

Film Review: *The Lovely Bones* (2009)

This is a beautiful but profoundly disturbing film about the murder of a lovely, sensitive, and empathetic 14 year-old girl named **Susie Salmon** at the hands of the monster who lived next-door to her family. It is based on the 2002 novel of the same title by Alice Sebold.

Susie (Saoirse Ronan) calmly narrates the events leading up to her murder, and the devastation it brought to her family by someone who seemed to be a benign neighbor, **George Harvey** (Stanley Tucci.) Early on, *Susie* declares that "**murder changes everything.**" The calm manner in which she describes her own death -- and her afterlife that follows -- makes the film all the more tragic, heart-rending and compelling.



George Harvey



Susie Salmon

After weeks of scouting *Susie's* daily routine, *Harvey* excavates an underground den in a harvested cornfield, and furnishes it with items to interest *Susie* or other potential victims. Crossing the cornfield on her return from school, *Susie* encounters *Harvey*, who -- like a spider enticing

its prey -- lures her into what he calls the "*kid's hideout*" he has built. When Susie attempts to leave, Harvey forcibly prevents it. Thankfully, her murder and assault are left up to the imagination.

After her murder, Susie becomes stuck in the "*in-between*," that realm dividing Heaven and Earthly existence. That's because she isn't quite ready for Heaven and feels there are things remaining that she must do. Among these are comforting her family, especially her loving father and her younger brother **Buckley** (Christian Ashdale,) whose life she once saved and to whom she is devoted. Both family members are comforted by the experience.



Susie in the "In-Between"

Her presence in the "*in-between*" permits some of her visions and the recollections of her last moments to be mysteriously communicated to her father **Jack** (Mark Wahlberg,) who never stops searching for her or her murderer. His quest exceeds mere obsession, and eventually drives his wife **Abigail** (Rachel Weisz) to temporarily abandon her family for the solace of a menial job in California. *George Harvey* was confident he would never be discovered, but as Susie explains, "**He never reckoned on a father's love for his daughter.**"



Susie Appears to Her Loving and Devoted Father

As tragic and horrifying as the film's subject matter may be, it manages to inspire and uplift in certain ways. There must be a special place in Heaven for innocent children who become murder victims, and that special place is depicted as a series of dazzling panoramic vistas, consisting of magnificent colors. There Susie meets a half-dozen other victims of her serial killer, and they enjoy the beauty, safety, and freedom of their Heavenly paradise.



Susie Meets Harvey's Other Murder Victims

I'm not going to spoil the film's *denouement* by describing the fate of *George Harvey*, the serial rapist and murderer of numerous children: suffice it to say that he got what he had coming to him. Unfortunately, it seems to have required *Divine Intervention*, and it took far too long to bring about. God finally intervened to accomplish that which we as underlings were unable to effectuate.

That being the case, allow me to step onto my soapbox for a minute. If we as a nation show the courage required to return to capital punishment on a significant scale, there would be far fewer serial killers, child-rapists, and child murderers in this country. Empirical evidence of the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent to first degree murder is overwhelming, and beyond any reasonable dispute. (Ted Bundy fought tenaciously for his life before he was eventually executed.)

In his review of the most recent studies on the deterrent effect of capital punishment before the *Senate Judiciary Committee* on February 1, 2006, former Reagan Economic Adviser Paul Rubin summarized the literature in this manner:

"The literature is easy to summarize: almost all modern studies and all the refereed studies find a significant deterrent effect of capital punishment..."

If we as a nation are **REALLY** interested in stemming the growing incidence of child murder and rape, we should begin by resurrecting capital punishment statutes in every state. Otherwise, the silent cries of lost children will continue to fall on the deaf ears of useless politicians.

-- Earl Holt III