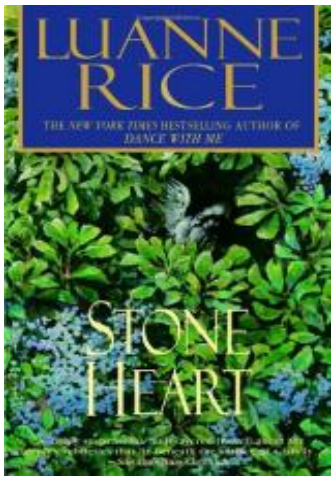
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Stone Heart

by Luanne Rice



About the Book

From *New York Times* bestselling author Luanne Rice comes a long-awaited opportunity for readers to discover an acclaimed early novel?one of this cherished storyteller?s most powerful and complex portraits of the fragile bonds of family and home.

Nomadic archaeologist Maria Dark is returning home again to the Connecticut shore?a magical place where she, her sister Sophie, and their brother Peter spent their childhood on the banks of Bell Stream. After fifteen years away, Maria hopes that she can rediscover the joy and optimism of her youth in the arms of her family. But things have changed. Maria?s siblings and her mother have weathered difficult times...and Sophie and her children are not as happy as they seem. Now Maria will embark upon an emotional journey?navigating the memories of a tender past?toward the truth at the heart of her family and the chance for a new beginning.

A remarkably graceful and intuitive novel, **Stone Heart** reveals the depths of faith and love that can mend life?s most fragile and precious ties. As never before, Luanne Rice inspires us all to look love squarely in the eye and never let it go.

Discussion Guide

1. In her preface to the novel, Luanne Rice tells us that the title comes from a poem by Irish Nobel laureate William Butler Yeats, "Easter 1916." Discuss the relevance of the lines "Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart" to the novel's primary characters. In what way is Irish history an apt metaphor for the personal struggles faced by Maria and her family?

2. Why do Maria and Sophie have such different approaches to love? What does the storyline indicate about the role of nature versus nurture in a child's life? Compare the various notions of legacy presented by Gordon's parents and Maria's parents. What does it take to break a harmful family cycle?

3. What makes this part of America such a compelling setting for **Stone Heart**, and for so much of Rice's fiction? How does Hatuquitit, with a rich and difficult history between Puritans and Native Americans, create a meaningful backdrop for Maria's homecoming?

4. Discuss the role of talismans and possessions in the novel. How does the meaning of the Chavín goddess replica shift over the course of Maria's time in Connecticut? How does Sophie calculate her own self-worth?

5. The author begins chapter 21 by telling us that Peter had always wanted to be the strong one in the family. How does he compare with the other significant men in Maria's life? Why were she and Aldo not able to form a lasting marriage? Does Duncan's unraveling marriage mirror Maria's?

6. Discuss the many obstacles that prevented Sophie's family from intervening in her crisis. What ultimately was the source of Gordon's power over her?

7. What insight do you gain from the chapters narrated by Sophie? What feeds her denial, and the denial expressed by her mother? What turning point does the miscarried child reflect?

8. What is the significance of the artifacts Maria unearths from the Pequot squaw's grave? How does this ancient love story reflect the novel's contemporary ones?

9. The community's notion of the prison as being "where bad girls go" is undermined by Sophie's experience there. How would you characterize the temporary family she forms with the inmates?

10. Why did Sophie believe she could only experience peace through death? Or do you perceive her death as further self-punishment? Do you believe that awareness and understanding of domestic violence have improved since 1990, when **Stone Heart** was first published?

11. Each of Luanne Rice's novels presents a unique and provocative human experience. What do we discover about resilience and vulnerability in **Stone Heart**? In what way does the novel convey Rice's signature approach to storytelling?

12. Discuss your own homecoming experiences. What were you able to discover about your past by spending time away from your roots? Have you ever been able to serve as an agent for change for a friend or relative in need, as Maria did?

Author Bio

Luanne Rice is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 37 novels, including three YA novels, that have been translated into 30 languages.

Rice?s books often center on love, family, nature and the sea. THE BEAUTIFUL LOST deals with teen depression, something Rice

Several of Rice's novels have been adapted for television, including CRAZY IN LOVE for TNT, BLUE MOON for CBS, FOLLOV

In 2002, Connecticut College awarded Rice an honorary degree. Her papers are located in the college's Special Collections Library. A profile of Rice appeared in *Connecticut College Magazine*, Fall 2014.

She was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from St. Joseph College in West Hartford, Connecticut.

In June 2014, she received the 2014 Connecticut Governor?s Arts Award for excellence and lifetime achievement as a literary artist

Rice, an avid environmentalist, is honored to be a creative affiliate of the Safina Center.

Critical Praise

"A highly suspenseful, multilayered [novel] about the complex subtleties that lie beneath the surface of a family."

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