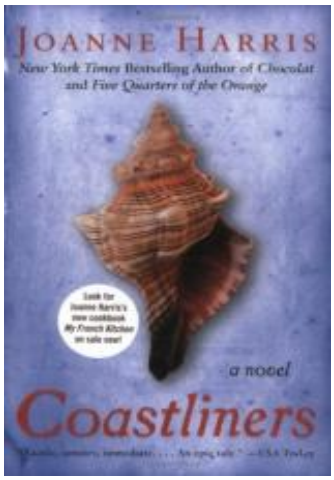
Coastliners

by Joanne Harris



About the Book

The island called Le Devin is shaped somewhat like a sleeping woman. At her head is the tumbledown village of Les Salants, while the more prosperous and tourist-friendly town of La Houssinière lies at the crook of her knees. Connected by a narrow strip of land, these towns could not feel further apart, for they are separated by a legacy of rivalry and a longstanding enmity.

The townspeople of Les Salants say that if you kiss the feet of their patron saint and spit three times, something you've lost will come back to you. And so Madeleine Prasteau, who grew up on the island, returns after an absence of ten years spent in Paris. She is haunted by this place, can paint nothing else, and has never been able to feel at home anywhere but in its sandy dunes.

When she arrives, she finds that her father -- who once built the fishing boats that fueled the town's livelihood -- has become more silent than ever, withdrawing almost completely into an interior world. And his decline seems reflected in the town itself, for when the only beach in Les Salants literally washes away, the soul and energy of this humble seaside village seem to disappear with it.

Madeleine is determined to rescue Les Salants from a certain death, and she enlists many of the resistant locals with the covert aid of a charismatic outsider, Flynn. Adrift for a long time herself, almost against her will Madeleine finds herself united with the village's other lost souls in a struggle for survival and salvation.

Discussion Guide

1. How would you characterize the villages of Les Salants and La Houssinière? What are some of the advantages each has over the other? How does Les Immortelles play a role in this power dynamic? Were you surprised by the tensions between the Sallanais and the Houssins? Did their conflict remind you of any other rivalry?

2. What explains Mado Prasteau's return to Les Salants? How does she earn a living? How would you describe her relationships with her mother and father?

3. The festival of Sainte-Marine-de-la-Mer is one of the traditional religious celebrations of the village of Les Salants. What happens when Mado makes eye contact with her father during the shoreside ritual? Who helps restore the Saint to the village?

4. How would you describe Jean-Claude Brismand's relationship with Mado? What does he offer her in exchange for her father's land? What is his connection to Adrienne Prasteau? Did you find him a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

5. What does the attempted rescue of the Eleanore reveal about tensions between La Houssinière and Les Salants? How do the Bastonnet and Guénolé families respond? How do the Salannais feel toward Mado after this?

6. Who is Rouget/Richard Flynn? How does Mado first become acquainted with him? What questionable behavior does she catch him involved in? How does he help the people of Les Salants?

7. How does the return of the Saint to her niche affect the villagers of Les Salants? How do the nuns, Soeur Thérèse and Soeur Extase, interpret her reappearance? How does her return lead the Salannais to build the artificial reef?

8. Analyze some of the complicated sibling relationships in *Coastliners*. Focus on P'titJean and GrosJean Prasteau, and Mado and Adrienne Prasteau in your discussion.

9. How does the appearance of new sand on Les Salants reanimate its inhabitants? What other positive developments occur in the village as a result of the changing coastline?

10. How does the threat of the oil spill galvanize the Salannais? What transformation in the villagers is evident at second festival of Sainte-Marine-de-la-Mer? What Black Tide eventually turns up on the beaches of Les Salants? How is this benign Black Tide accomplished?

Author Bio

Joanne Harris is the internationally renowned and award-winning author of 22 novels, plus novellas, scripts, short stories, libretti, lyrics and articles. Her novel, CHOCOLAT, was adapted to the screen, starring Juliette Binoche and Johnny Depp. She is an honorary Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and is Chair of the Society of Authors. She lives in Yorkshire and also has a form of synaesthesia that enables her to smell colours. Red, she says, smells of chocolate.

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Publication Date: September 1, 2003

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial

ISBN-10: 0060958014

ISBN-13: 9780060958015