

# **The Lovely Bones**

## **Alice Sebold**

### **Picador 2002**

***The Lovely Bones* is a story narrated by a dead girl. Susie Salmon tells us her story from heaven. It is a terrible story, for Susie was raped and murdered by a man she knew at the age of fourteen. Susie's body was dismembered and the parts disposed of, and her murderer is not caught.**

**Susie's heaven is constructed out of whatever she most wants and is most familiar to her, so her heaven starts off by being like a school playground, with swings. She reads teenage magazines instead of textbooks. She meets other people whose heavens overlap with hers but not exactly the same as hers. Her dog dies and she is reunited with him. There are counsellors in heaven who befriend and try to help her.**

**There is the suggestion that Susie should move on, that there is something else to do and somewhere else to go, but her life in heaven is still bound up with what happened to her in her life on earth and she is still inextricably tied to her family. She sees how her absence and then presumed death has powerful effects on her parents and her sister and little brother, how they grieve for her and what it does to the wider relationships within that family. Susie cannot 'rest in peace' while the horror and tragedy of her death remains unresolved and while her murderer is still at large. She remains involved with the life of the earth, watching and waiting and still learning and reflecting. Susie still has growing up to do, to become the person she never got the chance to be, until finally the story ends with human life asserting itself. The murderer dies (did Susie do it?) stalking his last intended victim, and new life begins in Susie's family.**

### **Exploring Spirituality through this novel:**

**Some things to think about....**

- What does this story tell us about ideas of heaven?**
- Susie's dog Holiday joins her in heaven. What do you think about that?**
- What do you think about the overlapping experiences of heaven?**
- Could the heavenly realm and the earthly realm be intertwined like this?**
- What does the story tell us about the need for justice?**
- What is Lindsey's importance to the story?**
- How do you feel about Abigail's behaviour?**
- What do you think is the significance of the charm bracelet?**
- What do you think might happen to Susie after the story ends?**
- Do you think Susie and Mr Harvey meet in heaven and if so what might happen at such a meeting?**
- What would it take for Susie or her family to forgive Mr Harvey?**

**In what ways might this story make you think about the potential and preciousness of human life?**

**Christian tradition says:**

**God himself will be with them**

**He will wipe away every tear from their eyes**

**Death will be no more**

**Mourning and crying and pain will be no more**

**For the first things have passed away**

**(Revelation 21. 3-4)**

**This passage is often used at funerals. Do you think the presence of God as comforter would have made a difference to Susie or to her family?**