

a low voice. "I live over an hour away, and the rest of our siblings—I mean, the ones still here with us—are scattered north of San Francisco."

Henry nodded and said, "Is your brother okay living here on his own, do you think?"

Imogen looked at Halliday, who was now sitting on an old deck chair, comfortably trying to fit fresh pieces of wood into right angles and sanding their edges.

"I tried to get someone to come in, but Hal didn't like living with anyone but Pop. He fired two women, one right after the other." She laughed a little. "Well, he's too nice to call it firing. He just told them they could go."

Caro couldn't remember any women coming out of the bungalow, or looking through the windows to keep an eye on Halliday.

"Our family is going to sell this property," Imogen added. "You'll probably be glad to hear it." She rolled her eyes at the mounds of stuff, the weary little house.

"Where will—?" Caro asked, looking at Halliday, who had kicked off his sandals, so that his bare feet were on a patch of grass by the chair.

Imogen looked self-conscious, with a touch of defiance, as if Caro and Henry were people who had a stake in Halliday's future and might put up a struggle.

"I've found a good place for him, closer to me. He'll be in a community." She looked at Caro as if to gain her blessing. "He's so isolated here."

Caro nodded, but all she could picture was Halliday being asked to wear a real shirt and trousers each day, to take baths and brush his hair, and cover his smail toes with socks and new shoes. How much good junk would a community home have lying around for him to sift through?

Henry seemed to be wondering the same thing, because he said, "He really likes it here."

He gazed at the backyard, which even Caro could now see as an outdoor art shop, eccentric but organized, filled with treasures. She thought of Halliday's sunflowers out front, doing their best to look normal.

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The property sold quickly, without a sign even having to be posted. Caro saw online that someone had paid over eight million dollars for it. She and Henry went home for Christmas, and once they came back, Halliday had already

left. In January, as the lemons ripened in the surrounding gardens, wire fences went up around Halliday's property. The bungalow looked like a prisoner, waiting for execution. And one spring day, as Caro walked past with Butter, she saw that the land had been cleared entirely. The fairy-tale house, the books, the woodstove, the mounds of treasure, all of it had been whisked away. A new house quickly rose up, in the style of a Mediterranean villa, and soon after that, an instant garden appeared, with orange and mango and olive trees, roses, and large squares of pebbles surrounded by California grasses, all of it protected by a freshly built cream-colored stucco wall. The bushes in front of the wall grew rapidly, so that within a year a passerby could only catch the smallest glimpses of the house.

By then, however, Caro and Henry were living in Rhode Island. Henry worked at a dusty art shop and had a studio in the garage of their rented house. Caro taught a class of kindergartners. Butter died in his sleep one August morning, as Henry stretched a new canvas.

Harriet Scott Chessman is the author of the acclaimed novels *Someone Not Really Her Mother*, *The Beauty of Ordinary Things*, *Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper*, and *Ohio Angels* in addition to the libretto for a contemporary operatic piece, *My Lai*. Chessman's fiction has been translated into ten languages. She has taught English and creative writing at Yale University, Bread Loaf School of English, and Stanford University. After many years in the San Francisco Bay Area, she now lives in Connecticut.

MARK SHETABI

Night, 2015
Oil on Linen, 48 x 60 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST