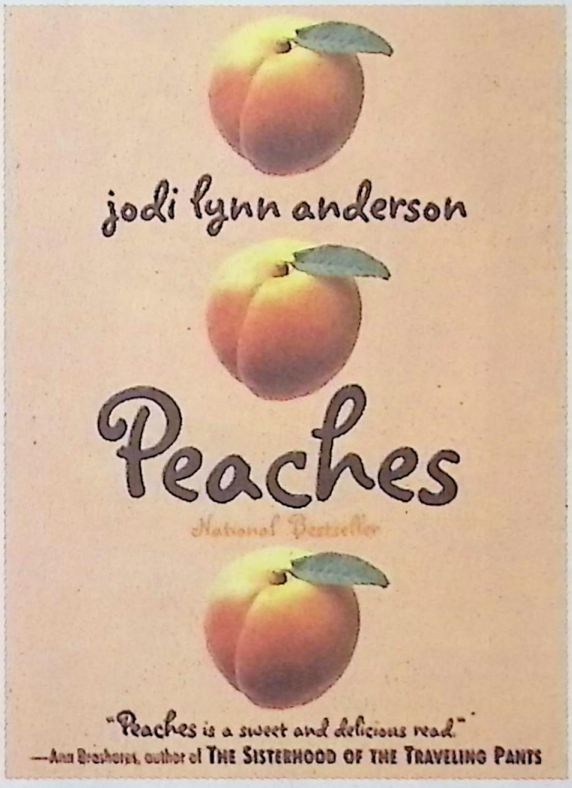
Peaches

by Jodi Lynn Anderson

Reviewed by Sameeha Suraiya



OKAY so clichéd or not, a group of girls always know how to have some good fun! Lifetime sisterhoods or day-old acquaintances, the stories that emerge are bound to pull some great strings. This summer, three girls in their sophomore years are to come together from three corners of Georgia, finding themselves in a peach orchard that lies in splendid seclusion, and teetering on the verge of extinction. Starting out as total strangers with no commonality whatsoever to spark up instant connections, the three very different girls, however, reach out most unexpectedly, finding the truest friendship and together picking the perfect Georgian peach.

Jodi Lynn Anderson, in her praiseworthy debut novel embraces the pulsating energy that surrounds us all. The magic that there is in the summer and how it brings together crooked souls to create the most lasting bondages is what the novel seems to sing out. *Peaches* is packed with fun and poignancy, sweet in some parts and sour in others as the author draws from her own experiences. Living in Georgia, she refers to herself as someone who eats peaches, peach pie and peach tart on a regular basis.

The Darlington Peach Orchard that brings together three seeking souls stands with "a past as shady as the grass under its tallest trees...stretching itself over the summer like it had every summersoftly, quietly and shyly". The Darlingtons refuse to see that it is falling apart, in spite of having to face constant warning from the next-door golf course that threatens to snub out its age-old history. Into this tangled world lands Murphy Mcdowen, a troublemaker who in her grand tradition always knows how to amuse herself whenever boredom springs up. Condemned to community service (picking peaches) for an attempt at stealing liquor, Murphy is unaware of the world that will open up to her, a world she in the beginning finds flat and oppressive. Smart and sarcastic, she would rather be out there taking risks, imagining herself as a fire-ant. Birdie Darlington owns the orchard where she lives with her dad. She would rather be alone sulking or watching re-runs of Dawson's Creek, always feeling more comfortable around plants and animals than people, always wishing she were some place else. Leeda Cawley-Smith is beautiful, rich and popular. She should be feeling like a million dollars yet she cannot lay her finger on why being around her sister makes her feel like twenty cents. Anderson delves into what it means to be young. She grapples with issues like rebellion, abandonment, love and acceptance. Her novel attempts to roll it all under one title, and it would be alright to say that she does it wonderfully, patching in the old with the new, the hushed Southern history with the culture of VH1 and Coldplay. The orchard is a witness to it all, silent and floundering.

There is a sense of timelessness in the way the orchard has survived all these years, carrying secrets in its cool, dark depths. It provokes strong emotions; Murphy feels drawn to it. There is something about its chaotic mess that she finds it irresistible to break in the property. Each of the girls develops a special attachment to the place that is threatened to be wiped out, and so to will the reader. However, the author throws in fragments of information from the past that could have been integrated better into the storyline. Some stand out too distant and confusing.

Highly recommended to while away these summer afternoons!