

**“The Peach Keeper” by Sarah Addison Allen. Bantam Books, 2011. 273 pages**

Walls of Water is a sleepy resort town tucked high in the North Carolina Mountains. Willa Jackson holds the dubious distinction of being the last descendent of the town’s founding family – a history that she has spent her life trying to escape.

Willa left town as soon as she graduated from high school, and returned only when her father was killed in an accident five years later. Filled with regrets, she is determined to be the stable, dutiful daughter her father always wanted. She purchases a local organic sporting goods store and lives a quiet life.

The Blue Ridge Madam was Willa’s family’s home for several generations. When the forest around Walls of Water became a National Park, the Jacksons, whose money came from the logging industry, lost everything. The Madam sat empty for decades, a decaying representative of all that the Jackson family lost, at least in Willa’s eyes.

Socialite do-gooder Paxton Osgood has purchased the Madam, and is renovating it into a bed and breakfast. Paxton is planning to debut the restored Madam at the Women’s Society Club’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala, and wants Willa to attend. Willa’s grandmother, Georgie Jackson, is one of the two remaining founders of the club.

Paxton’s life seems to be perfect. She’s smart, beautiful and wealthy. She has lots of friends, and artfully juggles the demands of the family business with her social obligations and charitable work.

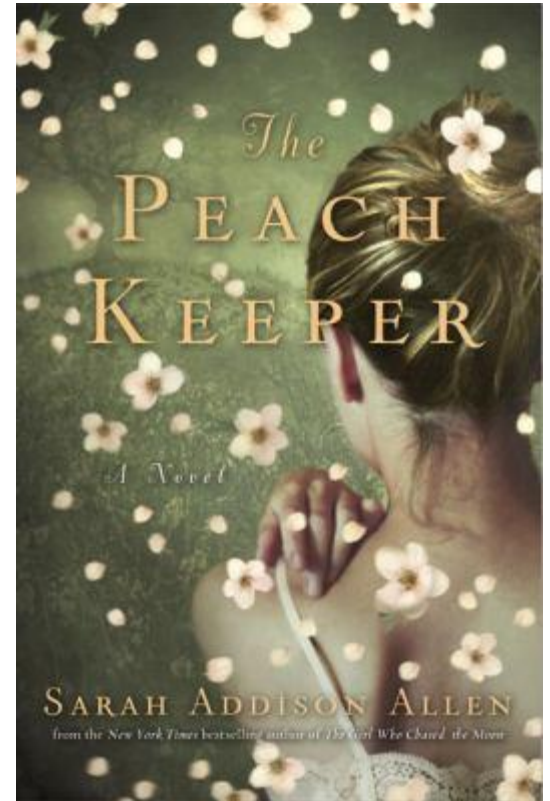
Beneath the polished façade, Paxton’s life is a tangled mess. She’s thirty years old, and living in her parents’ pool house because she’s afraid to confront her mother. She’s in love with a wonderful man who adores her, but thinks he isn’t interested. She is painfully aware that her “friends” in the Women’s Society Club aren’t really friends at all. Her twin brother, Colin, has managed to escape the family obligations, leaving Paxton to bear the weight of the duties.

When Colin returns to town to help Paxton with the final landscaping details at the Madam, things become even more complicated. A chance encounter with Colin leaves Willa off-kilter and reminds Colin of the reasons he left Walls of Water so long ago, yet the chemistry between them is undeniable.

Willa and Paxton have never been friends. Their grandmothers, however; were best friends until the Jackson family lost their money. That’s when Willa’s unwed, pregnant grandmother went to work as a maid in the Osgood household. That was also the year that Georgie Jackson and Agatha Osgood formed the Women’s Society Club.

A skeleton is unearthed by landscapers at the Madam, and Willa and Paxton must work together to solve the mystery. Thrown together in unlikely, uncomfortable circumstances, the two women discover the true meaning of friendship.

Sarah Addison Allen is a gifted storyteller. She weaves the world of her story gently around her readers, until they’re utterly enchanted. *The Peach Keeper* is a beautifully written, captivating exploration of love, friendship and loyalty. It’s a sweet springtime read that should be savored, but I couldn’t help gulping it down. Of course, I was sorry to reach the end so quickly.



Heather Holley-Hall is the Head of Branch Libraries with Alamance County Public Libraries. She may be reached at 336-570-6730 or hhhall@alamancelibraries.org.