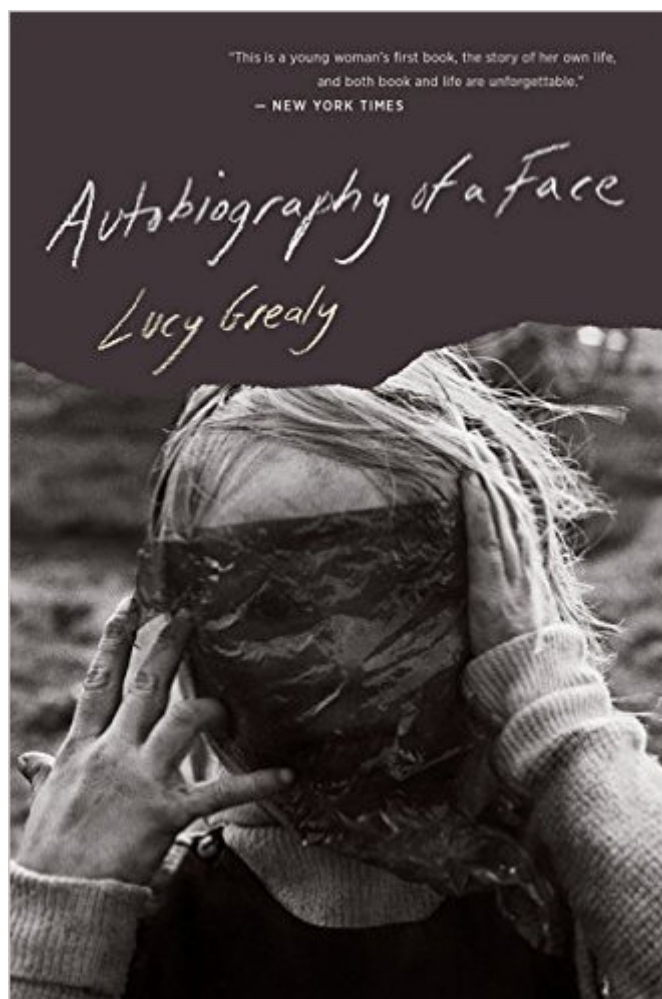


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Autobiography Of A Face



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book • This is a young woman's first book, the story of her own life, and both book and life are unforgettable. • "New York Times • Engaging and engrossing, a story of grace as well as cruelty, and a demonstration of [Grealy's] own wit and style and class." • Washington Post Book World This powerful memoir is about the premium we put on beauty and on a woman's face in particular. It took Lucy Grealy twenty years of living with a distorted self-image and more than thirty reconstructive procedures before she could come to terms with her appearance after childhood cancer and surgery that left her jaw disfigured. As a young girl, she absorbed the searing pain of peer rejection and the paralyzing fear of never being loved.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Do not misunderstand this review's title: it is not an apology, but rather a defense of what I consider to be one of the most hauntingly beautiful, well-crafted memoirs written in the last fifty years. Writing an autobiography of any kind is full of pitfalls--lapses into solipsism, half-truths, egoistical blathering--which Grealy avoids without even making the reader aware of her dexterity. "Are you crazy?" critics of Grealy's work may ask. "The book is full of self-pity, lies and self-absorption." Descriptions I read of encounters with Grealy after she became a literary notable would certainly seem to validate these judgments. But if the reader evaluates her memoir with the sensitivity and intellectual rigor it demands, the reader discovers that Grealy is not whiny at all. If she vacillates in her judgment of herself, if she shows us the tortuous feelings of self-pity and ugliness she felt, she is at the same time showing us an honest portrait of a human being in all its contradictory glory. Does

the reader expect Grealy to act unaffected by the taunts of her peers, the pain of chemo treatments, the pain of knowing she will never be given what she wants? Who wouldn't have indulged the fantasies she did, considering her age and the severity of her condition? Has any one of us, her readers, undergone such unremitting physical and emotional pain? As for Grealy's supposed detachment, we might say such distance is both necessary and understandable, considering when she wrote the memoir. Wordsworth noted that poetry, which I think applies to Grealy's work (I'm paraphrasing), is "an emotion recollected in tranquillity"--not while the passions are churning, but after the fact, when the writer can calmly assess the feelings and their significance.

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