

"Just After Supper" by Pamela Woolford

In the evening, we would all gather around little Mable because she was the one with the proper way of speaking—like she was from New York, or grown and had been to college—and Momma would light the kerosene lamp, and hopefully John, that’s my father, would have passed out by then. I can see him now, sleeping all big and pronounced on the gritty wood floor in the main room with his head turned side on his crossed-over arms, snoring some, like a man with a face as soft and gentle as his had no business doing.

Whether he was drunk from moonshine, which he usually was, or just worn out from the labor of the pulp wood during one of his rare being-on-the-wagon times, it was best that he’d be snoring with that deep hum of his before the story began or he’d ruin it with his “thoughts on the matter” of everything. He liked to hear himself say those words. “I got thoughts on that matter,” he’d say and go on about something that wasn’t the point of what was happening in the story, which is what we wanted to hear—about those far off places that most of us would never get to see. We knew that, that we’d never get to the places except in those stories, which is why we all loved the reading so.

Mable, being just a child—but me, I was still looking up to her because she was the oldest of the twelve of us, but there were still only seven back then before we moved—she would sit in one of those cane-backed chairs that Papa Eddie made and sit real straight to make herself, I expect, look grown. She was only two years older than me, which seemed a lifetime then (none of us out of grade school yet), and I used to look at her someways, sitting there all proper like that with her thick straightened hair in two braids and wearing her dark dungarees, and I’d feel special ‘cause she’s my sister.

You know, when she got older she took to wearing them dungarees to school when no girl would wear such a thing but a dress. First there was whispering, “Mable’s wearing her dungarees,” then some days some of those girls did the same.

Mable would follow her own mind, even when it came to getting them stories. I remember she read one story about this little boy who couldn’t get to sleep unless his momma kissed him goodnight, but he was getting too big for that so his father would get fed up with him. I don’t think she finished that one because it was a long one. Some of them were novels that she didn’t read all the way through if after some nights too many of us weren’t listening good or there were too many questions and Momma wanted a different book. But I remember that little boy and how he used to read stories to himself before he’d go to sleep, waiting for his momma to kiss him goodnight, and that little boy wondering if his father was going to be put out by him not acting grown enough and come and make that little boy nervous. That made me think about how he was reading that story in a book and having all them thoughts and I was sitting there listening to my sister Mable read me about him and thinking on it all. I was listening to a story, thinking, while he was reading a story, thinking. I remember how Mable said he was in France. And he was doing something just like I was doing. That struck me.

I think that was one of my favorite, about that little boy that wanted his momma’s goodnight kiss. I think I liked it because he loved his momma so and I loved my momma so. Lord, I hated to see my momma upset at things, how hard things were for her. I still think about her every day of my life. Let’s see, she must’ve been gone for come along forty years now, never lived to see herself be a real old woman like me. But I still look like her all the same. I see her in the mirror every morning when I look at my face. That’s a strange feeling. I guess I’m half again the age I ever saw her. Well, not that old but getting on it.

Once, I was in this house—it was my cousin Celia Belle’s house, but I hadn’t been there in some years—and I walked by the hallway and thought, “I never seen that picture of my momma,” one hanging on the wall in a gold wood frame. And then I looked, and it was my own face in a mirror. I guess I must’ve been getting old thinking that. But ya think, I saw myself and thought it was my own momma hanging in a picture in someone else’s house.

Mable would always ask me did I want to hear more of the longer novels when we got to going back and forth about whether to move on to something else. I guess she could see I was always the one listening the most, and she wanted me to be a part of the thinking it through—which book to read next or whether to keep on with that one we were on. I can see Mable now, sitting there with her feet dangling, wearing those worn, brown lace-ups, back just as straight and her looking over at me, letting me know she knew I was listening.

When we got to going on about the book and whether to keep on, we never talked long because we didn’t want John to get up. He’d perk up with a start if there was too much talking it over. I guess he could hear, even in his passed out snoring, that the reading had stopped. I think the reading lulled him some, so he’d sleep. When it stopped, he knew there was a discussion, and he needed to be in on it, no matter whether he was getting the context or not. He just had to have his say. When I think on it now, it was funny, his way of adding this or that. But back then, I just wished he’d stay asleep.

His moods would be a terror when they got wrong. Sometimes he was just joking, but sometimes, aw a’mighty, he’d be ugly to my momma. It’s hard to see something like that when you’re just a child. I guess today they’d say my momma had that syndrome that the wives stay with they husbands what beat ‘em, but she didn’t; she hadn’t lost her mind. She knew she had all us children, and she did what she could ‘til she could get to her own momma’s house good.

Papa Eddie, he's my momma's papa, nearly killed John when he found out about all them beatings and such, and Papa Eddie wasn't a violent man. I guess he couldn't stand that, that being his baby girl. Even when you're grown, no matter how old, you're always your daddy's and your momma's baby, I guess. I mean, if you got good people. My momma was good people, and that's the way it was with her. She looked out for me until the end. Even when I was caring for her when she was so far gone after those strokes, she most couldn't follow me when I was talking to her, but she would look at me someways and say, "You alright? You doing alright now, right?" just like she was my Momma again, got that same look in her eye like when she'd worry about me when I was just coming up and getting to be grown and she was helping me make it on my own. She had all of us children, but she looked out for each one of us. One stayed with her until Momma died, Samuel did. She looked out for him—he never married—and he looked out for her.

Mable's favorite person to read was O. Henry, who was from North Carolina like us. She had this book of stories of his, and she'd read from it, and then Guy de Maupassant, whose name is French, and she'd read him every Christmas—"The Gift of the Magi." We all knew what would happen, but it was nice. It was our tradition.

You know, we'd wake up, all of us, 'fore dawn on Christmas, and we'd each have a stocking stuffed with tangy dried apple rings and sweet raisins on the vine that'd been dried on the smokehouse roof and fresh walnuts in the shell and such, English walnuts that didn't turn your hands dark for weeks like our own ones still in the hull, tasty as they were in autumn. And somehow each of us would have a wrapped present from my parents from Santa: ball and jacks, Chinese marble checkers, a bingo or lotto set. Some years, when Grandma Nan had sold timber from her land, she would have for us something we had asked for. Mable got her dungarees from Grandma Nan one Christmas and a tam. One year I got a doll that looked just like a sleeping little baby. And once

there was a tea set. I loved that little tea set. Made me feel grown and special, like it was real porcelain. Then after we'd opened everything and looked at it all and played, it'd be mid-morning, and Momma would be baking apple jacks, with the nutmeg, ginger, and cinnamon spiced apple rings wrapped in her thin flaky dough scenting the house, and she would tell Mable to go ahead and get us around to read from her book with "The Gift of the Magi" Christmas story.

Mable would start to read in that voice of hers, all proper and low and soothing. I always remember how it opened, talking about that gray cat walking on a gray fence on a gray day, and I could feel it all seeming sad for that woman who was thinking on how she didn't have a present for her husband. Then it was Christmas, the story said. Seemed like Christmas turned all that around. The husband and wife seemed like they just had each other, and in the end that was enough. It made you feel sweet for them. Momma liked that it wasn't a grand story; it was about being happy and making do. "Look like they tried so hard, but it didn't matter in the end," Momma would say, and she'd kind of say it to me because I liked talking the story through. "It wasn't just them presents they were happy on. It was each other," she'd say and smile to herself like she was hearing that story for the first time.

Mable started getting these books from old Mr. Washington in Summerville. He was the first black man in Summerville I'd heard of. Of course he wasn't old back then. He'd put those books on the reading van that came around, giving them to lend because he was done with them, I guess. But we knew they were his because his name'd still be on them. He would come to our schoolhouse and talk, more than once he did. That's how I knew who he was because when the teacher said, "Clarence Washington," and I thought, that's the man from some of the reading van books.

It was exciting when we got to stop our lessons and listen to Mr. Clarence talk. The teacher'd tell us he was coming—we were about 30 or so in that one-room schoolhouse, from little ones to 10 years old—and we would grin and look around at each other when she'd tell us, all of us knowing we were happy about that. You know, I know old Mr. Washington is not a big man, but my memory of him is that he was big and tall, I expect since I was so small then. I just thought he was special, the way he'd talk—made the world sound exciting, like being alive was an invite to something. He'd talk about being overseas and traveling and that we could do that and be what we wanted to be. Most of us didn't, of course, but I think the ones that did—Jo Jo Carroll did, Johnny Joe (we called him Jo Jo) went to different parts of the world with his guitar music—I think them that did maybe did because people like old Clarence Washington put the notion in them, and that's a good thing. I mean, you didn't have to tell someone to want to leave, the wanting comes on its own, but sometimes you need more than that.

I see old Mr. Washington today sometimes when I drive up to Summerville for the orchards, and I wave. He still sets out on his porch. Look like he's alone. Sometimes I see his granddaughter Erica's car in the drive.

Wait now, no, I said something wrong just then before. O. Henry wrote that Christmas story. But she would read Guy de Maupassant, too. Mable liked to read him, too.

So just after supper in the Woodtown house, Mable'd pull a chair over, scraping wood against wood, to near the pot-bellied stove, whether it was going in winter or whether not in summer, she'd drag the chair over there to set up herself for reading. The little ones'd still be crawling—Annie and Lucy Mae—or be in Momma or my arms or they'd be put down for sleeping, and the rest of us—Momma, John, and me, Joseph and Jacob, and Samuel, who was always underfoot (liked to hang under Momma even though he was too

big for that)—we'd gather around: Momma in a chair and the rest of us spread on the floor, even John, he'd sometimes prop himself against the planks of the wall. We'd sit and listen to Mable read. 'Til we got near enough tired, we'd sit and listen to her read.

There used to be this big wooden bench tucked under the stairs in the house, and part of it'd be hidden under the diagonal cut of the stairs, and once in awhile during the day I'd curl up alone there sometimes. You could see the rest of the bench sticking out but no one'd know I 'as there when I curled up. I used to lay there and think on those stories sometimes, let 'em wander around in my head and switch 'em up. I'd put myself over there in France and see that little boy's picture lamp that he'd read by at night. It'd be glowing in my head when I'd close my eyes and see all them castles and such from the lamp cutouts shining on the walls, flickering in the kerosene. The book talked about how pretty that boy's lamp was, and then it was right there in my head.

One time I was curled up thinking about that boy and his lamp and them stories...you know, I think Mable read part of that story more than once. She'd do that sometime if she liked it, go back and read part of a story again, thinking Momma might be in a different mood about it that time, I expect. One time I was curled up thinking about that lamp light shining pictures of far off places on the wall, and I could hear John calling me, but I didn't answer. The cutouts of that lamp shining on the wall someways went from horses and castles and such to John walking with his big shoes. I could hear him creaking those floorboards and walking in the main room, and I was watching him in my head, his outline lit up on a wall. I don't know what he was up to, but he was calling my name, I'm sure, to do some cooking or some such, but I never did used to get up when he'd call my name for some such like that. Mable'd cook for him, but that's something I didn't do. Even as a child I had set my mind that I wasn't going to do that for him. He never would call my brother Samuel to do something like that, but I'd be chopping wood

and hauling spring water and just still a little bit of a girl, and I wasn't going to cook his food. One time I was all day catching one minnow in the creek, and I scraped and cleaned and fried it for myself. He could hear the oil crackle and smell that good fish frying and asked me could he have a taste, and I said yes, and when I went to that pan wasn't nothing in there, and I said I thought you just wanted a taste, and he said (I laugh at it *now*) "wasn't nothin' but a taste."

I can't remember why I was home that one day when he was calling my name or where everyone else was, but after awhile he stopped, and I could hear him creaking a chair up to the stove and sitting. Then I heard the quick flutter of a page turning and heard it again as he was reading one of Mable's books. With my eyes closed like that, I could almost smell the peppery pages. "What that mean?" I heard him say out loud even though no one else was there—he didn't know I was 'round. Then I heard him start to snicker and getting a joke in the book. I could hear the cane of the chair seat crackle as he read, as his shadow outline adjusted itself sitting there solid black like a cameo on the wall in my mind.

John didn't go past the fourth grade, but he was always reading something. He'd make me so mad stealing my school books when I got just a bit older. There'd be one I needed for school, and he'd say he wasn't finished with it yet. Seemed like he'd read those history books like a whole novel sometime, like he'd have to be done with it before he'd give it back to whichever of us it belonged to.

Seem like it'd make my momma mad, too. And I could know why because busy as she was with kneading the biscuits and rolling and baking them up twice a day, and cooking meals, and scrubbing clothes on the washboard and hanging them and ironing with the metal iron from the stove, and making lye soap, even with some of us helping her with the wood and water and canning

and the cows and chicken ringing, she was always doing. He should've been so, too.

They both drank, him and my momma, but it look like he didn't always know how to keep on afterwards. One of the earliest stories of me I remember was men coming in a black sedan to pick up John for pulp-wood work one time and him telling me to tell 'em that he wasn't home—he had been up half the night making moonshine and up the rest of the night testing the product, I guess—and I'm just a little child, and I go to the porch and I say, "John say, he ain't home." Well, they just laughed and went on.

I think of John now and the way he read and all and the way he liked to tell a joke and talk, and I see I have a talkative nature like him. When I was coming up, the way he was mean and beating my momma just ate me up inside, and now some bit of me is like him with the talking and all. Whew, that's a strange thing.

I can see him now coming at her, getting too close to my momma's face and talking at her like he was starting to boil up inside. And Mable'd put her book down or her homework or whatever she was doing and start to get any of us children to get out of the way, get us in another room if she could. But as hard as it was to see, it was more sickening to hear, them terror screams, and my momma's skull thud against that iron stove a time. Can't believe it was my poor momma's head.

When it'd start, look like Samuel'd just freeze in his tracks, alert like a dog that's heard a noise. Samuel'd be real taut up, and I seen him yell at my father if need be. He was usually nervous and quiet, Samuel was, but I 'spect he was the most bold. He's the only one of us I ever seen my father touch. John snatched him up real hard one time and slammed him and held him against the wall and said, "Boy, I'm not doing nothing to your mother! I'm talking to

her! I'm not touching her!" And he said it with such a fury. John was full of venom, and Samuel's eyes were red and watered over and his feet were hanging above the ground, and I thought John was going to strike him. He just had us all knotted up inside, John did.

Look like the warm weather was the best time in that house because we'd all be running around outside, and there'd be more ease, climbing trees and picking berries and such, getting fruit from the peach trees. I can smell them sweet ripe peaches now. And Momma would be in a good mood working her garden. Oh she'd have butter beans and a few hundred corn stalks she'd tend to and red onion bulbs and potatoes, and those big cabbages and collard bursts, okra plants with their white blooms, and tomatoes on the vine. She'd be out there 'round the back of the house harvesting Sunday afternoons mostly, out there until the whip-poor-will birds started that dusk song that gave them their name. Sometimes Samuel and I'd work alongside her 'cause we wanted to. It wasn't like working them fields.

When the seasons hit, we'd be working them cucumber, cotton, and tobacco fields for longer days than is good and be spent at the end of the day, and hire ourselves out—the ones that were 8 or so or more—to pay for shoes and fabric to get clothes made and the used books for public school in the fall, the schools for us and those Indian children our teachers were so mean to before they got their own schools and the black children went with the whites and their teachers.

But then 'course, there was Mable's reading. We all loved them stories. Joseph and Jacob would fidget some, and they never took to it like the rest, but even they would listen.

Now one time Mable read us "The Last Leaf," which, that one, I know O. Henry wrote, and I will always remember that story because of what it did to

Momma. Seem like it just stuck with her. It was the story of this woman who was sick and her friend was by her bedside seeing her to be well, but it looked like it was no good, and the doctor said she would die by the time the last leaf fell off the vine you could see from her window. I guess that was a way of giving the woman who was caring for her a way to think about it, the seasons and everything. So there's this man who paints, but nothing is coming of his painting, and he can't make ends meet, and he's old, and he lives in the building that these two women live in. They live in an apartment building because they live in the city. The woman who's not holding on well, she knows she's going to die with that leaf. So the old man gets an idea in his head to paint a leaf on a wall that she can see outside of her window, like a vine on a wall with a leaf on it, but he's painted it on. But it's real cold out when... 'cause I guess he has to paint at night so she can't see, so it's cold, and he catches his death of cold, literally to the fact, he catches his death and dies. But that woman never dies, not from that sickness. She gets better because seeing that leaf she kept holding on, kept on holding on and she got better. It was like she got it in her mind, if that leaf don't fall she won't fall, and she got better and her friend was glad. But that man had to die, but it was like he died because he was doing something so good, and all that painting he did all his life, that leaf on that wall was his best painting, and it meant something. It made that woman live.

And Momma got it in her head that that story was so pretty, even though that man died. And she kept thinking on it, you know. Even sometime later she'd talk on it. And when we finally did leave John, my momma was pregnant again, but she left anyway even how hard it was. She packed us up, which of course wasn't much—we didn't have much to take—but she packed all us children up, and me and Mable and Samuel helped with the younger ones, and she seemed like she wasn't scared of John coming after us and dragging us back this time. She talked about that leaf. She said she could see the leaf on

the wall, and she wasn't done yet. "Not this time, John," she said when she had us all marching up that dirt road. She thought to take the mule but didn't 'cause she said she didn't want nothing from that house no more and we were going to walk to Papa Eddie and Momma Grand's. Miles and miles, but we were going to walk.

Old Mr. Washington was right. We were able to do things we didn't know we could do. "The world's out there," he would say. I expect I didn't see most of it, but it's like I live my life the way I want, I live as I want, and that's important, too. It's not just seeing the world, but doing what you want in the world, living your life like you see fit to live your life.

That's what that story did for my momma. It took her notion to go and make it on her own and added some piece of strength she didn't know she had. My momma had so much joy in her. Joy that John couldn't snatch from her. She used to tease me about this neighbor boy I'd fish with saying he was my boyfriend, and it made me so mad, but she would get to smiling about it when she teased, and then I'd be smiling, too. And oh, she'd dance that old Charleston when she got a notion to, dancing in the main room. Folks loved her, and the PTA made her secretary when we lived in the Woodtown house. She was voted secretary, and she would look forward to going to them meetings.

Look like those meetings made John mad though. Seem like he was fine when she went, but when he'd get in a way that he was itching for a fight he bring up them meetings. "You think you needed outside this house. You not needed outside this house," he'd say. "Who you think you are going outside this house?" And the thing is Momma wouldn't let it lay, which I wish she would. She'd stick up for herself and didn't show the fear of him we did when he got that way. Sometimes I have an awful thought when I think back on it, like I wish she would've just let him strike and not fight back. You could see he

wanted to keep beating her 'till she stayed down, and sometimes as a child I'd wish she'd just play possum and let it be done.

The worst of John's beatings put Momma in the hospital for more than a day. When she came home her face was still swollen on one side of her upper lip and cheek. The area was all full and purplish and made her look like she had an odd expression. My stomach sunk when I saw her. I sat by her bed and talked to her, and I held her hand—it was what I could think to do—but she didn't say much or look at me. My little hand was wrapped around her heavy rough one, and you know, I felt a bit proud that I thought of that to do; I wanted to do the right thing by her just then. But I think she felt embarrassed to be around her children like that, even though we all knew it was John's doing. She slowly glanced over at me with her eyes looking drained then mostly looked off down near the foot of the bed.

A couple days before, Mable had been home with Joseph and Jacob and the baby girls when John took to boiling up again and did Momma worse than ever. They say Mable rode that mule like a horse down to Peter T. Thomas's and got Mr. Pete to ride his Chevy truck up there and pick up my poor momma from the floor. He took her to Doctor Wilson's, but Doctor Wilson wasn't home, so he rode her out to Claire County General rather than over to Doctor Harris's because she was getting worse, bleeding and all and closing her eyes.

He or Mable had thought to throw the flour-sac straw mattress from Momma and John's bed onto the bed of the truck for Momma to be on. Mable rode back there with her, talking to her, I know.

I can't imagine my momma lying there like that, and God know'd where John was when Mable and Mr. Pete had first got to the house and picked her up from where she still lay on the main-room floor, but he wasn't there. Just

little Joseph and Jacob there with her, with the girls set down. The sheriff came and arrested John later. His own momma, Grandma Nan, got him out of jail. She came to my mother's bedside once she was home and prayed at her and read the Bible at her for so long. Wanted her to forgive my father. Kept reading in her twangy high voice, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses," while she was lying there helpless like that. If my momma had a mind to forgive John, I expect it was changed by the time Grandma Nan sat there and got through talking at her. That wasn't doing no good but wearing her down in the other direction. I could see that. But his momma always wanted to do right by him because she had to pull him out of school so early when his daddy died and he 'came the man of the house and worked the fields, and his momma always felt wrong about that, you could see, her repeating it all the time. "Buddy never had a chance at real learning," she'd say about John. "Buddy never had a chance to learn like the others. Buddy never had a chance. Poor thing never had a chance" she'd say, like he was always that little boy.

You know, after the whole thing happened I never liked Mr. Pete again when I was a child. I feel right bad about it now and think on it sometimes. Not long after my Momma was home I passed Mr. Pete walking the dirt road, and he asked how my Momma was coming on, and I looked him in the eye and said "fine," but I said it real unfriendly and looked on and didn't stop walking. Mable had told me how he said to the people at the hospital, "Her husband did it to her. The nigger's name is John." Mable told me about him using that word, and I just knew he was someone to hate after that, like he thought he was better than me. I didn't care none about John being in jail, but it was like the world was good and bad people, and Mr. Pete was not to be liked. I feel unsettled when I think on it now, like I wish I could go back and thank him. He maybe saved my momma's life, let her live long enough to be strong.

That day that we left John and that house, Momma talking about that leaf the way she did, we all felt right strong marching up that road, and all of us there. We didn't get tired is how I remember it.

Strange, I recall one morning sometime before we left being up early on a Sunday, before the woodpecker started with his rat-a-tat-tat. There was some sun peaking through, but I was the only one about, and I went out on the front porch in my bare feet. I remember because it was never like that, just me about, outside. I leaped off the edge of the porch and went around the side of the house. I reached my hand down to touch the house's lowest plank a couple of feet off the ground, above the crawl space, feeling the splintered wood. The earth was cool on my feet. Momma's red rambling rose was growing up just as pretty on that side of the house.

I was standing there like that when I heard the screen door creak, and I went and saw Momma coming out to stand on the porch, and I could see she had her morning snuff in, her mouth in front of her bottom teeth protruding, but she didn't have nothing to spit in.

She went to the edge of the porch and spat out, the brown juice putting flecks on the bright yellow petals of one of the sunflowers, tall as me, where it towered above the pinkish purple clusters of zinnias and petunias and the crinkly orange marigolds. I was thinking how the flecks of that spittle matched the big dark center of that sunflower when my Momma looked at me, and I asked her did she want a cup.

I got myself up on the porch from the side and went in the house, through the main room and into the kitchen, and John was in there percolating coffee on one of the eyes of the wood-burning iron stove. I had smelled the burnt aroma when I creaked open the rusty springs of the screen door, and it seemed like Momma and John had been up so quick since I been up. Seemed

like that minute alone was so quick. I took a tin cup from the cupboard and brought it out to Momma.

Now the thing that was so unusual was that Momma grabbed a hold of me when I went out there and just held me like a strong hug and didn't say anything. When she let go of me, I acted just like it didn't happen and put the cup on the windowsill and went in. But that morning comes back to me sometimes.

Once we moved, Momma eventually had four more children with Tom from down the road from Papa Eddie's and Momma Grand's, and they married. He's Sandy Sue, Laura Jean's, Arthur, and Tom Jr.'s father, but he was a right nice man to all of us, and like a father better than our father ever was. He was like a father to me, and I sure loved him.

We didn't read like we used to once we left Woodtown because the van didn't come around there, and Mable had left her books at the house. Two of them were her own books, the books of stories from O. Henry and the man from France, Guy de Maupassant. Mostly you'd borrow the books and return them when the van came around again or just ask if you could keep 'em a little while longer. But the books of stories, the O. Henry ones and the Guy de Maupassant ones, she bought. She'd save her coins from working in other folks's fields and bought those books because those were her favorite and anyhow wasn't anybody else reading them. Usually you could only buy a book if it had been in the van a long time and they had got new ones, but they knew she kept borrowing those books and they let her go ahead and buy those before they got old. Oh Mable'd race to that black van when it started up our dirt drive, I guess every few weeks. We all liked it, but when that driver woman got out and slid those side doors open, Mable would be the first to hop in. You could smell the half million pages when you stepped in—must have been a couple thousand books in that space—and you could look

through for some time and get as many as you'd want to borrow. There were different sorts of books in that van: *Little Black Sambo*, believe it or not, and Dick and Jane books for the little ones and one called *Melindy's Medal* with pictures that I liked. I remember when I found a story about a little boy named Toby, and he was black and lived on a farm like me. I'll never forget finding that book. But Mable liked the longer ones with so much going on. The reading van lady could see Mable liked those and would tell Mable when she got something she thought she'd like. She was nice, that lady that was usually in that van. I wonder her name.





Pamela Woolford writes fiction and creative nonfiction, for which she has received a number of honors, including a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award. Her work has appeared in *Transition* and *Poets & Writers Magazine*, extensively in *The Baltimore Sun*, in the anthology *Amazing Graces* (Gargoyle Press, 2012), and in other publications. Her current project is a multi-discipline memoir, *Meditations on a Marriage*, which is an upcoming book with an accompanying short film, a film about a dance about a book about emotional abuse. Woolford is a Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards finalist for excerpts from the project. “Just After Supper,” and especially the character Mable, is inspired by the early life of Woolford’s mother, Sadie Woolford, who is also a writer and spent her childhood in rural North Carolina in the '30s, '40s, and '50s. More about Pamela Woolford’s work can be found at www.about.me/pamelawoolford.