

LARRY MORACE

City by the Sea, 2014
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JOHN YEWELL

A Good Son

It was hard to imagine Old George still having a mother. He was in his sixties, although he looked ten years older on account of being homeless for as long as anyone could remember. A Vietnam vet. But there it was, a letter from her. She had to be ninety. It seemed cruel to tell her the truth: that Old George had frozen to death.

Our shelter has rules, mainly about behavior—no drugs or alcohol, that sort of thing. Another is you've got to be inside by sunset. We'd held the door as long as we could, because he was usually pretty timely. We asked everyone who came in, but no one had seen Old George in any of the usual places. They found him the next morning under a freeway overpass, his body stiff, contorted. It gets cold in Salt Lake in the winter. Not a bad way to go, they say, to fall asleep and not wake up—except his sleeping bag was torn and he was cut on his back and arms. Might have been critters, after the fact. Or vigilantes. Passions have cooled some since a homeless street preacher kidnapped Elizabeth Smart a few years ago and raped her for nine months. But the Salt Lake Valley still isn't the most hospitable place for guys like Old George—especially since, with his long frame and grey beard, he looked a lot like that guy. Anyway, Old George died.

Not knowing his next of kin at the time, we put together a service, got him a cemetery plot and even a bronze plaque. "George Murphy," it read. "Age: Old Enough." "Hey Old George, how old *are* you?" we'd ask. "Old enough," he'd say.

I remember his graceful lope, his body all limbs and sinew, a sweeping, Mr. Natural glide. He spent a lot of time in the library, like a lot of folks here. As a group they are the best-read people I know, and Old George always seemed to have a new quote at the ready. "Age, with his stealing steps / Hath clawed me in his clutch," he said to me a few days before he died. Hamlet. Buried in that dusky exterior was a bright light, but somewhere along the way, ambition went dark. Sliding off the edge of life, once you lose your grip, is a lot easier than most realize.

He got by on SSI and scrounging. The people at Deseret Industries—that's the LDS version of Goodwill—had come to like Old George, and gave him the run of their dumpster. There's a wind chime hanging over the entrance to the shelter that Old George found. Every once in a while I'd come into my office and find some treasure,

*We take in men,
women, families,
as many as we
can, especially
lately, the economy
being what it is.*

like the little souvenir grizzly bear from Yellowstone I found on my desk one day. I collect bears.

Handling the mail is one of my responsibilities. Most shelters don't do it at all. They make clients (I hate that word) use general delivery at the P.O. We like to think we're different. Old George wasn't much for sharing his mail, or his personal life, which is why the letter came as a surprise, arriving from California four days after he died. It usually took a letter two or three days to travel that distance, so it seemed a bitter irony that his mother might have been composing it as death took him. I'd opened it, figuring it might help settle his affairs, if he had any to settle.

Lillian—that was his mom's name—wrote in an unsteady hand, like she had to bear down on the pen with what little strength she had. Her voice was strong, though.

Georgie...

Georgie. What a sweet mom.

Georgie, it's been so long, you can't imagine my excitement at getting your letter. It was too short! There is so much more I want to know. You must be very busy with your new job, but when you have a moment, please write again. What kind of job is it? Does it pay well? How did you find it? Is your new apartment comfortable? I'm so happy for you.

And tell me all about Joy! I'm sure she's a nice girl. How did you meet? Where is she from? Can she cook? Do you have a photo? I'm sorry to be so nosy, it's just... Anyway, don't tell her your mother is a busybody. I don't want her to think I'm meddling.

If it looked promising, she wanted to send Joy some keepsakes—jewelry and china mostly, to make sure they didn't end up in a yard sale with people who wouldn't understand their sentimental value. Women like to pass those things on to a daughter, or a daughter-in-law. I guessed Lillian had never had either.

I had to hand it to Old George: he was a good son. He'd been telling his poor, sainted mother some whoppers, and why not. He probably figured she could go at any time, and good news might keep her alive.

Success stories like he'd concocted are rare here. For those who wander through and vanish, it's hard to know how things turn out. But a lot stay, and for them things rarely improve. Some, I'm told, have been here for the better part of ten, fifteen years. They almost never become productive members of society again. It's like managing chronic illness, and we're not bad at it. We take in men, women, families, as many as we can, especially lately, the economy being what it is. We've got real beds, not just a floor for bedrolls or dirty mattresses, like other places. No showers, unfortunately, but there's usually a soup on simmer. Coffee, muffins sometimes. It's warm, clean, no bugs. No ambience either, but it's hard to make a converted warehouse homey. Still, we do what we can, like hold a big shindig every Thanksgiving, when the donors and politicians show up to serve and be seen. The rest of the year we get by, try to keep religion to a minimum. But this is Utah.

Some people say we should make it less comfortable, less welcoming, to encourage people to move on. I guess I've never seen things that way. Most do anyway—move on, I mean—to a more temperate climate, or a family member takes them in, or to the grave. Once a month or so somebody dies. When that happens, the most amazing thing takes place: for a day, all panhandling proceeds go to the deceased. People with hardly the price of a cup of coffee to their names help out. That, and help from a donor, is how Old George got his plaque.

Most of the time, you don't know what got 'em. It's not

like they're in good health. Living alone, outdoors mostly, takes a powerful toll on the body and spirit. Sometimes they just give up, and life floats out of them like steam from the soup. Or they get rolled and left for dead. Usually it's exposure, or disease, things you can't pinpoint. We have a nurse on call, but effective medical care is rare. There's no way to know what all those aches and pains people complain of really mean, until it means they're dead.

Some, especially men for some reason, cope with hardship through flamboyance. We've got the Cat in the Hat, a tall, whip-thin black dude, favors vests and collects odd hats, sometimes stacks them on his head, hangs the rest off the sides of his cart. He keeps to the Ninth and Ninth neighborhood with the college crowd. I'm told he has the best eye for dropped coins in the valley. Then there's Duck Man. He collects those little plastic ducks, a lot of which came courtesy of Old George. His thing is shouting "Duck!" when someone walks by and making them, well, duck. Likes to push his cart around downtown and catch tourists unawares, because they don't know him, of course. Pretty soon he's got a small crowd keeping to a short distance, watching for the next victim. They all have a good laugh, usually, then that victim joins the spectators, and on the show goes and grows. He gets no end of pleasure out of that.

Old George preferred to keep a low profile, or tried to, and it was easy to see why. His luck was so bad, it made you question karma. A couple of years ago, he was walking down the street, minding his own business, when some lunatic jumped out from behind a bush and put three bullets in him—.22 caliber, but deadly anyway in the right place. The same number killed Bobby Kennedy. So what does Old George do? He hardly realizes he's shot. Falls, gets up, chases the bastard, who is corralled by passersby. Then he collapses. They got him to University Hospital in time, but his health was never the same. The cops asked the shooter, a complete stranger, why he shot Old George, and he said he was going to shoot the first person who walked by, didn't matter who. The guy survives Vietnam, then nearly buys it on a sunny day in Zion.

Now, he had. What was I supposed to do about Lillian? Your Georgie is dead, ma'am. Not only that, he was still homeless. There is no job, and no Joy that I know of. Your son has been fibbing—I know you must have taught

him otherwise. She'd drop dead herself before she got to the bottom of the page. And if she got no reply at all, she might assume the worst and drop dead anyway.

For days I could not get Lillian out of my mind, her letter to her son tucked in my jacket pocket right over my heart and steadily burrowing in. Losing her son like that, at her age, when she'd finally found hope—that was fate at its most careless. What would Jesus do? I asked myself. He'd probably throw up his hands, ask himself what Abraham would do, say oh hell, pull Old George out of the grave and move on to more pressing problems.

That's when the light went on. I could resurrect him, write back *as* Old George. What could go wrong?

"I could make a list." My wife Anna leans to a more practical view of life.

"Jack," we were sitting at the kitchen table after dinner, having ice cream, "you can't be serious. It's not nice to lie to old people and children. They're defenseless."

"But why not? Why not make her happy in what little time she has?"

"It's unethical. You know it is."

"It's an act of mercy. You saw how grateful she was to hear from her son." I fanned the air between us with the letter.

"There are a hundred ways this could go wrong, Jack, things a mother would notice. And if she sees through it, it could be worse than telling her the truth."

I couldn't disagree. But I kept thinking that what Lillian needed right now more than the truth was her son.

"I'll be careful, keep things general."

"Would you want someone to lie to your mother?"

"But Anna, I feel like I have Old George's permission, like he would want me to do this." I shoveled mint chocolate chip into my mouth in big gulps. "He started it, after all."

"And where will it end?"

"Why does it have to?" I paused to swallow. I was getting caught up and needed to slow down, eating and talking. It was a simple technique we'd mastered over the years, to keep disagreements from getting blown out of proportion. "I want Lillian to go to her grave believing the best about her son. That's what I'd want for my mother."

"Your mother would agree with me," she said. "You know that. Lillian deserves the truth, and as much as you

hate to admit it, you're the only one who knows it and also knows about her." She nudged her bowl aside and looked at me earnestly. "That's what this is really about, isn't it? It's not about Lillian facing the truth. It's about you facing it."

It's just not fair when your spouse is always right—and Anna was more right than she realized. I felt my brain freeze. It might have been the ice cream.

"I see Old Georges every day. Sometimes they die, and it's sad, but I move on. This one's different." I reached across the table and took her hand. "This is the first time I've ever had to write to someone's mother. It's hard."

She squeezed mine, her eyes crinkled with a sympathy that curved her eyebrows into tildes. "Not everyone's a romantic, Jack. Lillian may be tougher than you think."

* * *

Two weeks went by before I could bring myself to compose a letter. I left out the parts about critters and vigilantes. I even left out the part about the cold. Did we really know how he died, after all? I was trying to spare her difficult details. I'm not sure that was the right thing, but I didn't know what the right thing was. I tried to be as positive as I could. I told her where he was buried, and that we'd made it look real nice. Most of all, I wanted her to know what a good son he was, about his many kindnesses. I didn't know of a Joy, I wrote, but he certainly deserved someone with such a name.

The next morning I sat on the shelter stoop, her letter in my hand, sealed and stamped, Old George speaking to me through the wind chime's soft, baritone gong. We live nearby, and I like to come by early sometimes when the doors open, catch up with folks as they mill around, some sitting quietly on the sidewalk leaning against the concrete wall, others stamping off the cold, munching muffins and sipping coffee. I looked around at Old George's friends. There's such a shortage of hope here. It was killing me to kill Lillian's.

Later that morning I was sitting at my desk when the mail arrived. The mailman, a young man I hadn't seen before, his uniform crisply pressed, dropped half a dozen letters on my desk, picked up Lillian's in the outbox, and left without a word. I sighed, picked up the fresh mail, and fingered through it.

There was a second letter from Lillian. I tore it open.

Dear Georgie,

I hadn't heard from you and began to worry myself. Forgive your old mother, sweetheart. I guess I panicked a little. After so many years, suddenly a few weeks feels like forever. Funny huh? Is everything okay? I'm sure everything's fine. I'm sure you're just busy with your new job. It would do me a world of good if you'd send a few words to reassure me. Could you do that?

Love,

Lillian

I bolted out of my office, through the kitchen, took the three steps to the sidewalk in a leap, and ran down the street. I could see the post office truck at a strip mall a block away. When I got there the carrier was gone, so I waited, taking deep breaths, trying to get my pulse under control. My blood pressure isn't so great. At last he emerged from a drug store and moved briskly toward his truck.

"I'm terribly sorry," I folded my hands together in a soft grip, not quite a prayer posture, but close enough. "I don't want to break any rules, but that letter I gave you at the shelter a few minutes ago... do you suppose I could have it back?"

He climbed into the driver's seat and fussed with his deliveries. "People are always asking..." He became very still and stared straight ahead. I think he was waiting for me to give up, but when I didn't move, he muttered "Jeez," which on the Utah Profanity Scale is about a seven, turned to a basket of outgoing mail, and pulled out a letter. "This it?"

"Yes."

"Try to be more careful next time. It's for your protection."

"Yes, sir,"—he was half my age—"I certainly will. Thank you again."

* * *

That night at dinner I showed Anna the second letter from Lillian. There was no concealing from her what I was thinking. "You're going to do it, aren't you," she said.

"I'd feel better about it if I had your blessing."

She looked over the letter again and put it down.

"You're a good man, Jack. But doing the right thing doesn't always mean making people feel good."

I don't want to give the impression that Anna was insensitive to Lillian's situation. She felt sincerely that the Christian thing to do was to tell the truth, come what may, and a part of me agreed. But Lillian's second letter had caught me like an emotional tripwire.

"Just a letter or two, to put her soul at ease."

I'm not sure I really believed that, that I could somehow keep it to a few letters. But I was convinced that keeping her son alive for her was worth a try, that the risks were manageable. And I think, in the end, that Anna didn't disagree, or at least not so utterly that she was willing to put up a fight when she could see which way I was leaning. She just wanted me to be careful.

"What if she wants to come for a visit?"

"Her address is a nursing home in Hemet. I think we're safe."

She carefully slid Lillian's letter back into its envelope.

"Sleep on it, at least. Okay?"

* * *

There were practicalities to work out. Old George had to have a job that wasn't out of character or made him too accessible. After my encounter with the mailman, I thought that might make a good job for Old George. Good pay, no travel, and I seemed to recall that the post office gave hiring preferences to veterans. I asked our home mailman, Karl, about that, but he said they weren't really hiring anymore. Lillian might not know that, but I didn't want to take the chance.

In the end, Old George became a manager at Deseret Industries. It fit his personality, and in a sly way was almost true—he'd been in dumpster management, after all. I merely promoted him. And I knew DI, as it's known here, had hired people like him in the past. If Lillian was familiar with Deseret Industries, that'd be fine. If not, then the sound of the name might give her an exalted view of her son's new status. Either way, Old George looked like he was moving up in the world. If she asked for a phone number, I'd give her my own and tell her it was the answering service for the special, unlisted company division he worked for. Hard to have a job of any consequence without a phone number.

For days I could not get Lillian out of my mind, her letter to her son tucked in my jacket pocket right over my heart and steadily burrowing in.

I didn't want to pretend to copy his handwriting, which in any case I wouldn't have known how to do, so I typed the letter on my office computer, adding a postscript that I was writing from my new office. I was able to find an example of Old George's signature on an old intake form, and practiced writing his name, so I could at least sign the letters.

Finally, I would tell Lillian she'd guessed right, that I'd been busy at work and unable to write, and that that would be the case for a while. I had it all figured out.

Except for Joy. I thought about her a lot. I imagined a pretty, thoughtful person with soft, kind eyes who looked after Old George. I decided to describe Joy as looking like Anna, who was twenty years younger than Old George. He was getting luckier by the minute. That way, if Lillian kept asking for a photo, I could send her one of Anna. I thought that was pretty clever.

"And if she asks for a photo of her son and Joy together?" Anna asked.

"I'm sure I've got a picture of Old George somewhere," I replied. "Photoshop?"

* * *

Who said always tell the truth, then you don't have to remember anything?

I'd forgotten about Old George's new apartment. In

her reply, Lillian asked for the address. Of course she wouldn't need, or want, to write to him at the shelter anymore. So I gave her mine, explaining the arrangement to Karl so he'd expect letters addressed to George Murphy at our address.

"Oh my heck." That's a nine.

He looked at me incredulously. "You're pretending to be the old lady's dead son?"

"Just for a while. She's, like, ninety."

"My aunt Stella lived to be 102. Lucid to the end."

"What are the odds, really?"

"I dunno," Karl said. "What are the odds of you getting hit by a bus?"

"Then you could be her dead son," I suggested.

"And your mother's too?"

And Lillian wanted to meet Joy. *Why don't you come for a visit? I'll send you the money. Or maybe I could manage a trip to Salt Lake. It's been so long.*

"I was afraid of that," Anna said.

You cannot say no to your mother about something like that, but you can delay... and delay. I told her I would try to come, but it wasn't a good time for either trip. With the new job, it might be a while before I—I mean, Old George—could get time off. Wanted to make a good impression and all. And anyway, was she really strong enough to travel? To soften the blow, I gave her our home phone number, even though she hadn't asked for it—out of concern for her welfare, of course. Georgie was going to be responsible from now on. *I want you to be able to contact me in an emergency.* It was apparent the telephone was the only way she'd know how to do that—if she could text or use e-mail, would we be exchanging letters? Anyway, I braced for a call, concocting excuses for Mr. Murphy being unavailable, and tutoring Anna on Old George's special division at DI.

"Oh what a tangled web." Anna shook her head. "Somebody's going to get their heart broken."

Meanwhile, I tried to change the subject with Lillian, get her to talk about herself.

I was sitting around having coffee with a friend at work, who wanted to know how you like Happy Hemet Homes. He's looking for a place his mom might like.

She wrote back about a week later.

I can't complain. The food's good, except for the coffee.

My room has a nice view of the courtyard garden. Of course, here in the Inland Empire it's usually sunny, so I can zoom around outside on my walker most days, and the nurses are helpful. The biggest problem is being cooped up all day with a bunch of old people. They smell funny.

Over time I learned more. I gathered she'd been a widow for some time, but that Old George's father had left her comfortable. She dropped hints about her husband, the way you would when you think you're filling in the blanks with someone who knows the rest.

He struggled, in his own way, just like you, she wrote about six weeks into our correspondence. A little Irish about liquor, but no need to go into that, I guess. If he had lived, I think he could have helped you. But you found your way all by yourself, Georgie. I'm proud of you.

Lillian talked about old students, what they were up to. She'd taught junior high school English and also operated a little beauty parlor in their kitchen in Pasadena for extra cash. But her old customers were dying.

You remember Mrs. Follis? Lillian joked about how young Georgie was always picking stray hair out of his corn flakes Saturday mornings, after Mrs. Follis's weekly appointment. She passed the other day. 93. Just decided one morning not to wake up. The family asked me if I'd do her hair for the funeral, so I did, but it was hard. I felt like I was looking down at myself the whole time. And my arthritis is so bad. There was a long blank space on the page, then: *I wish you'd come visit me, Georgie.*

Still, she hadn't called.

Meanwhile, I bragged something fierce. Old George was doing great at work, got to see places he'd never seen, like Denver. Maybe he'd get to California one day too—a prospect I hoped would mollify her for a while. And that Joy—she could cook like nobody's business, although she couldn't hold a candle to Lillian. I even thought of sending Lillian a gift of some kind, as evidence of Old George's prosperity, but Anna put her foot down on that one. "When was the last time you sent your own mother a gift out of the blue?"

Maybe I got a little carried away, but Old George was having the time of his life. And I hardly saw the time pass.

After a couple of months I got a letter that opened the Book of Old George a tantalizing crack wider. There had been a brother, Patrick. Lillian mentioned him in the past

tense, how she missed him, and left it at that. Of course Old George would have known what she was talking about, but I didn't, and as much as I wanted to, I couldn't just ask: What happened to Patrick, Lillian? How old was he? How did he die? Was that before the war, or after? Was that what tipped Old George over the edge?

Friends going, family gone, except for Old George. Yet Lillian was still active, still doing the occasional head of hair, no dementia to slowly disappear into like a fading family photo. She wrote like someone with a lot of remembering to do, and it began to sink in how alone she must feel. I got the sense it had been a long time, not just since she'd seen or heard from her son, but since she'd talked at all about her family—since she'd had anyone to talk with about her family. I'd have done anything for her to be able to see her Georgie again.

That was the toughest thing. I wanted Old George to be this great son, this man who had finally gotten his life together, someone worthy of the pride she professed in him. It became harder not to make him seem like a heartless bastard every time he made up a reason he couldn't visit his poor mother with nine toes in the grave. I began to hate myself.

* * *

As spring approached, we hit a busy patch at the shelter. Then one day, Duck Man surprised someone without a sense of humor, who called 911 and complained about a dirty homeless man scaring pedestrians. I managed to defuse the situation by getting Duck Man to promise to avoid downtown for a while. Since the Smart kidnapping, we've taken even minor incidents seriously, to try to improve relations with the police and community. But the homeless are creatures of habit like the rest of us, only their habits, being all they have, are even more important to them. When he went back downtown a couple of days later, looking for his old audience, they arrested him. I bailed him out, but the ban on downtown became permanent. For the longest time, he couldn't figure out what to do with himself. It was like being homeless all over again.

By the time I got the letter, I hardly realized that I hadn't heard from Lillian in a while. The return address was a law firm in Riverside. Inside was a check for a hun-

dred thousand dollars, made out to the shelter, with a note: "Perhaps this can help others like my son."

With it was a letter in a second envelope, a Post-it attached with instructions that it be sent in the event of her death.

Dear "Georgie,"

I don't know what to call you, but it doesn't matter. I assume you work at the shelter, and took the liberty of opening my son's mail after he died. Don't worry. It all worked out for the best. I want you to know how much I appreciate what you did for me, and for my son.

It became clear after a couple of letters. Georgie always called me Lillian, never Mom. I'm a terrible cook. And Georgie had a caffeine allergy—gave him hives. Things like that. A nurse here made a few calls to confirm he was gone.

I was terribly upset, and then angry with you, of course. I started to write a stern letter, but then I realized what you were doing, and that I had a choice: I could break the spell, or I could let you go on believing you had convinced me Georgie had gotten better. You seemed too kind to be acting capriciously. The plain fact was, after I found out Georgie was dead I'd never felt lonelier, and I enjoyed getting your letters. I get so few. Responding to them made me feel like I was with Georgie, and my family, again. It's hard, as a mother, when you outlive everyone.

I hope I didn't cause you too much anxiety. I was afraid if I didn't talk about things you didn't understand, or not ask Georgie to visit, you'd catch on that I had caught on. And I suppose you understand now why I never called. Anyway, I'd like to think that what you were doing had become as important to you in its own way as it had to me. I couldn't bear to let go. But now, I have.

Perhaps you're wondering what happened to Georgie. He was the last boy you'd expect to get into trouble, as smart and handsome as he was. People assume it's mental illness, or drugs, that drives people into the weeds, and I suppose it usually is. But that wasn't it with Georgie. Some people have no emotional reserves, can't bounce back from adversity. Georgie was like that, as was his father. His life was one thing after another, and every blow left him just a little lower than before. His father died when he was young. There was the war, but I suppose you knew about that. That did him no favors, I can tell you. Afterwards, he had a couple of heartaches, and

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 Oquirrh, its fading rays lighting up a spring storm blowing in over the lake from the west.

"I miss Lillian."

* * *

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.

LARRY MORACE

Orange Trolley, 2014

Oil on canvas, 51 x 71 in



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