

Holding

My grandmother hands me her mother's ration book,
still lined with stamps. She hands me Victory Mail,
her brothers' cursive spilling like water over rocks.
Envelopes, whose edges have been eaten
by silverfish, addressed only to *The Cornetts, Blackey, Kentucky*.
She hands me an infantryman's pocket Gospel of John
and the stone of a story in which she's stringing beans,
when through the trees, she and her mother see
the boy on his bicycle coming, the boy bearing
a telegram that will announce her brother's release
from the POW camp. She hands me the mountainside
on which she and her eleven siblings were raised.
Photographs of grey children squinting into white sun.
Words like *coal tipple, broomcorn, field cradle*. The porch swing
on which she rocked back toward the house her father built
and out, almost past the edge, toward the Indian Bottom
where the schoolhouse sat. She hands me the river's
murmurations and, across, Aunt Bertie's orchard
where she could pull an apple down and bite.
A spilled churn, sheets boiled in lye and dancing white
on the line. She hands me a spring, somewhere
on the way to town, where a neighbor left a ladle out
for passersby. She hands me the relief of a cool drink.
In front of us sits the gold leaf trunk she's had restored,
the one her mother brought with her when she married
a century ago. *When was it made?* I ask. *Who knows,*
she shrugs. My grandmother puts her papers away.
I'm left with stories that will pill and alter in my hands.
That empty trunk. A broken ladle that I raise.



ABOUT CORINNA McCLANAHAN SCHROEDER



Corinna McClanahan Schroeder's poetry appears or is forthcoming in such journals as *The Gettysburg Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Tampa Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Blackbird*. She holds an MFA from the University of Mississippi and is currently pursuing her PhD at the University of Southern California.

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