”

“Good job getting out,” Benjamin said, winking, then he studied the Polaroids for a moment. “I’ll bet nobody’s interested in these pictures.”

“Thanks so much.”

“I’m not making a value judgment. Just saying, these images are probably not popular with this particular crowd. Am I right?”

“Most people linger for between one and three seconds before smiling pleasantly and moving on.”

“And do you understand why?”

“Not really.”

“Because Polaroids are not appreciable assets.”

“Sorry?”

“They don’t sell. A Polaroid has never once been auctioned at Sotheby’s. Polaroids are mass-produced, instant, cheap, impermanent. The chemicals will degrade, the image will dissolve. A Polaroid is not a durable good. These people here?” Benjamin motioned vaguely to everyone else in the room. “They describe themselves as collectors, but a better word would be *investors*. They’re capitalist stooges. Materialistic tools. They’re looking to buy low and sell high. Your problem is that a Polaroid will never sell high.”

“Honestly I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Good for you.”

“Mostly I just liked those trees.”

“I have to say I admire your authenticity. You’re not another of these pandering sluts. I dig that.” Then Benjamin came closer, put a hand on Jack’s shoulder, whisper-spoke: “Listen. I own a building in Wicker Park. An abandoned old ironworks. I bought it for a dollar. The bank just wanted to get it off the books. You know about Wicker Park?”

“Not really.”

“North Side. About fifteen minutes on the train. Take the Blue Line six stops and it’s a completely different world.”

“Different how?”

“Primarily, it’s real. It is a place of substance. That’s where the real art is happening, unlike this donor-pleasing bullshit. And real music too, not the fake corporate crap on the radio. I’m renovating my building, a total gut job, turning it into a co-op for creatives. I’m calling it the Foundry. Very exclusive, invitation only, nothing mainstream, nothing conventional, nothing frat boy, no yuppies allowed.”

“Sounds nice.”

“Do you do heroin?”

“No.”

“But it *looks* like you do heroin. Which is perfect. You want in?”

It was the first time in his life that being skinny and frail worked somewhat in Jack’s favor—it got him this apartment in Wicker Park, where he’s living rent-free in exchange for photographic services, living among musicians and artists and writers who mostly also look like they do heroin. It’s a thrilling place to have landed, and Jack finds that despite the poor condition of his apartment building, despite the darkness and bleakness and shivering cold of a real Chicago winter, despite the neighborhood’s frequent muggings, and the alleged dealers stalking the park, and the gangs with their complex rivalries and occasional disputes, he loves it. It is his first winter away from home and he cannot believe how alive he feels here, how utterly, truly, and unprecedentedly free. The city is noisy and dirty and dangerous and expensive and he loves it. He loves the noise in particular, the roar of the elevated trains, the honks of impatient cabbies, the shriek of

police sirens, the moaning of lake ice grinding against concrete embankments. And he loves those nights when the noise stops, when the city is shut down and muffled by a storm dropping the fattest, slowest snow he has ever seen, and cars are buried on the curbs, and the sky is a scrim of reflected orange streetlight, and each footfall is greeted with a satisfying eluvial crunch. He loves the city at night, especially when he exits the Art Institute and looks upon Michigan Avenue and the great skyline beyond, the buildings that touch the clouds on thickly overcast days, their colossal flat faces inscribed with hundreds of tiny yellow squares where the business of the city works overtime.

It is an odd feeling, to sense one's aliveness, for perhaps the very first time, to understand that life up until this point was not being lived, exactly; it was being endured.

In Chicago, he's seeing art in person (museums being unavailable where he comes from); and he's watching theater (never having attended a school that even once put on a play); and he's eating foods he's never eaten before (foods he had not once encountered until now: pesto, pita, empanadas, pierogi, baba ghanoush); and he's listening to classmates sincerely debate who's better: John Ashbery or Frank O'Hara? Arne Naess or Noam Chomsky? David Bowie or literally anybody else? (Debates that would earn nothing from people back home but blank stares and possibly beatings.) For the rest of his life, the songs released this winter will always call him back to these feelings of expansiveness and freedom—Rage Against the Machine screaming “Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!” being the verse that most accurately embodies his new uncaged ethos right now, but even the cheesy commercial radio hits feel special and meaningful, songs like “Life Is a Highway” and “Right Now” and “Finally” and that *Aladdin* tune that's getting interminable airplay and seems to Jack almost like his own Chicago anthem: it is, indeed, *a whole new world*.

(Not that he would admit to anyone—ever—that he secretly hums and sometimes actually sings a song from a Disney cartoon while he's in the shower and, further, that he finds great strength in it. No, he'll take that to the grave.)

He loves the noise of the city because there's something reassuring about it—the evidence of other people, neighbors, compatriots. And also there's something grand about becoming insusceptible to the noise, sleeping peacefully through the urban night without flinching at the beeps and voices and car alarms and police sirens outside—it's an important marker of transcendence. Back home, the only noise was the constant low breath of the wind, a prairie wind relentless and monotonous. But sometimes, under the wind, after sunset, one could hear the barking and howling of the coyotes that scavenged the countryside each night. And every once in a while, the howling of a pack would become suddenly and hauntingly reduced, only one voice, and the howling would become more urgent, more like yelping, and then more plaintive, more like whining, and Jack, still awake and hearing all of this despite the covers pulled up way over his head, knew exactly what was going on. A coyote was trapped on the fence.

What happens is this: when coyotes leap over a barbed-wire fence, sometimes they don't leap high enough, and they get caught on the top wire, right at the spot where their hind legs attach to their body, which on canines forms a kind of unfortunate hook. Their front paws will be reaching, swimming, not quite touching the ground, their back legs bucking, and they'll hang there despite fierce kicking because coyotes are not biologically equipped with the joints or flexibility that might enable other animals to free themselves from a wire fence. Coyotes cannot twist enough, cannot maneuver back legs that are really meant only for driving forward, and so they dangle there, all night. And because they're dangling on barbed wire, there's a very good chance they came down upon—and were impaled by—the fence's knifelike talons, which are now digging into their softest, most tender spot, and the more they thrash and kick and wriggle, the more the spikes stir up their insides, and this is, eventually, how they die: bleeding out from stabs to the belly, their screams carried for miles on the wind. Jack would see them in the morning, hanging like clothes from a line.

Compared to that, the sirens of Chicago are a blessing. Even the muggings are a reasonable toll for entry into this world.

Jack has not yet been mugged. He has, since moving to Wicker Park, perfected a look that he hopes is a mugger deterrent, a dangerous-seeming impression built from secondhand clothes purchased at the Salvation Army and an armload of tattoos and unkempt hair and an urban sort of strut and a steely, determined stare over a cigarette that's very nearly always in his mouth—all of which communicates, he hopes, *Fuck off*. He does not want to be mugged, and yet he is also aware that the possibility of being mugged is, in a weird way, part of the draw, part of this neighborhood's particular attraction. The artists who come out here are not here despite the neighborhood's danger but because of it. They are here to embrace it. Wicker Park is, according to Benjamin Quince (who can really get going on this subject and talk just about all night long), Chicago's answer to Montmartre: cheap and dirty and run-down and, therefore, alive.

So the filthiness is roundly celebrated, hence Jack's photos, which try to capture exactly this quality: the grit, the gunk. He searches the hallways and former offices and storage rooms of the fifth floor looking for evidence of life on the edge. The cracked paint. The left-behind hypodermics. The broken windows. The browned curtains. The crumbling walls. The dust that's settled so thickly after so many years that it's now less like dust and more like sand.

"That is so raw," Benjamin says later, inspecting the photos.

The two of them are standing on the roof of the co-op on a deep-winter day. Jack is blowing warm air into his cold, cupped hands. He's wearing his usual thin black peacoat, under which is every sweater he owns. Benjamin wears a big parka so puffy it looks balloonish. His cheeks are watermelon pink, and his coat looks warm and soft and probably filled with down, a material Jack has heard of but could not define specifically.

Benjamin looks at the photos, and Jack looks at the gray neighborhood around them, the occasional pedestrian or car, the mounds of dirty snow, the streets and alleys running perfectly straight all the way to their vanishing points at the lake. They're on the east side of the building, the side that faces the girl in the window. The nameless her. Jack looks down into her apartment. She's not home right now, but this new view from above is

strangely thrilling. He sees a rug she's placed on the floor near the window, not visible from his usual vantage on the fourth floor. And he imbues this new fact about her with great meaning: *She is a woman who buys rugs.*

He wants to know everything about her. But he has not asked anyone anything about the girl in the window because he can't figure out how to ask about her without also revealing that he occasionally spies on her, a practice he is ashamed of only insofar as he knows that others would shame him for it.

Benjamin, still admiring the photos, says: "We gotta put these on the internet."

"Okay," Jack says as, directly below them, a man walks into the alley. He's carrying a large black duffel bag, and judging by the way he's stumbling along, it seems that either the bag is so heavy it's impeding his balance or he is very drunk.

Jack says: "What's the internet?"

Benjamin looks up from the photos. "Seriously?"

"Yeah. What is that?"

"The internet. You know. The information superhighway. The digital hypertextual global cyberspace thing."

Jack nods, then says: "To be honest I'm not entirely clear on those terms either."

Benjamin laughs. "They don't have computers in Kansas yet?"

"My family never really saw the point."

"Okay, well, the internet. How to explain it?" He thinks for a moment, then says: "You know those flyers for bands that people staple to all the telephone poles?"

"Yeah."

"The internet is like those flyers, except imagine they're not on the telephone pole but in it."

"You lost me."

"Imagine they're inside the telephone *wires*, traveling at the speed of light, all of them connected, dynamic, communicating, accessible to anyone in the world."

“Anyone?”

“Anyone with a computer and a phone line. I’ve gotten visitors from England, Australia, Japan.”

“Why do people in Japan care about your flyer?”

“There are outcasts everywhere, my friend. The misunderstood, the unpopular, the dissidents, malcontents, freaks. With the internet, we find each other. It’s like this amazing alternative world. You don’t have to prostrate yourself to the usual conformist rules. You’re free to be your weird and wild self. So it’s a more honest place, less fraudulent, more real.”

“More real than what?”

“The world. The manufactured fishbowl construct we live in. The whole mind-control commercialized oppression apparatus.”

“Wow. That must be one hell of a flyer you made.”

“It’s absolutely state-of-the-art.”

“And it’s a flyer about what? The Foundry?”

“Sort of, but it’s also about the neighborhood, and the energy in the neighborhood, our antiestablishment vibe. You want to see it?”

“Sure.”

“I’ll tutor you. I’ll be your internet sherpa. Pull you out of the eighties.”

“Thanks.”

“Hey, you should work for me. I need visuals. Photos of bars, bands, parties. Cool people being cool. That kind of thing. Could you do that?”

“I guess.”

“Great!” Benjamin says, which is how Jack comes to be employed in the New Economy despite not understanding exactly what’s new about it.

Beneath them, the man with the duffel bag stops at the bike rack behind the co-op. He stands there considering the many bicycles locked to the bar, wobbling a little on unsteady feet. Then he puts down his bag, unzips it, and pulls out a large bolt cutter, with which he quickly and cleanly snips the lock off one of the more expensive-looking ten-speeds.

“Hey!” Jack yells.

The man turns around, frightened, and looks down the alley. Then he searches the windows of the building, and then, his palm shielding his eyes

from the light, he finally spots them, on the roof, six stories up, at which point the man smiles at them, and waves. A big friendly wave, like they're all old pals.

And what can they do? Jack and Benjamin wave back. And then they watch the man stow his bolt cutter in the duffel bag, which he slings around his back before hopping on the freed bicycle and riding crookedly away.

Benjamin smiles and looks at Jack and says: "That was so fucking real."