

honestly, sometimes I think love was harder on him. War bruises the body and brain, but the heart is more delicate.

He was one of those people who could have done anything with their lives, and as a consequence did nothing. He could never choose a direction, thought he deserved better at every job he had. He wasn't a ne'er-do-well, he just never figured out what he wanted from life, and eventually, nobody wanted him. He turned reclusive and stayed there. I offered to help many times, told him he could always come stay with me, when I was still on my own. I offered money. He never said no, but he never took me up on it, either.

His younger brother Patrick was killed in a motorcycle accident. They were pretty close. After that it was just me and Georgie in the world, and slowly, over time, just me. I'd go years without hearing from him, but I could feel his disintegration going on out there, alone, like an elephant looking for the graveyard. Sometimes I'd think, if only he could manage to make a family for himself.

When my own health took a turn a few months ago, I decided to reach out to him. You can imagine how thrilled I was when he wrote back. At last, I thought. He won't be alone when I'm gone. I never told him I was sick, but he may have guessed it, as perhaps you did.

You gave him the best days of his life. I only wish he'd gotten to live them.

—Lillian

I went out and sat on the porch. Anna followed, the screen door bumping gently behind her, and sat next to me. I couldn't look at her. She looked at the letter in my lap, then laid her hand on mine.

"It's over, isn't it," she said.

We sat quietly for several minutes as the sun dipped below the Oquirrhis, its fading rays lighting up a spring storm blowing in over the lake from the west.

"I miss Lillian."

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One morning not long after Lillian died, I was sitting on the shelter stoop. There was hot chocolate that day, and some folks were dipping bits of muffin in their steaming Styrofoam cups. A woman came down the street carrying a knapsack. I put her at forty-five or so. Her hair was mostly grey, straight and brushed. It was unusual to see anyone

well coifed at that hour, which made her stand out. She had light eyebrows and lashes and smooth skin around her eyes. She looked around.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

Her gaze settled on the shelter entrance. "Thought I might find someone here."

I wondered why she hadn't stayed with us, but women are different, skittish. Even though men and women sleep separately here, some women have had bad experiences at other shelters and don't trust the indoors. It's hard to get that trust back once they conclude they're more likely to be molested indoors than if they seclude themselves out. Of course, sometimes they stay out for companionship, no different than men. Maybe she was looking for a companion.

"What's the name?" I asked. "I might know the person."

She looked around me, over me, past me. The wind chime gonged softly.

"George."

"Old George?"

"Weren't so old. Not to me." She perked up, like I might be of some use to her after all. "We lost track of each other a couple of months back. You seen him?"

Hope had caught her unawares, and for a moment she seemed to forget her circumstances, how people look at her, or don't, or won't, perhaps believing that this time she had as much right to good luck as anyone. But wariness, born of regular disappointment, is never far from the surface. I forced a smile. She was so very much as I'd imagined she might be.

**John Yewell** recently turned to writing fiction after a long career in journalism. After two summers attending the Squaw Valley Writers Workshops, he received an MFA in creative writing from San Francisco State, where he studied under Peter Orner and Maxine Chernoff. He now teaches writing, edits, and coaches privately. He is the co-founder of Writeaways.com, a writing retreat with programs in France, Italy, North Carolina, and elsewhere. John is a fourth-generation Californian, and occasionally press-gangs ancestors into service in his writing. He is the author of *The Land of Sunshine*, a novel set in Southern California a century ago. He studied English literature as an undergraduate at UC Santa Cruz. Learn more at [www.johnyewell.com](http://www.johnyewell.com).

## LARRY MORACE

*Orange Trolley*, 2014

Oil on canvas, 51 x 71 in



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