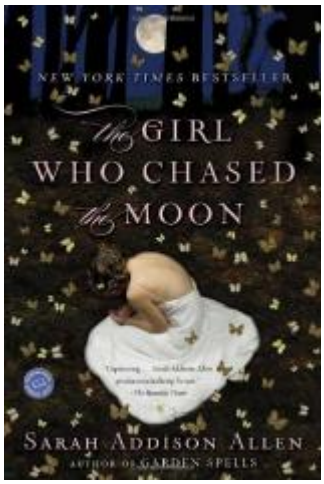
The Girl Who Chased the Moon

by Sarah Addison Allen



About the Book

Seventeen-year-old Emily Benedict, intent on learning more about her mother, Dulcie, moves in with her grandfather, but is disappointed to find that her grandfather doesn't want to talk much about Dulcie. She soon discovers, though, that many still hold a grudge against Dulcie for the way she treated an old sweetheart before dumping him and disappearing. Luckily, Dulcie's high school adversary, Julia Winterson, back in town to pay down her deceased father's debt, takes a shine to Emily. She's working another quest as well: baking cakes every day with the hope that they'll somehow attract the daughter she gave up for adoption years ago. There are love interests, big family secrets, and magical happenings (color-changing wallpaper, mysterious lights) aplenty as Allen charts the spiraling inter-generational stories, bringing everything together in an unexpected way.

Discussion Guide

1. The legend of the Mullaby lights is front and center in this story. How do legends come to pass? What do they say about a culture or community? Can you imagine something like this happening in your town? Have you ever had a haunting or whimsical experience that led you to a valuable discovery?

2. In Mullaby, barbecue is a celebratory food, meant to be shared. It brings people together. On the other hand, for Julia, cake-baking is a solitary activity, a ceremony she performs alone to feel connected to someone she has lost. Why do you think food is so central to this story? What kind of meaning can cooking, baking, and food take on? What do they mean to you? What kind of food is your city/state known for?

3. Julia finds that baking cakes is the only way she can comfortably express what is truly going on in her heart. What hobby or talent allows you to reveal yourself more clearly to others? Is there something specific about you or something you are good at that you feel draws others to you?

4. From the moment they meet, Win and Emily seem unavoidably drawn to one another. What do you think is the cause of this connection and why does the bond between them grow so quickly? Do you think that this kind or romance would be possible if they were older?

5. Julia takes an immediate liking to Emily, assuming a motherly role. What do you think drews Julia to Emily? Could it be that Julia needed Emily just as much as Emily needed Julia? Have you ever taken a nurturing stance in someone else's life only to find that they were truly the ones rehabilitating you? Furthermore, do you think the relationship between Emily and Julia helped open Julia up to Sawyer? If so, how?

6. Despite the fact that Sawyer mistreated Julia in a painful way, she ultimately forgives him. Do you think that

Sawyer deserved Julia's forgiveness? Do you think that you would forgive someone who had abandoned you in the same way? Do you think that there are limits on what a person can forgive?

7. In the story, we see different characters mourning the loss of loved ones (Emily with her mother, Vance with his wife and daughter, and Julia with her daughter and father). What are the different ways these characters cope with their losses? What do you think their coping mechanisms say about who they are?

8. Julia only moves back to Mullaby under the self-enforced condition that she will leave in two years. Why do you think she returned to Mullaby to save her father's restaurant when their relationship had been so tenuous? Other than Sawyer, what persuades her to stay in her hometown?

9. Emily has one view of her mother, while the town has a very different view. And Grandpa Vance has yet another understanding. Who is/was the real Dulcie? Do you believe a person can truly change? How might Emily's life have been different if she had known the truth of her mother's past before coming to Mullaby?

10. Many people in Mullaby could be considered misfits. From the most prominent family in town to Julia and Vance, there are a multitude of characters who have the experience of not fitting in. How does this affect their lives? How do some manage to use this to their advantage while others seem to suffer for it? What does this say about the power of belonging? Why do many people, particularly young people, feel the need to belong while others are determined to stand out? Which kind of person are you?

11. Emily's grandfather is a loveable giant. She is completely taken aback when she first sees him. Have you ever met someone who did not meet your expectations at all? How so? Much the same, Julia and Stella's friendship seems like an unlikely pairing. What do you think they gain from their differences? What do you gain from the opposites in your life?

12. At the end of the story, when Vance reveals the truth behind Dulcie's motivations for the midnight show in the park, Emily is at first incredulous that he has kept this secret for so long. Why do you think he took so long to reveal this? Do you think it was right of him to allow the town to think of her negatively? What would you have done if Dulcie were your daughter?

13. At the beginning of the novel, Emily discovers the grandfather she didn't know she had, and at the very end, Maddie embarks on a relationship with Julia. What does this story tell us about our blood connections? Do you think that being related to someone binds you to them whether you know them personally or not? What do you think Julia and Maddie's relationship will look like five or ten years down the road?

Author Bio

Sarah Addison Allen is the *New York Times* bestselling author of GARDEN SPELLS, THE SUGAR QUEEN, THE GIRL WHO CHASED THE MOON, THE PEACH KEEPER and LOST LAKE. She was born and raised in Asheville, North Carolina.

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