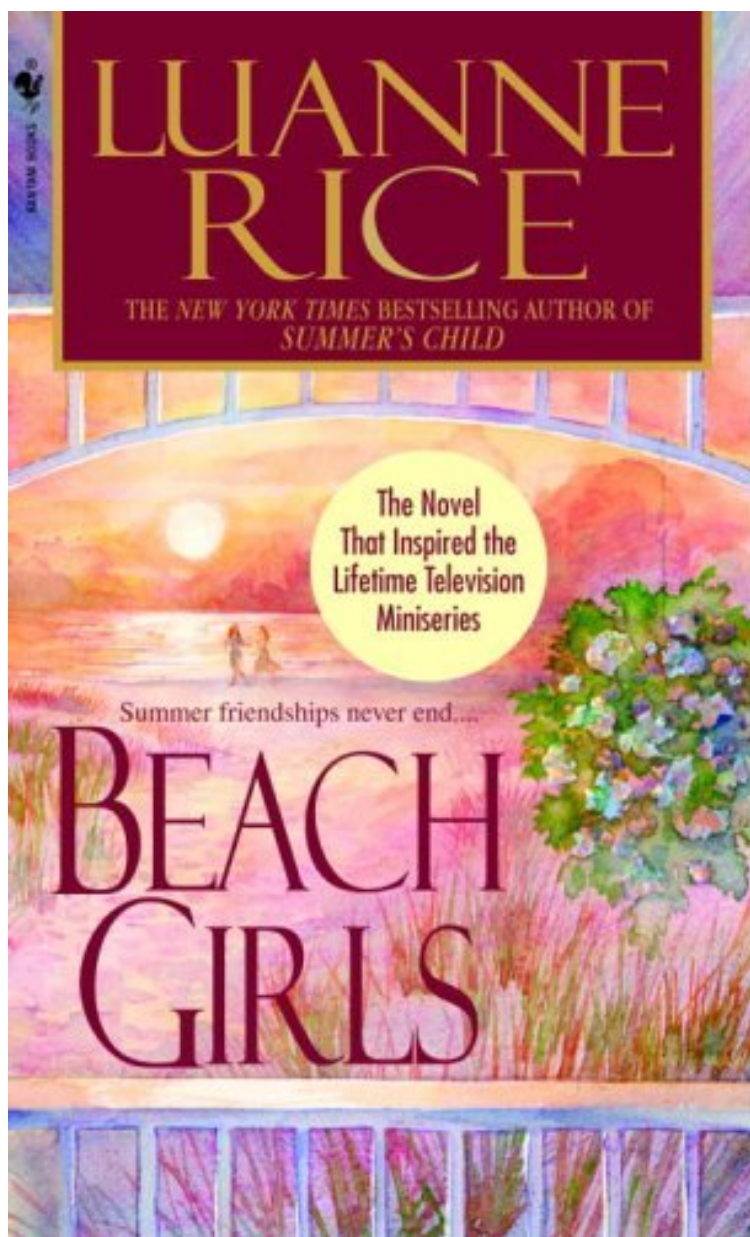


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Beach Girls



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurLuanne Rice is a rarity among novelists today; she's a true storyteller. Her unique ability to weave together the bonds of love and family with the challenges and rewards of everyday life has garnered her eight consecutive top-ten New York Times bestselling paperbacks. With Beach Girls, Luanne Rice returns to the place that she was born to write aboutthe Connecticut shoreto tell a story about a family of women whose lives encompass three generations, their histories intertwined with that of the mystic coastal town that has forever bound them to one another.Beach Girls explores the complex and contradictory

territories of love, family and friendship. Luanne Rice's sensuous prose and unforgettably rich and textured characters guide us toward a truth that lies within and sometimes beyond our dreams an enduring strength that we all must embrace to find our way home and into the hearts of those we cherish most. *Beach Girls* is an enthralling novel of haunting beauty that will resonate long after the final page is turned. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One June, 2003

Her mother's best friend lived in a blue house, and that was all Nell Kilvert knew. So, from the minute she and her father had arrived at the beach for their summer vacation, Nell had kept her eyes peeled for a blue house. When she asked her father where it might be, he said that after so many years away, his only strong memory of Hubbard's Point was of falling in love with her mother on the boardwalk. Beach girls now, beach girls tomorrow, beach girls till the end of time . . . Nell still remembered her mother's stories about Hubbard's Point, where she'd spent her childhood summers. She said that she and Aunt Madeleine and her best friend--what was her name?--were happiest with their feet in salt water. Her mother had said that no matter where they were, no matter where life took them, they would always be united by blue summer skies, high winds and sudden gales, and hot beach sand under their bare feet. Hot beach sand . . . Nell felt it now, scalding the soles of her tender feet. "Ouch, ouch," she said out loud. A girl about nine--her age--looked up from her beach towel. "Stand here," she said, moving over so Nell could get some relief from the hot sand. "Thanks," Nell said, standing on the very edge of the girl's towel. "Do you live here?" the girl asked. "We're renting a cottage," Nell said. "My father and I." "That's good," the girl said. "What's your name?" "Nell Kilvert. What's yours?" "Peggy McCabe. I live here. Year-round." "Oh," Nell said. She felt funny standing on the corner of the strange red-haired girl's towel, and thought how cool and fun it would be to live at the beach all year. Then, realizing that she had a Hubbard's Point expert on her hands, her eyes widened. "Do you know any blue houses?" Peggy looked puzzled. "Well--that one," she said, pointing. Nell looked over. Tall grass grew at the end of the beach, holding the sand in place so that no storm could ever wash it away. A big blue house nestled on the low dune--Nell had thought it had to be a beach club, but her father had told her it belonged to some lucky family. He had told her that it was built on pilings, to keep it above the highest tides, and that when they were young, he and her mother had gone underneath to kiss. Did it belong to Mom's best friend? Nell had asked, tingling. No, we didn't know the owners, her father had replied. "A different blue house," Nell said to Peggy. "Oh," Peggy said, getting a funny look on her face. "The witch's house." "The witch?" Peggy nodded, scooting over even farther on her striped towel, inviting Nell to sit down. She pointed across the crescent of white sand and sparkling bay to a house on the Point, hidden in lacy blue shadows of oak and fir trees. Nell peered, shielding her eyes from the sun with visor-hands. "That house looks white to me," she said. "It is now," Peggy said. "But it used to be blue. When I was really little. I remember, because my sister Annie had a song about it: Heart of stone, house of blue, If you come in my yard I'll make you a witch, too. . . ." Nell stared up at the house. She was skeptical: her mother's best friend couldn't be a witch. On the other hand, Nell had ruled out just about every other cottage at Hubbard's Point. She had ridden her bike up and down all the roads with her father. And she'd gone back to the only two blue cottages she'd found and asked the people if they remembered her mother, Emma Kilvert. Both times, the answer was no. "Why do you call her a witch?" Nell asked. "Because no one ever sees her," Peggy said. "She lives in New York all winter, and when she's here, she stays in her yard till after dark. She talks to owls. She writes children's books about all different birds. One got made into a movie. People who don't know how weird she is come from outside the beach to look for her--but she doesn't even answer her door! And every morning, before the sun comes up, she walks along the tide line to look for shorebirds and her lost diamond ring." "Her lost diamond ring?" Nell asked. "Yes. She's a divorcee. She's been married lots of times. No kids, even though she writes kids' books. She collected the engagement rings, and wears them on all her fingers. But she lost the biggest one while she was swimming in a storm, and she has to find it. It's worth thousands. She puts spells on the men who cross her! And on kids who trespass in her yard. They read her books, and she chases them away. You should see the sign she has by her stairs. . . ." Nell frowned, hugging her knees, making herself small. She didn't like the sound of this woman. Maybe it was a mistake to want to meet her. . . . But then she thought of her father and his new girlfriend, Francesca, and she thought of her mother's soft blue eyes, with the gentle sun lines around the outside corners, and of the way she used to talk about her best friend, and Nell felt a hole in her stomach. Beach girls now, beach girls tomorrow, beach girls till the end of time . . . Just thinking of the old saying made the shiver worse, and the hole bigger, and made Nell miss her mother so much she thought the sorrow might crush her right there on the beach. She stared up at the house on the hill, holding her knees tighter. Could her mother's best friend be a book-writing witch? Nothing seemed impossible anymore. In fact, compared to

other things that had happened during Nell's lifetime, that didn't even seem so weird or terrible. She thanked Peggy for the information, and then she set off to find a way up the hill to the House That Used to Be Blue. The Hubbard's Point tennis courts had come a long way from when Jack Kilvert was a kid. Back then, they were cracked blacktop, a second thought to the beach and marsh, sloping into the sandy parking lot, underwater during big storms. Now they were green composite, neatly lined, rolled, and maintained--and people had to sign up to use them. "Thirty-love!" Francesca called from across the net. Jack concentrated as she prepared to serve. Her hair was honey brown, held back by a wide white band that set off her tan. Willow thin, except for the hourglass factor, she had legs that went on forever, and, in spite of his attempting to focus on the game, Jack was aware that she had stopped some traffic. Two men, smoking cigars and carrying beach chairs and floats, had stopped on their way down Phelps Road to watch her serve. Or stare at her legs. She served, he returned, she jumped the net into his arms. "You won, you bum," she said, kissing him on the lips. "Doesn't that mean I'm supposed to jump the net?" he said. "Don't get technical about everything. Maybe I was just in a big hurry to hold your big sweaty body--did you ever think of that?" Jack laughed as she kissed him again. She felt thin and hard in his arms. He had a memory that bypassed his mind entirely, existing solely in his heart: of holding Emma twenty-five years ago, right in this same spot.

Francesca was the spitting image of his wife as a young woman. Jack did the age math, and his head hurt. "Come on, let's jump in the ocean," Francesca said. "I want to go home and check on Nell." "She told me she was going to the beach," Francesca said. "In fact, she saw me pull up in front of the house, and she met me before I even got out of the car. I think she wanted to go through my trunk, to make sure I hadn't brought an overnight bag. Honestly, she's like the border patrol." "No, she was just welcoming you." Francesca snorted through her pretty, perfect nose. "You are so not right about that. My parents were divorced, and when my father brought women home, I gave them hell. This is my payback--and believe me, I deserve it. Don't worry, though. I don't scare easy, and I totally respect her need to stake out her territory. I'll win her over--you'll see." Jack didn't say anything, not wanting to give her the wrong idea about where things were going. "Look . . . if she's at the beach, that means your house is empty," Francesca said, squeezing his hand. "I already know you have to be proper on the chance she'll walk in on us, but can we at least hold hands on the couch?" "While going over our British North Sea plans . . ." Jack said. They both laughed, Jack pulling back his hand as they set off, thinking, Real romantic, you jerk. He was forty-eight, overwhelmed, overworked, and totally confused about life's twists and turns. She was twenty-nine, dangerously beautiful. For the last six months, Jack had been in the Boston office of an Atlanta engineering firm. Francesca worked in his department now, and they had been colleagues for several years before that. They played mixed doubles together with people from work. He admired her serve, the precision of her mind, the excellence of her engineering skills, her great sense of humor. Did she notice that he was keeping distance between them, not wanting people to think he was part of a couple? And just who would care? Who would even remember him? Emma had spent about fifteen childhood summers here, before her family had moved to Chicago. Jack's family had rented here for three years in a row; Emma was four years younger--his sister's age. He had met her on the boardwalk one clear July night, and their fates were sealed. This year, needing a place to take Nell on vacation, he had chosen Hubbard's Point over the Vineyard, Nantucket, the Cape, islands in Maine . . . not so much because he wanted her to see the place where her parents had met, but because he'd been pulled here by forces he couldn't understand. "If your daughter's not home," Francesca whispered, closing the gap as they walked, "I can't promise that I'll behave myself. . . ." Jack felt the grin on his face, in the muscles around his mouth, but it didn't register anywhere else. He could show a smile, but he couldn't feel one. That had been the biggest curse of losing Emma. He was numb to the bone, as if winter had come to stay for the rest of his life. He was six foot three, had been an athlete since he could throw a ball, and he couldn't feel anything. Guys in his basketball league didn't know, his tennis partners had no clue, the women he dated wouldn't guess, his own sister, Madeleine, was in the dark. Only Nell knew, and he hated that she did. The road to the Point looped up from the beach, right past the tennis courts. Nell glanced over, just in time to see her father and Francesca kissing at the net, too busy to look up and witness her passing by. Seeing her father kiss Francesca was like a dagger in Nell's heart and made her in a greater rush to get to the House That Used to Be Blue. She began to trot, turning right at the top of the hill. The shadows were soft and dark here on the Point. Nell slowed down, looking at all the houses, trying to figure where she was in relation to the beach. Her parents had talked about this place, but never brought her here. Their family lived in Atlanta and vacationed on the beautiful Georgia barrier islands. Nell was used to southern white sand beaches and soft green grasses and warm water . . . nothing like this jagged coast, the chilly Long Island

Sound. A craggy bay showed through the trees of the yards on the left. Some of the gardens were beautiful, overflowing with roses and lilies. A few had flagpoles. The breeze was blowing, and the flags stood out. Some of the flag houses had lovely window boxes cascading with petunias and ivy. Suddenly, looking up the hill that rose to the right, Nell saw a different kind of yard. It was mostly rock, with patches of wild-looking grass filling in between bushes and trees. Lilies bloomed in the shade, scraps of yellow and orange, like birds hiding in the woods. Pine needles and oak leaves rustled overhead, and stoncrop thatched in the crevices of stone steps curving up the rocky hill. Nell's heart began to beat very hard when she saw the sign: please go away. It was hand-lettered, white paint on gray driftwood, nailed to a stake and driven into the ground beside the steps. Nell raised her eyes from the sign to the house. It was painted white, but the white looked almost blue in the shade of two tall oak trees. Nell looked back at the sign. Then at the house. She heard Peggy's words about the lady being a witch, and felt a tug-of-war inside. What if she was mean and scary and put a spell on her? The possibility gave Nell a cold shiver. But some feelings are stronger than fear: love, longing, desire. She had a lump in her throat and couldn't shake it loose. Her feet began to walk up the hill, and then she started to run. Staring upward, she saw a face in the window. She felt afraid, but she couldn't stop now. Barefoot, she caught her toe on a rock in the yard, tumbled head over heels, skinned both her knees. Stevie Moore had been at her kitchen table, watercolor brush poised as she stared out the window at hummingbirds darting in and out of the trumpet vine. Her seventeen-year-old cat, Tilly, sat on the table beside her, no less intent. Stevie wanted to capture the hummingbird's essence, which she thought was its amazing ability to be purely still yet in constant motion, all at the same time. Tilly just wanted to capture the hummingbird. Stevie really didn't know how she would survive without Tilly. The cat had been Stevie's constant companion through everything. Tilly had gotten her through more lonely nights than she could ever count. Sighing with love for her cat, she saw the hummingbirds suddenly dart away. Looking toward the stairs, she saw a child running up the hill. "Tilly, don't schools teach kids to read anymore?" Stevie asked, wondering whether maybe her nemeses, the young boys next door, had stolen her sign again. *Revue de presse* "Few writers evoke summers translucent days so effortlessly, or better capture the bittersweet ties of family love." *Publishers Weekly*