

GEORGE CLARK ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

George Clark is the smallest person on Earth, living in a hole with all his possessions. Five brightly painted tankards, all purchased on the Kansas side of Kansas City. A miniature wooden trolley. An armadillo of clay. His third most prized collection: wine corks by the thousands, each purpled on one end, held in a copper tub big enough to bathe in.

Smoke drifts up from the hole, although George Clark does not smoke. It's simple: wherever he is, it gets colder, then he breathes. He keeps his second most prized collection high on a shelf: hot sauces from across the country, carefully arranged in a red and green phalanx. Liquefied habanero. Devil Drops. The one that had a naked woman posing with a whip which somehow always came back to the front no matter how far back you hid it.

George Clark cannot move. He calls me exactly one month after my birthday and says Happy Birthday and I can hear his head bouncing off the sides of the hole. The men at the drive-thru window at the liquor store down the street know George Clark by face, by name, in secret. They throw a few lollipops in with the vodka when they see me in the passenger seat. Once he threw me down the stairs.

Once he hit my sister so hard she slid down the wall
from the top bunk. I watched from the bottom.
George Clark's favorite food is barbeque sauce.
His favorite city is San Francisco. His favorite color
is blue. He keeps them lined up in a lit cabinet with
all the antique toys he inherited from his mother.
She also lived in a hole. And her mother too.

Once he tried to run my mother over with his car
in her own driveway. She never told anyone about it
—the police never believed—but I saw it happen.
I was there. His most prized collection: a slender
bracelet gold on his gray wrist, the white hide
of a little dog, some woman's tan slip-ons
tossed aside, carelessly, at the earthen bottom of his hole.

One night he drove himself to the highest point
east of the Mississippi in his old burgundy sedan.
When he got there he looked out over his land
and whispered to it and put his face in it. There,
George Clark is the governor.
George Clark is the king.
I have built villages around his absence.

IN HIBERNATION

I was walking through the train looking for my winter coat. I thought it was with my bags.

My mother works our small land with her hands even though she hurt her right index finger and can't straighten it all the way.

I didn't know where my bags were. I got up from my seat and walked forward. My seat was in the front of the car.

She shows me that curled finger all the time. It hurts to look at so it must hurt also to have.

I walked to the door and pushed the black plastic button that says *push* with one finger. The door opened on another dark car.

One morning my mother found a nest of mice below my open window. She was raking and laying down seed.

The train tracks curved left as I lifted my right foot and I almost fell into the lap of a man asleep under a white blanket. There were a lot of other people on the train. I didn't see them at first in the darkness.

They reclined fully backwards, curled against each other, leaning on each other's shoulders and heads, breathing each other's breath, white bellies pointed upwards, noses curving into whiskers, pink hands entwined, spots in fur.

But I righted myself. I didn't wake anyone up. I wanted to sleep under my winter jacket. It had to exist somewhere on the train.

I woke up to everyone screaming. Then I couldn't hear the tinny mice voices. I could just hear my mother roaring, crying, raking up the bodies.