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THE  
LOVELY  
BONES

ALICE SEBOLD

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

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LOVELY  
BONES

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ALICE SEBOLD



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Extraordinary praise for  
Alice Sebold's #1 bestseller  
*The Lovely Bones*

"A literary page turner."

—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*

"A knockout . . . Almost everything that makes *The Lovely Bones* the breakout fiction debut of the year – the sweetness, the humor, the kicky rhythm, the deadpan suburban gothic – is right there, packed into those first two lines, under pressure and waiting to explode. . . . Sebold imagines the unimaginable and in doing so reminds us that those missing girls aren't just tabloid icons or martyred innocents but real human beings who chewed gum and kissed boys and suffered and died." —Lev Grossman, *Time*

"Susie Salmon is one of the more captivating creations of recent fiction. Sebold has crafted a gripping tale of tragedy and grief. . . . *The Lovely Bones* is a page-turner in the most literary sense. . . . That Sebold so brilliantly maintains all of the narrative strands and hard-to-swallow conceits she has set in motion is nothing short of a revelation."

—Elaina Richardson, *O: The Oprah Magazine*

"Sebold has worked wonders. Part of the book's appeal is its marvelous pacing; it can be gulped down, devoured in one long evening. Part of it is the dreamy safety net of Sebold's words. . . . And part of it is that she knows of what she writes." —Karen Valby, *Entertainment Weekly*

more...

“This is a high-wire act for a first novelist, and Alice Sebold maintains almost perfect balance. . . . *The Lovely Bones* takes the stuff of neighborhood tragedy – the unexplained disappearance of a child, the shattered family alone with its grief – and turns it into literature.”

—**Katherine Bouton**, *New York Times Book Review*

“Letting go is a leitmotif of *The Lovely Bones*, one that Sebold evokes with a sly inventiveness and lyrical power that are deeply moving and ultimately redemptive. . . . Sebold has created a novel that is painfully fine and accomplished, one which readers will have their own difficulties relinquishing, long after the last page is turned.”

—**Paula L. Woods**, *Los Angeles Times*

“Savagely beautiful. . . . A strange and compelling novel.”

—**Monica Wood**, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Alice Sebold’s first novel, *The Lovely Bones*, is the most touching and yet bracing imagining of what the dead may have to say to the living that I’ve read in a long time. . . . Sebold is astonishing in the first chapters, bold and pitiless. . . . Read Sebold now, while the story is still fresh and true and expanding out over the world.”

—**Marta Salij**, *Detroit Free Press*

“Sebold takes an enormous risk in her wonderfully strange debut novel: her narrator, Susie Salmon, is dead—murdered at the age of fourteen by a disturbed neighbor—and speaks from the vantage of Heaven. Such is the author’s skill that from the first page this premise seems utterly believable. . . . A stunning achievement.”

—**New Yorker**

“What might play as a sentimental melodrama in the hands of a lesser writer becomes in this volume a keenly observed portrait of familial love and how it endures and changes over time. . . . Sebold [has the] ability to capture both the ordinary and the extraordinary, the banal and the horrific, in lyrical, unsentimental prose.”

—**Michiko Kakutani**, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Don’t start *The Lovely Bones* unless you can finish it. The book begins with more horror than you could imagine, but closes with more beauty than you could hope for. . . . The power of *The Lovely Bones* flows from a voice at once charmingly adolescent and tragically mature. . . . These are catch-your-breath scenes. . . . Alice Sebold has done something miraculous here.”

—**Ron Charles**, *Christian Science Monitor*

“An exquisitely possessing first novel. . . . Alice Sebold profoundly conveys what it means first to be devastated, then defined by tragedy. . . . That she does so in the voice of a dead 14-year-old girl only suggests the uniqueness of this novel.”

—**Sherryl Connelly**, *New York Daily News*

“Stunning and unforgettable . . . *The Lovely Bones* reflects a moving passionate interest in and love for ordinary life at its most wonderful, most awful, even at its most mundane. . . . Genuinely original and transcendent. . . . That Sebold can fashion such beauty out of pain is remarkable.”

—**Connie Ogle**, *Houston Chronicle*

ALSO BY ALICE SEBOLD

*Lucky*  
*The Almost Moon*

*Always, Glen*



T H E

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L O V E L Y

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B O N E S

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Inside the snow globe on my father's desk, there was a penguin wearing a red-and-white-striped scarf. When I was little my father would pull me into his lap and reach for the snow globe. He would turn it over, letting all the snow collect on the top, then quickly invert it. The two of us watched the snow fall gently around the penguin. The penguin was alone in there, I thought, and I worried for him. When I told my father this, he said, "Don't worry, Susie; he has a nice life. He's trapped in a perfect world."



O N E

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**M**y name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973. In newspaper photos of missing girls from the seventies, most looked like me: white girls with mousy brown hair. This was before kids of all races and genders started appearing on milk cartons or in the daily mail. It was still back when people believed things like that didn't happen.

In my junior high yearbook I had a quote from a Spanish poet my sister had turned me on to, Juan Ramón Jiménez. It went like this: "If they give you ruled paper, write the other way." I chose it both because it expressed my contempt for my structured surroundings à la the classroom and because, not being some dopey quote from a rock group, I thought it marked me as literary. I was a member of the Chess Club and Chem Club and burned everything I tried to make in Mrs. Delminico's home ec

class. My favorite teacher was Mr. Botte, who taught biology and liked to animate the frogs and crawfish we had to dissect by making them dance in their waxed pans.

I wasn't killed by Mr. Botte, by the way. Don't think every person you're going to meet in here is suspect. That's the problem. You never know. Mr. Botte came to my memorial (as, may I add, did almost the entire junior high school—I was never so popular) and cried quite a bit. He had a sick kid. We all knew this, so when he laughed at his own jokes, which were rusty way before I had him, we laughed too, forcing it sometimes just to make him happy. His daughter died a year and a half after I did. She had leukemia, but I never saw her in my heaven.

My murderer was a man from our neighborhood. My mother liked his border flowers, and my father talked to him once about fertilizer. My murderer believed in old-fashioned things like eggshells and coffee grounds, which he said his own mother had used. My father came home smiling, making jokes about how the man's garden might be beautiful but it would stink to high heaven once a heat wave hit.

But on December 6, 1973, it was snowing, and I took a shortcut through the cornfield back from the junior high. It was dark out because the days were shorter in winter, and I remember how the broken cornstalks made my walk more difficult. The snow was falling lightly, like a flurry of small hands, and I was breathing through my nose until it was running so much that I had to open my mouth. Six feet from where Mr. Harvey stood, I stuck my tongue out to taste a snowflake.

"Don't let me startle you," Mr. Harvey said.

Of course, in a cornfield, in the dark, I was startled.

After I was dead I thought about how there had been the light scent of cologne in the air but that I had not been paying attention, or thought it was coming from one of the houses up ahead.

“Mr. Harvey,” I said.

“You’re the older Salmon girl, right?”

“Yes.”

“How are your folks?”

Although the eldest in my family and good at acing a science quiz, I had never felt comfortable with adults.

“Fine,” I said. I was cold, but the natural authority of his age, and the added fact that he was a neighbor and had talked to my father about fertilizer, rooted me to the spot.

“I’ve built something back here,” he said. “Would you like to see?”

“I’m sort of cold, Mr. Harvey,” I said, “and my mom likes me home before dark.”

“It’s after dark, Susie,” he said.

I wish now that I had known this was weird. I had never told him my name. I guess I thought my father had told him one of the embarrassing anecdotes he saw merely as loving testaments to his children. My father was the kind of dad who kept a nude photo of you when you were three in the downstairs bathroom, the one that guests would use. He did this to my little sister, Lindsey, thank God. At least I was spared that indignity. But he liked to tell a story about how, once Lindsey was born, I was so jealous that one day while he was on the phone in the other room, I moved down the couch—he could see me from where he stood—and tried to pee on top of Lindsey in her carrier. This story humiliated me every time he told it, to the pastor of our church, to our neigh-

bor Mrs. Stead, who was a therapist and whose take on it he wanted to hear, and to everyone who ever said "Susie has a lot of spunk!"

"Spunk!" my father would say. "Let me tell you about spunk," and he would launch immediately into his Susie-peed-on-Lindsey story.

But as it turned out, my father had not mentioned us to Mr. Harvey or told him the Susie-peed-on-Lindsey story.

Mr. Harvey would later say these words to my mother when he ran into her on the street: "I heard about the horrible, horrible tragedy. What was your daughter's name, again?"

"Susie," my mother said, bracing up under the weight of it, a weight that she naively hoped might lighten someday, not knowing that it would only go on to hurt in new and varied ways for the rest of her life.

Mr. Harvey told her the usual: "I hope they get the bastard. I'm sorry for your loss."

I was in my heaven by that time, fitting my limbs together, and couldn't believe his audacity. "The man has no shame," I said to Franny, my intake counselor. "Exactly," she said, and made her point as simply as that. There wasn't a lot of bullshit in my heaven.

Mr. Harvey said it would only take a minute, so I followed him a little farther into the cornfield, where fewer stalks were broken off because no one used it as a shortcut to the junior high. My mom had told my baby brother, Buckley, that the corn in the field was inedible when he asked why no one from the neighborhood ate it. "The corn is for horses, not humans," she said. "Not dogs?" Buckley asked. "No," my mother answered. "Not dinosaurs?" Buckley asked. And it went like that.



“I’ve made a little hiding place,” said Mr. Harvey.

He stopped and turned to me.

“I don’t see anything,” I said. I was aware that Mr. Harvey was looking at me strangely. I’d had older men look at me that way since I’d lost my baby fat, but they usually didn’t lose their marbles over me when I was wearing my royal blue parka and yellow elephant bell-bottoms. His glasses were small and round with gold frames, and his eyes looked out over them and at me.

“You should be more observant, Susie,” he said.

I felt like observing my way out of there, but I didn’t. Why didn’t I? Franny said these questions were fruitless: “You didn’t and that’s that. Don’t mull it over. It does no good. You’re dead and you have to accept it.”

“Try again,” Mr. Harvey said, and he squatted down and knocked against the ground.

“What’s that?” I asked.

My ears were freezing. I wouldn’t wear the multicolored cap with the pompom and jingle bells that my mother had made me one Christmas. I had shoved it in the pocket of my parka instead.

I remember that I went over and stomped on the ground near him. It felt harder even than frozen earth, which was pretty hard.

“It’s wood,” Mr. Harvey said. “It keeps the entrance from collapsing. Other than that it’s all made out of earth.”

“What is it?” I asked. I was no longer cold or weirded out by the look he had given me. I was like I was in science class: I was curious.

“Come and see.”

It was awkward to get into, that much he admitted