Jill McCorkle’s first novel in seventeen years is alive with the daily triumphs and challenges of the residents and staff of Pine Haven Estates, a retirement facility now home to a good many of Fulton, North Carolina’s older citizens. Among them, third-grade teacher Sadie Randolph, who has taught every child in town and believes we are all eight years old in our hearts; Stanley Stone, once Fulton’s most prominent lawyer, now feigning dementia to escape life with his son; Marge Walker, the town’s self-appointed conveyor of social status who keeps a scrapbook of every local murder and heinous crime; and Rachel Silverman, recently widowed, whose decision to leave her Massachusetts home and settle in Fulton is a mystery to everyone but her. C.J., the pierced and tattooed young mother who runs the beauty shop, and Joanna, the hospice volunteer who discovers that her path to a good life lies with helping folks achieve good deaths, are two of the staff on whom the residents depend. McCorkle puts her finger on the pulse of every character’s strengths, weaknesses, and secrets. And, as she connects their lives through their present circumstances, their pasts, and, in some cases, their deaths, she celebrates the blessings and wisdom of later life and infuses this remarkable novel with hope and laughter.

This is the story of Virginia Turner Ballard, known to her North Carolina relatives as Ginny Sue. It’s also the story of her mother, her grandmother, her great aunts, her closest cousin—three generations of women who gather around Virginia to help her at the end of a hard pregnancy, to tend to her, to help her prepare for the fourth generation. This kind of family attendance, this kind of tending to, is Southern to the core, offering, as it does, the occasion for reviving and trading entwined family stories. Tending to Virginia is a novel of one family’s most important stories—how they happened, how they were perceived, how they were remembered, how their truth is revealed. In the end, an eruption of family confessions becomes revelation—revelation as legacy, passed down among a family’s women; revelation as a family’s gift in celebration of growing up, a process Jill McCorkle knows lasts into old age. In her characterizations of these vivid women playing out their generational roles in the contemporary South, McCorkle presents us with a powerful insight—that the strongest family bonds are, for better or worse, as often created by what is held back as by what is spoken.