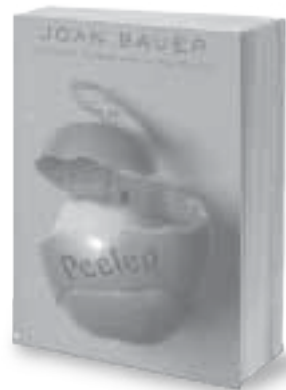


from

Peeled

by JOAN BAUER



Who's responsible for the strange events in Banesville? Hildy is determined to find out. She attends a town meeting where a developer tries to convince people to "grow."

Growth," said Martin, "is what the world needs. And how does something grow?" He chuckled. "That's a presumptuous thing to say here in apple country, where you understand the seasons of growth and harvest better than most Americans. But the basics of growth for an orchard are the same as for a town or a city. You've got to have space to grow. You've got to understand what the soil is good for. You've got to prune back the dead leaves on a tree. Growth is only possible when we work at it."

I took notes, even though Darrell was taping this.

More 3-D pictures of Banesville came on the screen and then morphed into a map of the town. Jazz music began to play. "And what's the growth that can happen here? Oh, you can plant more trees. Trees are a fine thing. You can increase the size of your farmers' market, spruce up your yards, add a couple of new buildings. But where's the energy of bold new beginnings? The creative thinking that would make Banesville, New York, the travel destination in the Northeast?"

People started murmuring.

"What," Martin asked, "could turn this sweet, sleepy town into a mecca of new ideas, bold technology, and good old family togetherness?"

"I bet you're going to tell us, Martin," Mom whispered.

The 3-D map changed into an amusement park with rides and stores. Beyond that were more buildings. "We want to build here," Martin said with feeling. "We want to highlight the mythology of your little apple valley."

The Ludlow house loomed on the screen.

"People are hungry to find new ways to get together. You know the beauty of a theme park? No one goes there alone." A big midway stretched across the screen, filled with families. A dark building cast shadows across the people. "A haunted theme park, ladies and gentlemen, where people can come and find a place to release their fear in a safe environment." A map of Banesville appeared. "It would be perfectly situated along that expanse of badly used land on Red Road. . . ."

Badly used? There were homes there, family farms!

"My great-grandfather bought our plot of land," a man shouted out. "We grow six kinds of apples there, plus peaches and pears. Who are you to say that land is badly used?"

The mayor walked to the microphone. "Now, this isn't the kind of respectful attention I told Martin to expect—"

I heard the sound of a folding chair moving behind me.

"I understand your concern," Martin Midian said gently. "No one's saying you're not using your land, but using it for this new project will bring millions of dollars into this town. Tourism will explode. That means all of you folks who have stores will be riding high. All of you who grow apples will have thousands more customers. The name of Banesville will be known far and wide. Don't you see the beauty of this? Yes, a few will need to be relocated. But the greater good for all will be immeasurable."

Mom stood up. "Relocated is a big word, Mr. Midian. Relocated where?"

He smiled like a movie star. "That's part of Phase Two. All those issues will be worked out equitably." 