

At the end of the table, my grandmother eats. No one watches her do this. They are repelled by it. To cover her noise they keep up a counterpoint of conversation across the table. I have to glance at her.

She sits, her old eyes close to her plate, tearing at her turkey, stuffing it into her mouth with her fork. She is a savage, hungry child, self-comforting, self-pleasing, who has been hungry in a creek-side cabin forgotten by us all, eating sow-belly and cornpone when they could get it, the father away at war. The child she feeds so urgently was born in 1861. Now, taking a pickle from the Waterford glass in front of her, remembering that there is a someone else, she leans over, her face covered with turkey grease, and presents it to her great-grandson, who takes it and squeezes it in his hand.

-- The Clamshell, by Mary Lee Settle