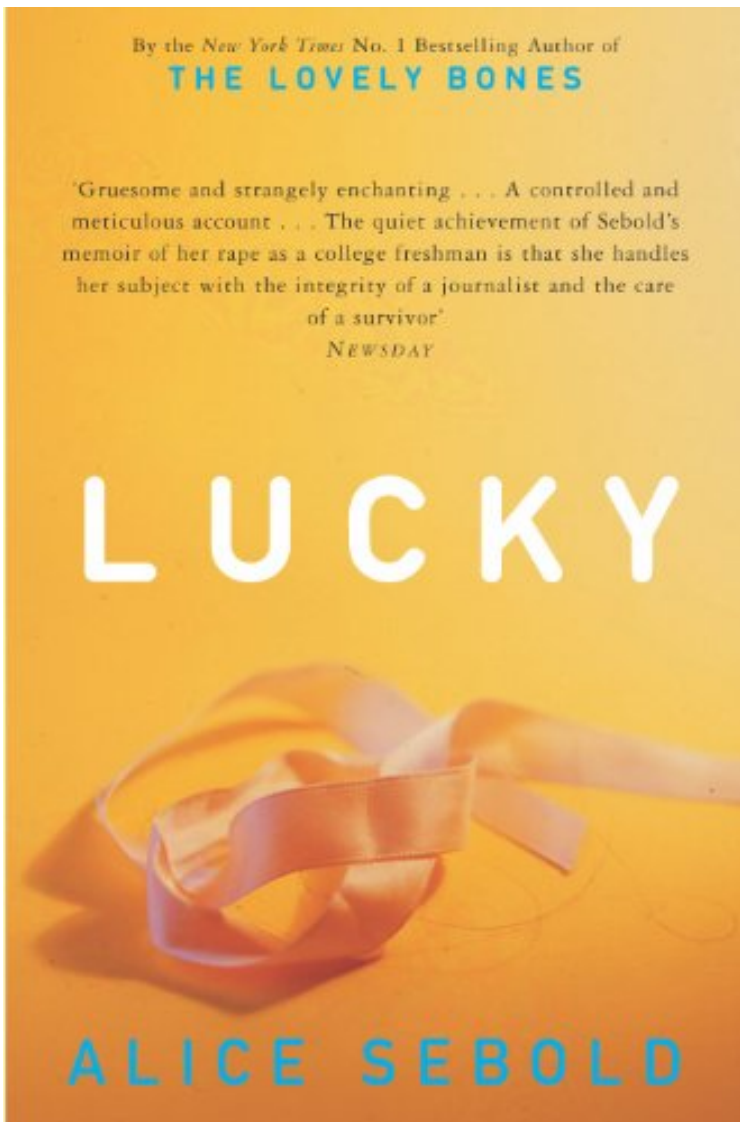


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Lucky (English Edition)



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Description : Description du produit Enormously visceral, emotionally gripping, and imbued with the belief that justice is possible even after the most horrific of crimes, Alice Sebold's compelling memoir of her rape at the age of eighteen is a story that takes hold of you and won't let go. Sebold fulfills a promise that she made to herself in the very tunnel where she was raped: someday she would write a book about her experience. With Lucky she delivers on that promise with mordant wit and an eye for life's absurdities, as she describes what she was like both as a young girl before the rape and how that rape changed but did not sink the woman she later became. It is Alice's indomitable spirit that we come to know in these pages. The same young woman who sets her sights on becoming an Ethel Merman-style diva one day (despite her braces, bad complexion, and extra weight) encounters what is still thought of today as the crime from which no woman can ever really recover. In an account that is at once heartrending and hilarious, we see Alice's spirit prevail as she struggles to have a normal college experience in the aftermath of this harrowing, life-

changing event. No less gripping is the almost unbelievable role that coincidence plays in the unfolding of Sebold's narrative. Her case, placed in the inactive file, is miraculously opened again six months later when she sees her rapist on the street. This begins the long road to what dominates these pages: the struggle for triumph and understanding -- in the courtroom and outside in the world. Lucky is, quite simply, a real-life thriller. In its literary style and narrative tension we never lose sight of why this life story is worth reading. At the end we are left standing in the wake of devastating violence, and, like the writer, we have come to know what it means to survive.

Prsentation de l'diteurIn a memoir hailed for its searing candour and wit, Alice Sebold reveals how her life was utterly transformed when, as an eighteen-year-old college freshman, she was brutally raped and beaten in a park near campus. What propels this chronicle of her recovery is Sebold's indomitable spirit as she struggles for understanding (After telling the hard facts to anyone, from lover to friend, I have changed in their eyes); as her dazed family and friends sometimes bungle their efforts to provide comfort and support; and as, ultimately, she triumphs, managing through grit and coincidence to help secure her attacker's arrest and conviction. In a narrative by turns disturbing, thrilling, and inspiring, Alice Sebold illuminates the experience of trauma victims even as she imparts wisdom profoundly hard-won: You save yourself or you remain unsaved. A rueful, razor-sharp memoir . . . Sebold tells what its like to go through a particular kind of nightmare in order to tell what its like slowly, bumpily, triumphantly to heal Sarah Kerr, VogueExtraitChapter OneThis is what I remember. My lips were cut. I bit down on them when he grabbed me from behind and covered my mouth. He said these words: "I'll kill you if you scream." I remained motionless. "Do you understand? If you scream you're dead." I nodded my head. My arms were pinned to my sides by his right arm wrapped around me and my mouth was covered with his left. He released his hand from my mouth. I screamed. Quickly. Abruptly. The struggle began. He covered my mouth again. He kneed me in the back of my legs so that I would fall down. "You don't get it, bitch. I'll kill you. I've got a knife. I'll kill you." He released his grip on my mouth again and I fell, screaming, on the brick path. He straddled me and kicked me in the side. I made sounds, they were nothing, they were soft footfalls. They urged him on, they made him righteous. I scrambled on the path. I was wearing soft-soled moccasins with which I tried to land wild kicks. Everything missed or merely grazed him. I had never fought before, was chosen last in gym. Somehow, I don't remember how, I made it back on my feet. I remember biting him, pushing him, I don't know what. Then I began to run. Like a giant who is all powerful, he reached out and grabbed the end of my long brown hair. He yanked it hard and brought me down onto my knees in front of him. That was my first missed escape, the hair, the woman's long hair. "You asked for it now," he said, and I began to beg. He reached around to his back pocket to draw out a knife. I struggled still, my hair coming out painfully from my skull as I did my best to rip myself free of his grip. I lunged forward and grabbed his left leg with both arms, throwing him off balance and making him stagger. I would not know it until the police found it later in the grass, a few feet away from my broken glasses, but with that move, the knife fell from his hands and was lost. Then it was fists. Maybe he was angry at the loss of his weapon or at my disobedience. Whatever the reason, this marked the end of the preliminaries. I was on the ground on my stomach. He sat on my back. He pounded my skull into the brick. He cursed me. He turned me around and sat on my chest. I was babbling. I was begging. Here is where he wrapped his hands around my neck and began to squeeze. For a second, I lost consciousness. When I came to, I knew I was staring up into the eyes of the man who would kill me. At that moment I signed myself over to him. I was convinced that I would not live. I could not fight anymore. He was going to do what he wanted to me. That was it. Everything slowed down. He stood up and began dragging me over the grass by my hair. I twisted and half crawled, trying to keep up with him. Dimly, I had seen the dark entrance of the amphitheater tunnel from the path. As we neared it, and I realized it was our destination, a rush of fear ran through me. I knew I would die. There was an old iron fence a few feet out from the tunnel entrance. It was three feet high and provided a narrow space through which you had to walk in order to enter the tunnel. As he dragged me, as I scrambled against the grass, I caught sight of that fence and became utterly convinced that if he brought me beyond this point, I would not survive. For a moment, as he dragged me across the ground, I clung feebly to the bottom of that iron fence, before a rough pull yanked me clean. People think a woman stops fighting when she is physically exhausted, but I was about to begin my real fight, a fight of words and lies and the brain. When people talk about climbing a mountain or riding rough water, they say they became one with it, their bodies so attuned to it that they often, when asked to articulate how they did it, cannot fully explain. Inside the tunnel, where broken beer bottles, old leaves, and

other, as yet indiscriminate, things littered the ground, I became one with this man. He held my life in his hand. Those who say they would rather fight to the death than be raped are fools. I would rather be raped a thousand times. You do what you have to. "Stand up," he said. I did. I was shivering uncontrollably. It was cold out and the cold combined with the fear, with the exhaustion, made me shake from head to toe. He dumped my purse and bag of books in the corner of the sealed-off tunnel. "Take off your clothes." "I have eight dollars in my back pocket," I said. "My mother has credit cards. My sister does too." "I don't want your money," he said, and laughed. I looked at him. Into his eyes now, as if he was a human being, as if I could speak to him. "Please don't rape me," I said. "Take off your clothes." "I'm a virgin," I said. He didn't believe me. Repeated his command. "Take off your clothes." My hands were shaking and I couldn't control them. He pulled me forward by my belt until my body was up against his, which was up against the tunnel's back wall. "Kiss me," he said. And he drew my head forward and our lips met. My lips were pursed tightly together. He tugged harder on my belt, my body pressing up further against his. He grabbed my hair in his fist and balled it up. He drew my head back and looked at me. I began to cry, to plead. "Please don't," I said. "Please." "Shut up." He kissed me again and this time, he inserted his tongue in my mouth. By pleading, I had left myself open to this. Again he pulled my head back roughly. "Kiss back," he said. And I did. When he was satisfied, he stopped and tried to work the latch on my belt. It was a belt with a strange buckle and he couldn't figure it out. To have him let go of me, for him to leave me alone, I said, "Let me, I'll do it." He watched me. When I was done, he unzipped the jeans I wore. "Now take off your shirt." I had a cardigan sweater on. I took that off. He reached over to help unbutton my shirt. He fumbled. "I'll do it," I said again. I unbuttoned the oxford-cloth shirt and, like the cardigan, I peeled it back from my body. It was like shedding feathers. Or wings. "Now the bra." I did. He reached out and grabbed them -- my breasts -- in his two hands. He plied them and squeezed them, manipulating them right down to my ribs. Twisting. I hope that to say this hurt isn't necessary here. "Please don't do this, please," I said. "Nice white titties," he said. And the words made me give them up, lobbing off each part of my body as he claimed ownership -- the mouth, the tongue, my breasts. "I'm cold," I said. "Lay down." "On the ground?" I asked, stupidly, hopelessly. I saw, among the leaves and glass, the grave. My body stretched out, disassembled, gagged, dead. I sat first, kind of stumbled into a seated position. He took the end of my pants and tugged. As I tried to hide my nakedness -- at least I had my underpants on -- he looked down at my body. I still feel that in that gaze his eyes lit up my sickly pale skin in that dark tunnel. Made it all -- my flesh -- suddenly horrible. Ugly too kind a word, but the closest one. "You're the worst bitch I ever done this to," he said. It was said in disgust, it was said in analysis. He saw what he had bagged and didn't like his catch. No matter, he would finish. Here, I began to combine truth with fiction, using anything to try and get him to come over to my side. To see me as pitiful, for him to see me as worse off than him. "I'm a foster child," I said. "I don't even know who my parents are. Please don't do this. I'm a virgin," I said. "Lie down." I did. Shaking, I crawled over and lay face up against the cold ground. He pulled my underpants off me roughly and bundled them into his hand. He threw them away from me and into a corner where I lost sight of them. I watched him as he unzipped his pants and let them fall around his ankles. He lay down on top of me and started humping. I was familiar with this. This was what Steve, a boy I liked in high school, had done against my leg, because I would not let him do what he wanted most, which was to make love to me. With Steve I was fully dressed and so was he. He went home frustrated and I felt safe. My parents were upstairs the whole time. I told myself Steve loved me. He worked away on me, reaching down to work with his penis. I stared right into his eyes. I was too afraid not to. If I shut my eyes, I believed, I would disappear. To make it through, I had to be present the whole time. He called me bitch. He told me I was dry. "I'm sorry," I said -- I never stopped apologizing. "I'm a virgin," I said. "Stop looking at me," he said. "Shut your eyes. Stop shaking." "I can't." "Stop it or you'll be sorry." I did. My focus became acute. I stared harder than ever at him. He began to knead his fist against the opening of my vagina. Inserted his fingers into it, three or four at a time. Something tore. I began to bleed there. I was wet now. It made him excited. He was intrigued. As he worked his whole fist up into my vagina and pumped it, I went into my brain. Waiting there were poems for me, poems I'd learned in class: Olga Cabral had a poem I haven't found since, "Lillian's Chair," and a poem called "Dog Hospital," by Peter Wild. I tried, as a sort of prickly numbness took over my lower half, to recite the poems in my head. I moved my lips. "Stop staring at me," he said. "I'm sorry," I said. "You're strong," I tried. He liked this. He started humping me again, wildly. The base of my spine was crushed into the ground. Glass cut me on my back and behind. But something still wasn't working for him. I didn't know what he was doing. He kneeled back. "Raise your legs," he said. Not knowing what he meant, never having done this for a lover, or read that kind of book, I raised them straight

up."Spread them."I did. My legs were like a plastic Barbie's, pale, inflexible. But he wasn't satisfied. He put a hand on each calf and pressed them out farther than I could hold."Keep them there," he said.He tried again. He worked his fist. He grabbed my breasts. He twisted the nipples with his fingers, lapped at them with his tongue.Tears came out of the corners of my eyes and rolled down either cheek. I was leaving now, but then I heard sounds. Out on the path. People, a group of laughing boys and girls, passing by. I had passed a party on my way to the park, a party to celebrate the last day of school. I looked at him; he did not hear them. This was it. I made an abrupt scream and, as soon as I did, he shoved his hand in my mouth. Simultaneously I heard the laughter again. This time it was directed toward the tunnel, toward us. Yells and taunts. Good-time noises.We lay there, his hand locked in my mouth and pressing down hard into my throat, until the group of well-wishers left. Moved on. My second chance at escape now gone.Things weren't going the way he planned. It was taking too long. He ordered me to stand up. Told me I could put on my panties. Used that word. I hated it.I thought it was over. I was trembling but I thought he'd had enough. Blood was everywhere and so I thought he'd done what he'd come for."Give me a blow job," he said. He was standing now. I was on the ground, trying to search among the filth for my clothes.He kicked me and I curled into a ball."I want a blow job." He held his dick in his hand."I don't know how," I said."What do you mean you don't know how?""I've never done it before," I said. "I'm a virgin.""Put it in your mouth."I kneeled before him. "Can I put my bra back on?" I wanted my clothes. I saw his thighs before me, the way they belled out from the knee, the thick muscles and small black hairs, and his flaccid dick.He grabbed my head. "Put it in your mouth and suck," he said."Like a straw?" I said."Yeah, like a straw."I took it in my hand. It was small. Hot, clammy. It throbbed involuntarily at my touch. He shoved my head forward and I put it in. It touched my tongue. The taste like dirty rubber or burnt hair. I sucked in hard."Not like that," he said and brought my head away. "Don't you know how to suck dick?""No, I told you," I said. "I've never done this before.""Bitch," he said. His penis still limp, he held it with two fingers and peed on me. Just a little bit. Acrid, wet, on my nose and lips. The smell of him -- the fruity, heady, nauseating smell -- clung to my skin."Get back on the ground," he said, "and do what I say."And I did. When he told me to close my eyes I told him I had lost my glasses, couldn't even really see him. "Talk to me," he said. "I believe you, you're a virgin. I'm your first." As he worked against me, trying for more and more friction, I told him he was strong, that he was powerful, that he was a good man. He got hard enough and plunged himself inside me. He ordered me to and I wrapped my legs around his back and he drove me into the ground. I was locked on. All that remained unpossessed was my brain. It looked and watched and cataloged the details of it all. His face, his purpose, how best I could help him.I heard more party-goers on the path, but I was far away now. He made noises and rammed it in. Rammed it and rammed it and those on the path, those so far away, living in the world where I had lived, could not be reached by me now."Nail her, all right!" someone yelled toward the tunnel. It was the kind of fraternity reveler's voice that had made me feel that, as a student at Syracuse University, I might never fit in.They passed. I was staring right into his eyes. With him."You're so strong, you're such a man, thank you, thank you, I wanted this."And then it was over. He came and slumped into me. I lay under him. My heart beating wildly. My brain thinking of Olga Cabral, of poetry, of my mother, of anything. Then I heard his breathing. Light and regular. He was snoring. I thought: Escape. I shifted under him and he woke.He looked at me, did not know who I was. Then his remorse began."I'm so sorry," he said. "You're a good girl," he said. "I'm so sorry.""Can I get dressed?"He moved aside and stood up, raised his pants, zipped them."Of course, of course," he said. "I'll help you."I had begun to let myself shake again."You're cold," he said. "Here, put these on." He held my underwear out to me, in the way a mother would for a child, by the sides of it. I was supposed to stand up and step in.I crawled over toward my clothes. Put my bra on as I sat on the ground."Are you okay?" he asked. His tone was amazing to me. Concerned. But I didn't stop to think of it then. All I knew was it was better than it had been.I stood up and took my underpants from him. I put them on, almost falling for my lack of balance. I had to sit on the ground to put my pants on. I was worried about my legs. I couldn't seem to control them.He watched me. As I inched my pants up, his tone switched."You're going to have a baby, bitch," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"I realized this could be a reason to kill me. Any evidence. I lied to him."Please don't tell anyone," I said. "I'll have an abortion. Please don't tell anyone. My mother would kill me if she knew about this. Please," I said, "no one can know about this. My family would hate me. Please don't talk about this."He laughed. "All right," he said."Thank you," I said. I stood now and put my shirt on. It was inside out."Can I go now?" I asked."Come here," he said. "Kiss me good-bye." It was a date to him. For me it was happening all over again.I kissed him. Did I say I had free will? Do you still believe in that?He apologized again. This

time he cried. "I'm so sorry," he said. "You're such a good girl, a good girl, like you said." I was shocked by his tears, but by now it was just another horrible nuance I couldn't understand. So he wouldn't hurt me more, I needed to say the right thing. "It's okay," I said. "Really." "No," he said, "it's not right what I did. You're a good girl. You weren't lying to me. I'm sorry for what I did." I've always hated it in movies and plays, the woman who is ripped open by violence and then asked to parcel out redemption for the rest of her life. "I forgive you," I said. I said what I had to. I would die by pieces to save myself from real death. He perked up. Looked at me. "You're a beautiful girl," he said. "Can I take my purse?" I asked. I was afraid to move without his permission. "My books?" He went back to business now. "You said you had eight dollars?" He took it from my jeans. It was wrapped around my license. It was a photo ID. New York State didn't have them yet but Pennsylvania did. "What is this?" he asked. "Is this one of them meal cards I can use at McDonald's?" "No," I said. I was petrified of him having my identification. Leaving with anything other than what he had: all of me, except my brain and my belongings. I wanted to leave the tunnel with both of them. He looked at it a moment longer until he was convinced. He did not take my great-grandmother's sapphire ring, which had been on my hand the whole time. He was not interested in that kind of thing. He handed me my purse and the books I'd bought that afternoon with my mother. "Which way you going?" he asked. I pointed. "All right," he said, "take care of yourself." I promised that I would. I started walking. Back out over the ground, through the gate to which I'd clung a little over an hour before, and onto the brick path. Going farther into the park was the only way toward home. A moment later. "Hey, girl," he yelled at me. I turned. I was, as I am in these pages, his. "What's your name?" I couldn't lie. I didn't have a name other than my own to say. "Alice," I said. "Nice knowing you, Alice," he yelled. "See you around sometime." He ran off in the opposite direction, along the chain-link fence of the pool house. I turned. I had done my job. I had convinced him. Now I walked. I didn't see a soul until I reached the three short stone steps that led from the park to the sidewalk. On the opposite side of the street was a frat house. I kept walking. I remained on the sidewalk close to the park. There were people out on the lawns of the frat house. A kegger party just dying out. At the place where my dorm's street dead-ended into the park, I turned and started to walk downhill past another, larger dormitory. I was aware I was being stared at. Party-goers coming home or grinds taking in the last bit of sober air before the summer. They talked. But I wasn't there. I heard them outside of me, but like a stroke victim, I was locked inside my body. They came up to me. Some ran, but then stepped back when I didn't respond. "Hey, did you see her?" they said to one another. "She's really fucked up." "Look at the blood." I made it down the hill, past those people. I was afraid of everyone. Outside, on the raised platform that surrounded Marion Dorm's front door, were people who knew me. Knew my face if not my name. There were three floors in Marion, a floor of girls between two floors of boys. Outside now it was mostly the boys. One boy opened the outer door for me to let me pass through. Another held the inner one. I was being watched; how could I not have been? At a small table near the door was the RSA -- resident security assistant. He was a graduate student. A small, studious Arab man. After midnight they checked ID's of anyone trying to get in. He looked at me and then hurriedly stood. "What has happened?" he asked. "I don't have my ID," I said. I stood before him with my face smashed in, cuts across my nose and lip, a tear along my cheek. My hair was matted with leaves. My clothes were inside out and bloodied. My eyes were glazed. "Are you all right?" "I want to go to my room," I said. "I don't have my ID," I repeated. He waved me in. "Promise me," he said, "that you will take care of yourself." Boys were in the stairwell. Some of the girls too. The whole dorm was still mostly awake. I walked by them. Silence. Eyes. I walked down the hall and knocked on the door of my best friend Mary Alice's room. No one. I knocked on my own, hoping for my roommate. No one. Last, I knocked on the door of Linda and Diane, two of a group of six of us who had become friends that year. At first there was no answer. Then the doorknob turned. Inside, the room was dark. Linda was kneeling on her bed and holding the door open. I had woken her up. "What is it?" she asked. "Linda," I said, "I was just raped and beaten in the park." She fell back and into the darkness. She had passed out. The doors were spring-hinged and so the door slammed shut. The RSA had cared. I turned around and walked back downstairs to his desk. He stood. "I was raped in the park," I said. "Will you call the police?" He spoke quickly in Arabic, forgetting himself, then, "Yes, oh, yes, please come." Behind him was a room with glass walls. Though meant as an office of some sort, it was never used. He led me in there and told me to sit down. Because there was no chair, I sat on top of the desk. Boys had gathered from outside and now stared in at me, pressing their faces near the glass. I don't remember how long it took -- not long because it was university property and the hospital was only six blocks south. The police arrived first, but I have no memory of what I said to them there. Then I was on a gurney, being strapped down. Then out in the hallway.

There was a large crowd now and it blocked the entrance. I saw the RSA look over at me as he was being questioned. A policeman took control. "Get out of the way," he said to my curious peers. "This girl's just been raped." I surfaced long enough to hear those words coming from his lips. I was that girl. The ripple effect began in the halls. The ambulance men carried me down the stairs. The doors of the ambulance were open. Inside, as we charged, sirens screaming, to the hospital, I let myself collapse. I went somewhere deep inside myself, curled up and away from what was happening. They rushed me through the emergency room doors. Then into an examination room. A policeman came inside as the nurse was helping me take off my clothes and change into a hospital gown. She wasn't happy to have him there, but he averted his eyes and flipped forward to a clean page in his pocket notebook. I couldn't help but think of detective shows on television. The nurse and policeman argued over me as he began to ask questions, take my clothes for evidence as she swabbed my face and back with alcohol and promised me the doctor would be there soon. I remember the nurse better than I do him. She used her body as a shield between us. As he gathered preliminary evidence -- my basic account -- she said things to me as she took items for the evidence kit. "You must have given him a run for his money," she said. When she took the scraping from under my nails, she said, "Good, you got a piece of him." The doctor arrived. A female gynecologist named Dr. Husa. She began to explain what she was going to do while the nurse shooed out the policeman. I lay on the table. She was going to inject me with Demerol in order to relax me enough for her to gather evidence. It might also make me want to pee. I was not to do that, she said, because that might disrupt the culture of my vagina and destroy the evidence the police needed. The door opened. "There's someone here who wants to see you," the nurse said. Somehow, I thought it might be my mother, and I panicked. "A Mary Alice." "Alice?" I heard Mary Alice's voice. It was soft, afraid, even. She took my hand and I squeezed it hard. Mary Alice was beautiful -- a natural blonde with gorgeous green eyes -- and on that day, particularly, she reminded me of an angel. Dr. Husa let us talk for a moment as she prepped the area. Mary Alice, like everyone else, had been drinking heavily at a year-end bash held at a nearby fraternity house. "Don't say I can't sober you up," I said to her, and for the first time I cried too, letting the tears leak out as she gave me what I needed most, a small smile to acknowledge my joke. It was the first thing from my old life that I recognized on the other side. It was horribly changed and marked, my friend's smile. It was not free and open, born of the silliness our smiles had been all year, but it was a comfort to me. She cried more than I did and her face became mottled and swollen. She told me how Diane, who, like Mary Alice, was five ten, had practically lifted up the small RSA in order to get my whereabouts out of him. "He wasn't going to tell anyone but your roommate, but Nancy was up in your room, passed out." I smiled at the idea of Diane and Mary Alice lifting up the RSA, his feet doing a wild walk in the air like a Keystone Kop. "We're ready," Dr. Husa said. "Will you stay with me?" I asked Mary Alice. She did. Dr. Husa and the nurse worked together. Every so often they needed to massage my thighs. I asked them to explain everything they did. I wanted to know everything. "This is different from a regular exam," Dr. Husa explained. "I need to take samples in order to make up a rape kit." "That's evidence so you can get this creep," the nurse said. They took pubic clippings and pubic combings and samples of blood and semen and vaginal discharge. When I would wince, Mary Alice squeezed my hand harder. The nurse tried to make conversation, asked Mary Alice what she majored in up at the school, told me I was lucky to have such a good friend, said that being beaten up like I had would make the cops listen to me more attentively. "There is so much blood," I heard Husa say worriedly to the nurse. As they did the combings, Dr. Husa said, "Ah, now, there is a hair from him!" The nurse held the evidence bag open and Dr. Husa shook the combings into it. "Good," the nurse said. "Alice," Dr. Husa said, "we are going to let you urinate now but then I will have to take stitches inside." The nurse helped me sit up and then scooted a bedpan under me. I urinated for such a long time that the nurse and Mary Alice made a point of it, and laughed each time they thought I'd stopped. When I was done, what I saw was a bedpan full of blood, not urine. The nurse covered it quickly with paper from the examining table. "You don't need to be looking at that." Mary Alice helped me lie back down. Dr. Husa had me scoot down so she could take the stitches. "You'll be sore down here for a few days, maybe a week," Dr. Husa said. "You shouldn't do much, if you can avoid it." But I couldn't think in terms of days or weeks. I could only focus on the next minute and believe that with each minute it would get better, that slowly all of this might go away. I told the police not to call my mother. Unaware of my appearance, I believed I could hide the rape from her and from my family. My mother had panic attacks in heavy traffic; I was certain my rape would destroy her. After the vaginal exam was completed, I was wheeled into a bright white room. This room was used to store large, incredible machines with lifesaving abilities, all shining with stainless steel and spotless fiberglass. Mary Alice had gone back out to the waiting room. I noticed the

machines and their details, how clean and new they seemed, because it was the first time I had been alone since the wheels of my rescue were set in motion. I lay on the gurney, naked under the hospital gown, and I was cold. I was not sure why I was there, stored alongside these machines. It was a long time before anyone came. It was a nurse. I asked her if I could take a shower in the shower stall in the corner. She looked at a chart on the end of the gurney, which I hadn't known was there. I wondered what it said about me, and pictured the word RAPE, in bold red letters, written diagonally across the page. I lay still and took shallow breaths. The Demerol worked hard to relax me but, still dirty, I fought back. Every inch of my skin prickled and burned. I wanted him off of me. I wanted to shower and scrub my skin raw. The nurse told me I was waiting for the psychiatrist on call. Then she left the room. It was only fifteen minutes -- but with the buggy crawl of contamination spreading over me, it felt very long -- when a harried psychiatrist entered the room. I thought, even then, that this doctor needed the Valium he prescribed for me more than I did. He was exhausted. I remember telling him I knew about Valium and so he didn't need to explain. "It will make you calm," he said. My mother had been addicted to it when I was little. She had lectured me and my sister on drugs and as I grew older I understood her fear -- that I would get drunk or high and lose my virginity to some fumbling boy. But in these lectures what I always pictured was my vibrant mother diminished somehow, lessened -- as if a gauze had been thrown over her sharp edges. I couldn't see Valium as the benign drug the doctor made it out to be. I told him this but he pooh-poohed it. When he left the room I did what I knew I would do almost immediately, and crumpled up the prescription to throw it into the waste bin. It felt good to do it. A sort of "fuck you" to the idea that anyone could sweep this thing I'd suffered under the carpet. Even then I thought I knew what could happen if I let people take care of me. I would disappear from view. I wouldn't be Alice anymore, whatever that was. A nurse came in and told me she could send in another one of my friends to help me. With the painkillers I would need a nurse or someone else to help me keep my balance in the shower. I wanted Mary Alice, but I didn't want to be mean, so I asked for Tree, Mary Alice's roommate and one of our group of six. I waited and as I did, I tried to think of what I could tell my mother -- some kind of story that would explain why I was so sleepy. I could not know, despite the doctor's warnings, how sore I would be in the morning, or that an elegant latticework of bruises would appear along my thighs and chest, on the undersides of my upper arms and around my neck, where, days later, at home in my bedroom, I would begin to make out the individual pressure points of his fingertips on my throat -- a butterfly of the rapist's two thumbs interlocking in the center and his fingers fluttering out and around my neck. "I'm gonna kill you, bitch. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up." Each repetition punctuated by the smash of my skull against brick, each repetition cutting off, tighter and tighter, the airflow to my brain. Tree's face, and her gasp, should have told me that I couldn't hide the truth. But she recovered herself quickly and helped me navigate over to the shower stall. She was uncomfortable around me; I was no longer like her but was other than. I think the way I survived in the early hours after the rape was by spiraling the obsession of how not to tell my mother over and over again in my brain. Convinced it would destroy her, I ceased thinking of what had happened to me and worried about her instead. My worry for her became my life raft. I clung to it, coming in and out of consciousness on my way to the hospital, during the internal stitches of the pelvic exam, and while the psychiatrist gave me the prescription for the very pills that had once made my mother numb. The shower was in the corner of the room. I walked like a wobbly old lady and Tree steadied me. I was concentrating on my balance and so did not see the mirror to my right until I looked up and I was almost right in front of it. "Alice, don't," Tree said. But I was fascinated, the way I had been as a child when, in a special room with low light, I saw an exhibit at the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology. It was nicknamed Blue Baby and it was a mummy, with the disintegrated face and body of a child who had died centuries ago. I recognized something alike in it -- I was a child as this Blue Baby had been a child. I saw my face in the mirror. I reached my hand up to touch the marks and cuts. That was me. It was also an undeniable truth: No shower would wipe the traces of the rape away. I had no choice but to tell my mother. She was too savvy to believe any story I could now fashion. She worked for a newspaper, and she took pride in the fact that it was impossible to pull the wool over her eyes. The shower was small and made of white tile. I asked Tree to turn on the water. "As hot as you can," I said. I took off the hospital gown and handed it to her. I had to grip the tap and a handle on the side of the shower to stay upright. This left me unable to scrub myself. I remember telling Tree I wished I had a wire brush but that even that wouldn't be enough. She drew the curtain and I stood there, letting the water beat over me. "Can you help me?" I asked. Tree pulled the curtain back a few inches. "What do you want me to do?" "I'm afraid I'll fall down. Can you take the soap and help wash me?" She reached through the water and got the large square brick of soap. She drew it down my

back, nothing but the bar of soap touching me. I felt the rapist's words, "worst bitch," as I would feel them almost constantly for years when I undressed in front of other people. "Forget it," I said, unable to look at her. "I'll do it myself. Just put the soap back." She did, then pulled the curtain closed, before leaving. I sat down in the shower. I took a washcloth and lathered it up. I scrubbed hard with the rough towel, under a tap so hot my skin had already turned beet red. The last thing I did was put the towel over my face and with both hands rubbed it back and forth over and over again until the cuts and their blood turned the small white towel pink. After the hot shower, I dressed in clothes that Tree and Diane had hurriedly selected from the few clean clothes I had. They had forgotten any underwear so I had no bra or underpants. What I did have was a pair of old jeans that I had embroidered flowers on while still in high school and then, when the knees ripped open, had sewn intricate handmade patches on -- long strips of pleated paisley and deep-green velvet. My grandmother had labeled them my "rebel" pants. On top, I wore a thin white-and-red-striped blouse. I left the shirttails out, hoping to hide as much as possible of the jeans. The heat of the shower and the Demerol worked together to make me groggy during the drive to the police station. I remember seeing the resident advisor, a sophomore named Cindy, outside the security door on the third floor of the police station, called the Public Safety Building. I wasn't prepared to see anyone with such a bright face, such an all-American-coed presence. Mary Alice stayed outside with Cindy as police officers led me through a security door. I met a plainclothes detective inside. He was short, with longish black hair. He reminded me of Starsky from Starsky and Hutch, and seemed different from the other policemen. He was nice to me but his shift was ending. He assigned me to Sergeant Lorenz, who had not yet arrived at the station. In hindsight I can only imagine how I appeared to them. My face was swollen, my hair wet, my clothes -- the "rebel" pants especially and the lack of a bra -- and on top of this, the Demerol. I made a composite from microfilm features. I worked with an officer and was frustrated because none of my rapist's features seemed to be among the fifty or so noses, eyes, and lips. I gave exact descriptions but when nothing was acceptable to me among the tiny black-and-white features I could select, the policeman decided on what was best. The composite that went out that night looked little like him. The police then took a series of pictures of me, never knowing another series had been taken earlier that night. Ken Childs, a boy I liked, had shot almost a whole roll of film, snapping candid photos of me in various poses throughout his apartment. Ken had a crush on me, and I knew that he was taking the pictures to show to people at home over the summer. I knew the photos would be judged. Was I pretty? Did I look smart? Would his friends be reduced to "She seems nice"? Or, worse still, "That's a nice sweater she's wearing"? I had gained weight, but the jeans I wore were still too big for me, and I'd borrowed my mother's white oxford-cloth shirt and a tan cable cardigan sweater. The word that comes to mind here is frumpy. So, in the "before" photos taken by Ken Childs, I am at first posing, then giggling, then laughing openly. For all my self-consciousness, I also got lost in the giggling silliness of our crush. I balance a box of raisins on my head, I stare at the writing on the back as if it were a gripping text, I prop my feet up on the edge of his dining table. I smile, smile, smile. In the "after" photos the police took, I stand shocked. The word shock, in this context, is meant to mean I was no longer there. If you have seen police photos of crime victims, you will know that they appear either bleached or unusually dark. Mine were of the overexposed variety. There were four types of poses. Face. Face and neck. Neck. Standing with identity number. No one tells you at the time how important these photos will be. The cosmetics of rape are central to proving any case. So far, in appearance, I was two for two: I wore loose, unenticing clothes; I had clearly been beaten. Add this to my virginity, and you will begin to understand much of what matters inside the courtroom. Finally, I was allowed to leave the Public Safety Building with Cindy, Mary Alice, and Tree. I told the officers in the station that I would return in a few hours and could be counted on to give an affidavit and look through mug shots. I wanted them to see I was serious, I wouldn't let them down. But they were working the night shift. Even when I did come back -- and in their minds, it was far from certain that I would -- they wouldn't be there to see I'd kept my word. The police drove us back to Marion Dorm. It was early in the morning. Light had begun to creep up over Thorden Park at the top of the hill. I had to tell my mother. The dorm was deathly quiet. Cindy went into her room at the top of the hall and Mary Alice and I agreed we would meet her there momentarily. Neither of us had a private phone. We went to my room, where I found a bra and underwear to put on under my clothes. Back out in the hallway, we ran into Diane and her boyfriend, Victor. They had been up all night, waiting for me to come home. My relationship to Victor, before that morning, consisted primarily of not understanding what he had in common with Diane, whom I found loud. He was handsome and athletic and very, very quiet around all of us. He had entered school already having chosen his major. It was something like electrical engineering. Very different from poetry.

Victor was black."Alice," Diane said. Other people came out of Cindy's open doorway. Girls I knew vaguely or those I didn't know. "Victor wants to hug you," Diane said. I looked at Victor. This was too much. He was not my rapist, I knew that. That was not the issue. But he was blocking my way to the last thing on earth I wanted to do and the thing I knew I had to do. Make that call to my mother. "I don't think I can," I said to Victor. "He was black, wasn't he?" Victor asked. He was trying to get me to look at him, look right at him. "Yes." "I'm sorry," he said. He was crying. The tears ran slowly down the outside of his cheeks. "I'm so sorry." I don't know whether I hugged him because I could not stand to see him crying (so odd in the Victor I knew, the quiet Victor who studied diligently or smiled shyly at Diane), or because I was prompted further by those around us. He held me until I had to pull away and then he let me go. He was miserable, and I cannot even now imagine what was going on inside his head. Perhaps he already knew that both relatives and strangers would say things to me like "I bet he was black," and so he wanted to give me something to counter this, some experience in the same twenty-four hours that would make me resist placing people in categories and aiming at them my full-on hate. It was my first hug from a man after the rape -- black or white -- and all I knew was that I couldn't give anything back. The arms around me, the vague threat of physical power, were all too much. By the end, Victor and I had an audience. It was something I would have to get used to. Standing close to him, but separated from the embrace, I was aware of Mary Alice and of Diane. They belonged. The others were foggy and off to the side. They were watching my life as if it were a movie. In their version of the story, where did they fit? I would find out over the years that in a few versions, I was their best friend. Knowing a victim is like knowing a celebrity. Particularly when the crime is clouded in taboo. When I was doing research for this book, back in Syracuse, I met a woman like this. Without recognizing me at first, only knowing I was writing a book on Alice Sebold's rape case, she hurried in from another room and told me and those assisting me that "the victim in that case was my best friend." I had no idea who she was. When someone referred to me by name, she blinked and then came forward, embracing me to save face. In Cindy's room, I sat down on the bed closest to the door. Cindy, Mary Alice, and Tree were there, perhaps Diane. Cindy had shoed the others out and shut her door. It was time. I sat with the phone in my lap. My mother was only a few miles away, having driven up the day before to take me home from Syracuse. She would be up and pattering around her hotel room at the Holiday Inn. At that time she traveled with her own coffeemaker because she made decaf in her room. She was coming down from as much as ten cups of coffee a day, and restaurants weren't yet in the custom of serving decaf. Before she had dropped me off at Ken Childs's house the evening before, we had agreed she would come to the dorm around 8:30 a.m. -- a late start for her but a concession to the fact that I would have been up late saying good-bye to friends. I looked around at my girlfriends, hoping they would say, "You don't look so bad," or provide me with the single and perfect story to explain the cuts and bruises on my face -- the story that I hadn't been able to come up with during the night. Tree dialed the phone. When my mother picked up, Tree said, "Mrs. Sebold, this is a friend of Alice's, Tree Roebeck." "Maybe my mother said hello." "I'm going to put Alice on the phone now. She needs to speak with you." Tree handed me the phone. "Mom," I started. She must not have heard what I thought was the obvious quaver in my voice. She was irritated. "What is it, Alice? You know I'm due over soon; can't it wait?" "Mom, I need to tell you something." She heard it now. "What, what is it?" I said it as if I were reading a line from a script. "Last night I was beaten and raped in the park." My mother said, "Oh, my God," and then, after a quick inhalation of breath, a startled gasp, she reeled herself in. "Are you all right?" "Can you come get me, Mommy?" I asked. She said it would be twenty minutes or so, she had to pack up and check out, but she would be there. I hung up the phone. Mary Alice suggested that we wait in her room until my mother arrived. Someone had bought bagels or doughnuts. In the time since our arrival back at the dorm, students had woken up. There was hurry all around me. Many students, including my friends, were meeting parents for breakfast or rushing to bus stations and airports. People would attend to me and then switch off to finish packing. I sat with my back against the cinder-block dorm wall. As people came in and out and the door opened, I could hear bits of conversation. "Where is she?" "Raped..." "...see her face?" "...she know him?" "...always weird..." I had not eaten anything since the night before -- since the raisins at Ken Childs's house -- and I could not look at the bagels or doughnuts without feeling what -- the rapist's penis -- had last been in my mouth. I tried to stay awake. I had been up for more than twenty-four hours -- far longer, what with the all-nighters that I'd pulled during finals week -- but I was afraid to fall asleep before my mother got there. My girlfriends and the resident advisor, who, after all, was only nineteen, tried to take care of me, but I had begun to notice that I was now on the other side of something they could not understand. I didn't understand it myself. 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journalist Sebold was a college freshman at Syracuse University, she was attacked and raped on the last night of school, forced onto the ground in a tunnel "among the dead leaves and broken beer bottles." In a ham-handed attempt to mollify her, a policeman later told her that a young woman had been murdered there and, by comparison, Sebold should consider herself lucky. That dubious "luck" is the focus of this fiercely observed memoir about how an incident of such profound violence can change the course of one's life. Sebold launches her memoir headlong into the rape itself, laying out its visceral physical as well as mental violence, and from there spins a narrative of her life before and after the incident, weaving memories of parental alcoholism together with her post-rape addiction to heroin. In the midst of each wrenching episode, from the initial attack to the ensuing courtroom drama, Sebold's wit is as powerful as her searing candor, as she describes her emotional denial, her addiction and even the rape (her first "real" sexual experience). She skillfully captures evocative moments, such as, during her girlhood, luring one of her family's basset hounds onto a blue silk sofa (strictly off-limits to both kids and pets) to nettle her father. Addressing rape as a larger social issue, Sebold's account reveals that there are clear emotional boundaries between those who have been victims of violence and those who have not, though the author attempts to blur these lines as much as possible to show that violence touches many more lives than solely the victim's. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.