

A photograph of a weathered blue wooden door with a metal latch, surrounded by lush green grapevines and clusters of pink flowers. The scene is set outdoors, likely in a vineyard or garden.

# The Sweet Taste of Muscadines

Pamela Terry

Book Club Kit

# Letter from the Author

Dear Reader,

Like most writers I know, I'm always reluctant to depend too heavily on any sort of muse. Waiting on one to show up and help you write is generally a lonely and unproductive business. Telling a story well depends mostly on hard work, tenacity, and a bloodhound's determination to follow your characters through all sorts of uncharted territory, even when you'd bet money they have no idea where they're going. However, I've also learned never to discount that a muse exists, for sometimes, just when you're confident in the direction you're going, she'll show up and yank you down a totally different road. And if you're lucky enough to ever have this happen to you, you ignore her at your peril.

I was in the middle of writing another book when the first line of *The Sweet Taste of Muscadines* ran through my head like one of those news crawls you see at the bottom of your TV screen. I was stirring a pot of homemade soup at the time and I put it aside, went to my laptop, and basically wrote the entire prologue. Dinner was a little late that night. In the weeks that followed, these characters kept pulling on my sleeve so persistently that I finally shelved my other book and followed them where they wanted me to go. And I'm so happy I did.

From eye color to shoes, Lila, Henry, and Abigail Bruce rose up off the page fully formed, with Southern soil still clinging to the soles of their shoes no matter how far they traveled from the land of their birth. (And they do travel quite a way.) When you grow up in the South as they did, and as I did, a sense of place is buried so deep in your bones it could never be removed by surgeon's knife or witch's spell. No one can tell you exactly why this is. Maybe it's the beauty, or the heat. But it's something you either revel in or struggle against, and it's always there. I suppose this is part of the reason we are the one region of the country with our own genre of fiction, a fact I've always found more fascinating than limiting. I hope you as a reader will feel this sense of place. I hope you'll see the steam rising up off the roads of fictional Wesleyan, Georgia after a noonday storm, and smell the magnolia blossoms filling a room with a fragrance like freshly cut lemons. And I hope you'll feel the leaves brush against your face when you step inside that muscadine arbor to wonder just what Geneva Bruce was doing in there when she took her last breath.

Writer Flannery O'Connor once said, "I write to discover what I know." In revealing the secrets that defined the Bruce family, I have discovered what I know about the powers of home, love, joy, and forgiveness. I have learned how freeing it is to throw the covers off the past and let in the light, and how impossible it is to move forward until we do.

I hope you'll laugh with the characters in *The Sweet Taste of Muscadines*, and maybe cry with them, too. I hope they will lead you to places you never thought you'd travel, and that you'll enjoy the journey every bit as much as the destination.

Thank you so much for reading.

Warmly,  
Pamela Terry

# Discussion Questions

1. Which character did you most like or relate to, and why?
2. In the beginning of the book, Pamela Terry writes, “Growing up in the South is not for the faint of heart. An enigmatic place at the best of times, it is paradoxical to the core.” If you grew up in the South, do you agree? If you grew up elsewhere, what did you think about Terry’s portrayal of the South in this novel?
3. At its core, *The Sweet Taste of Muscadines* is a novel about home and family. How were those concepts handled in the book, and how would you define them? How are home and place intertwined but also at odds sometimes?
4. Returning home is a common theme in fiction. Terry even references Thomas Wolfe’s famous novel *You Can’t Go Home Again* in her book. Why do you think this trope is so popular? And how does *The Sweet Taste of Muscadines* compare to other “going home again” novels you’ve read?
5. “Every house is haunted,” Terry tells us. Some houses are haunted in the traditional way, but some are haunted by “our own memories: bits of ourselves individual and unique, left behind and lying dormant for decades but with the power to quicken and breathe the moment we step back inside.” What do you think about this statement? How is Lila’s home haunted in the book, and how is your own home haunted?
6. Setting plays a big function in the plot of this novel—from the South, to the coast of Maine, to the Scottish Highlands. Why do you think setting is so important? Which setting was most appealing to you?
7. Terry writes that, “The touchstones that stand in our memory rarely match up to reality. They suffer from the distortion of time, with a tendency to become bigger and grander whenever we call them to mind.” Do you agree or disagree? What role does memory play in the book?

# Discussion Questions

8. In Chapter 23, Lila says, “Things were so different then,” but Henry contradicts her. How do you think things have changed for LGBTQ+ people over recent years, and how have they stayed the same?
9. As the Bruce siblings start to uncover the truth about their family’s past, they suddenly realize there was an entirely different version of their parents’ lives they never knew about. How well do you think children can ever fully know their parents? Why do parents hide so much of themselves from their children?
10. Many of the characters in this novel are dealing grief, guilt, and anger at the same time. Why do you think those emotions are so closely linked?
11. Faith and religion are big themes in the book. How do you think Penn managed to hold on to his faith? How did Lila find the way back to hers?
12. In the epilogue, Terry writes, “living your own life with joy is indeed a form of forgiveness.” Do you agree? What other forms of forgiveness appear in the novel? How do we forgive people who are no longer around to ask for forgiveness?
13. In writing this book, the author said she discovered a lot about the powers of home, love, joy, and forgiveness. She learned how freeing it is to throw the covers off the past and let in the light, and how impossible it is to move forward until we do. What did you learn from reading this novel?

# Author Photos

From Pamela's home in Georgia to her travels across Scotland



# Knitting Pattern: The March Hat

## Specifications\*

YARN: Kelbourne Woolens Germantown (100% N. American wool; 220 yds/100 gm skein): honey, 1 (1) skein.

GAUGE: 24 sts and 28 rnds = 4" (10 cm) in Seersucker Stitch on largest needle, after blocking.

## NEEDLES

1 - 16" (40 cm) US 3 (3.25 mm) circular.

1 - 16" (40 cm) US 5 (3.75 mm) circular.

1 - 16" (40 cm) US 7 (4.5 mm) circular.

1 - set US 7 (4.5 mm) DPNs.

Check your gauge and adjust needle size(s) accordingly.

NOTIONS: Size G-6 (4 mm) crochet hook, waste yarn, stitch marker, tapestry needle, pom pom maker, Kelbourne Woolens label, sewing thread, sharp sewing needle.

SIZE: 18 (20)" [45.75 (51) cm] circumference, 10.5" [26.5 cm] length.

\*Worthy of Note: The March Hat is worked in the round from the brim up. The pattern begins with a Tubular Cast On. If you do not wish to use the tubular cast on method you may opt to begin by casting on 108 (120) sts, joining for working in the round, and then skipping to the Brim instructions. When working the crown decreases, change to double pointed needles when the circumference is too small to fit onto the circulars.

## Stitch Patterns

K1, P1 Ribbing (in the rnd over a mult of 2):

Rnd 1: \*K1, p1; rep from \* around.

Rep Rnd 1 for pattern.

Seersucker Stitch (in the rnd over a mult of 4):

Rnd 1: \*K1, p1; rep from \* around.

Rnd 2: \*K1, p1; rep from \* around.

Rnd 3: \*P1, k3; rep from \* around.

Rnd 4: \*P1, k3; rep from \* around.

Rnd 5: \*K1, p1; rep from \* around.

Rnd 6: \*K1, p1; rep from \* around.

Rnd 7: \*K2, p1, k1; rep from \* around.

Rnd 8: \*K2, p1, k1; rep from \* around.

Rep Rnds 1-8 for pattern.

## Directions

### PROVISIONAL CAST ON:

Using smallest ndl, crochet hook, and waste yarn, provisionally cast on 55 (61) sts. Do not join.

Rnd 1: Using main yarn, \* k1, yo; rep from \* to 1 st rem, k1 - 109 (121) sts. Join for working in the rnd.

Rnd 2: Slip st from last rnd onto LH ndl, pm, k2tog, \*p1, sl1wyb; rep from to 1 st rem, p1 - 108 (120) sts.

Rnd 3: \*K1, sl1wyf; rep from \* around.

Rnd 4: \*Sl1wyb, p1; rep from \* around.

Repeat Rnd 3 once more. Change to second largest ndl.

### BRIM:

Work in K1, P1 Ribbing for 3" (7.5 cm).

Change to largest ndl.

BODY: Work Rnds 1-8 of Seersucker Stitch from chart or written instructions 5 times.

### CROWN:

Rnd 1 (Dec): \*Ssk, k1, p1; rep from \* around - 81 (90) sts.

Rnd 2 (Dec): \*Ssk, p1; rep from \* around - 54 (60) sts.

Rnd 3 (Dec): \*Ssk; rep from \* around - 27 (30) sts.

Size 18" Only:

Rnd 4 (Dec): \*Ssk; rep from \* to 1 st rem, k1 - 14 sts.

Rnd 5 (Dec): \*Ssk; rep from \* to 1 st rem, k1 - 7 sts.

Size 20" Only:

Rnd 4 (Dec): \*Ssk; rep from \* around - 15 sts.

Rnd 5 (Dec): \*Ssk; rep from \* to 1 st rem, k1 - 8 sts.

### FINISHING:

Break yarn. Thread through live stitches 2-3 times and fasten off. Remove waste yarn from provisionally CO edge. Weave in remaining ends. Soak in cool water and wool wash, and block to measurements.

### POM POM:

Make a 4" diameter pompom with remaining yarn. Secure pom pom to hat and tie off inside.

### LABEL:

Using sewing thread and a sharp sewing needle sew-on Kelbourne Woolens label to brim as shown.

## Seersucker Chart

				8
				7
				6
				5
				4
				3
				2
				1
pattern repeat				

## Chart Key

Knit

Purl

# Southern Buttermilk Biscuits



## Ingredients

- ½ cup butter (1 stick), frozen
- 2½ cups self-rising flour
- 1 cup chilled buttermilk
- Parchment paper
- 2 tbspn. butter, melted

Preheat oven to 475°F. Grate frozen butter using large holes of a box grater. Toss together grated butter and flour in a medium bowl. Chill 10 minutes.

Make a well in center of mixture. Add buttermilk, and stir 15 times. Dough will be sticky.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Lightly sprinkle flour over top of dough. Using a lightly floured rolling pin, roll dough into a ¾-inch-thick rectangle (about 9 x 5 inches). Fold dough in half so short ends meet. Repeat rolling and folding process 4 more times.

Roll dough to ½-inch thickness. Cut with a 2½-inch floured round cutter, reshaping scraps and flouring as needed.

Place dough rounds on a parchment paper-lined jelly-roll pan. Bake at 475°F for 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Brush with melted butter.

# Fried Okra



## Ingredients

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup cornmeal
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- ½ tsp. paprika
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1¼ cups buttermilk
- 12 oz. okra, stems removed, sliced into ½" thick rounds
- Vegetable oil, for frying

Line a baking sheet with paper towels. In a large bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, salt, garlic powder, paprika, and peppers. Pour buttermilk into a medium bowl.

Working in batches, toss okra in buttermilk, stirring to coat, then toss in flour mixture, making sure okra is well coated.

In a medium skillet over medium heat add just enough oil to coat bottom of pan. When oil is hot, work in batches and add okra, making sure to not overcrowd the pan. Fry 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, to make sure all sides are golden and fried. Drain on prepared baking sheet. Add more oil between batches, as necessary.

# Cheese Grits



## Ingredients

- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- Kosher salt
- 1 cup corn grits
- 4 tbsp. butter, divided
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- Freshly ground black pepper

In a medium saucepan, bring chicken broth and water to a boil and season generously with salt. Reduce heat so mixture is at a simmer, then whisk in grits. Simmer, stirring often, until grits have absorbed liquid and are very tender, 10 minutes.

Stir in butter and cheeses, then season with salt and pepper.