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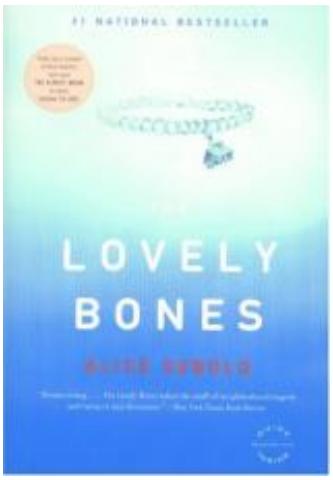
The Lovely Bones: Deluxe Edition

by Alice Sebold



About the Book

This deluxe trade paperback edition of Alice Sebold's modern classic features French flaps and rough-cut pages.

Once in a generation a novel comes along that taps a vein of universal human experience, resonating with readers of all ages. The Lovely Bones is such a book - a phenomenal #1 bestseller celebrated at once for its narrative artistry, its luminous clarity of emotion, and its astoniishing power to lay claim to the hearts of millions of readers around the world.

"My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973."

So begins the story of Susie Salmon, who is adjusting to her new home in heaven, a place that is not at all what she expected, even as she is watching life on eath continue without her - her friends trading rumors about her disappearance, her killer trying to cover his tracks, her grief-stricken family unraveling.

Out of unspeakable traged and loss, **The Lovely Bones** succeeds, miraculously, in building a tale filled with hope, humor, suspense, even joy

"A stunning achievement." -*The New Yorker*

"Deeply affecting... A keenly observed portrait of familial love and how it endures and changes over time." -*New York Times*

"A triumphant novel... It's a knockout." -*Time*

"Destined to become a classic in the vein of **To Kill a Mockingbird**... I loved it." -Anna Quindlen

"A novel that is painfully fine and accomplished." -*Los Angeles Times*

"**The Lovely Bones** seems to be saying there are more important things in life on earth than retribution. Like forgiveness, like love." -*Chicago Tribune*

Discussion Guide

1. In Susie's Heaven, she is surrounded by things that bring her peace. What would your Heaven be like? Is it surprising that in Susie's inward, personal version of the hereafter there is no God or larger being that presides?

2. Why does Ruth become Susie's main connection to Earth? Was it accidental that Susie touched Ruth on her way up to Heaven, or was Ruth actually chosen to be Susie's emotional conduit?

3. Rape is one of the most alienating experiences imaginable. Susie's rape ends in murder and changes her family and friends forever. Alienation is transferred, in a sense, to Susie's parents and siblings. How do they each experience loneliness and solitude after Susie's death?

4. Why does the author include details about Mr. Harvey's childhood and his memories of his mother? By giving him a human side, does Sebold get us closer to understanding his motivation? Sebold explained in an interview about the novel that murderers "are not animals but men," and that is what makes them so frightening. Do you agree?

5. Discuss the way in which guilt manifests itself in the various characters - Jack, Abigail, Lindsay, Mr. Harvey, Len Fenerman.

6. "Pushing on the inbetween" is how Susie describes her efforts to connect with those she has left behind on Earth. Have you ever felt as though someone was trying to communicate with you from "the inbetween"?

7. Does Buckley really see Susie, or does he make up a version of his sister as a way of understanding, and not being too emotionally damaged by, her death? How do you explain tragedy to a child? Do you think Susie's parents do a good job of helping Buckley comprehend the loss of his sister?

8. Susie is killed just as she was beginning to see her mother and father as real people, not just as parents. Watching her parents' relationship change in the wake of her death, she begins to understand how they react to the world and to each other. How does this newfound understanding affect Susie?

9. Can Abigail's choice to leave her family be justified?

10. Why does Abigail leave her dead daughter's photo outside the Chicago Airport on her way back to her family?

11. Susie observes that "The living deserve attention, too." She watches her sister, Lindsay, being neglected as those around her focus all their attention on grieving for Susie. Jack refuses to allow Buckley to use Susie's clothes in his garden. When is it time to let go?

12. Susie's Heaven seems to have different stages, and climbing to the next stage of Heaven requires her to remove

herself from what happens on Earth. What is this process like for Susie?

13. In **The Lovely Bones**, adult relationships (Abigail and Jack, Ray's parents) are dysfunctional and troubled, whereas the young relationships (Lindsay and Samuel, Ray and Susie, Ray and Ruth) all seem to have depth, maturity, and potential. What is the author saying about young love? About the trials and tribulations of married life?

14. Is Jack Salmon allowing himself to be swallowed up by his grief? Is there a point where he should have let go? How does his grief process affect his family? Is there something admirable about holding on so tightly to Susie's memory and not denying his profound sadness?

15. Ray and Susie's final physical experience (via Ruth's body) seems to act almost as an exorcism that sweeps away, if only temporarily, Susie's memory of her rape. What is the significance of this act for Susie, and does it serve to counterbalance the violent act that ended Susie's life?

16. Alice Sebold seems to be saying that out of tragedy comes healing. Susie's family fractures and comes back together, a town learns to find strength in each other. Do you agree that good can come of great trauma?

Author Bio

Alice Sebold is the author of the memoir LUCKY and the bestseller THE LOVELY BONES. She has been chosen by the *Village Voice* as a Writer on the Verge and has written for the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. She lives in California with her husband, Glen David Gold.

Critical Praise

"The Lovely Bones is one of the strangest experiences I have had as a reader in a long time, and one of the most memorable. Painfully funny, bracingly tough, terribly sad, it is a feat of imagination and a tribute to the healing power of grief."

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Publication Date: September 17, 2007
Paperback: 328 pages
Publisher: Back Bay Books
ISBN-10: 0316001821
ISBN-13: 9780316001823