

The main character exhibits aberrant behavior at an early age showing an eerie lack of understanding after killing a baby chick and her baby sister. She wasn't stopped and grew up to abuse husband, mother, siblings and children. She spirals into bi-polar, paranoid, delusional and psychotic behavior.

**Descent into Darkness:
The Story of One Woman's Untreated Mental
Illness and the Havoc It Wreaked on Her Family**
By Martha Rucker

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Descent into Darkness

**The Story of One Woman's Untreated Mental Illness
and the Havoc It Wreaked on Her Family**

Martha Rucker

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Disclaimer

This is a work of creative nonfiction. All of the events in this book are true to the best of the author's memory and research, although some situations, dialog, and thoughts are speculative. Some names and identifying features have been changed to protect the identity of certain parties. The views expressed in this book are solely those of the author. This book deals with mental illness, domestic violence, and their traumatic effects. While the author has taken great lengths to ensure the subject matter is dealt with in a compassionate and respectful manner, it may be troubling for some readers. Discretion is advised."

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1. Committed

Celia's daughter Pat had to have her mother committed because neither she nor anyone else could control her increasingly threatening and dangerous behavior. Papers were signed and the arrangements were made.

The town Sheriff had been called to facilitate transporting Celia to the State Mental Hospital 200 miles away to be committed. She would be driven to the next town to meet the hospital car, which would pick her up and continue to the final destination.

The sheriff had called Pat repeatedly to do something about her mother's behavior. Celia had taken to shooting at school buses filled with children because they wouldn't be quiet as they passed by her house. Pat was finally forced to come down from New Jersey when her mother had fallen on her front stoop. A neighbor called, an ambulance came, and she had been taken to the hospital. Celia had apparently had a minor stroke. After a twelve-hour car ride, she followed her Aunt Leah in her own car to the hospital. Pat and her brother T had lived with their aunt for one year when their mother had gone to New York City to work. Aunt Leah was bouncy with an infectious laugh, red hair, and freckles on her light-skinned face.

When they got to the hospital, she found out that her mother had been so belligerent, combative, and uncontrollable that she had to be kept in restraints. The hospital staff simply couldn't handle her any other way.

When they entered the room, the staff had taken the restraints off and Celia was busy shoving the straitjacket into a bag, saying she was going to sue the hospital and the doctors. She looked angrily at Pat and ordered her to, "**Tell them to release me!**"

Having dealt with her mother's erratic behavior and rages, Pat had learned to under-react. Looking into her mother's face, twisted with anger, she calmly said, "I can't *tell* them when they should release you."

Still enraged, Celia grabbed her daughter's blouse in the front and forcefully pulled her face close to her own and said again with a snarl, "*Do it!*"

Still remaining calm, making no move or raising her hands, Pat said, "I can't do that."

Aunt Leah was in the room when this was happening. When Celia realized that Pat wasn't going to do what she was told, she pivoted, focusing her rage onto her sister. Celia started toward her, saying even more angrily, "**It's your fault!**" Trapped in a corner of the room with no way to get around her sister to get out, Leah cowered in abject fear, pleading with her hands held in front of her, backing away from her, "Nooo! Nooo!" Pat had never in her life seen that kind of *raw fear* on anyone's face.

Celia had been so mad when she came to, that she was raging, fighting, and cursing, and they had to restrain her in order to help her.

Neither the hospital nor her doctor *would go on record* as questioning that something was wrong with her. That would have allowed her to be transported directly from the hospital to the state mental hospital. So, they released Celia to Pat's care.

Pat drove back to her mother's house. It was a pre-fab ranch in a small one stop-light town on a road behind the elementary school where Pat had attended for one year in the seventh grade. Her brother T had bought this little house to move their mother from the Bronx back to South Carolina.

Aunt Leah had left the hospital and gone home.

Pat, though somewhat hesitant, made the mistake of stopping at the post office on the way home to get her mother's uncollected mail. She knew she couldn't leave her alone in the house to go back and get it. She got the mail as quickly as she could. When she came back out, her mother was standing outside of the car in her hospital gown, smoking a cigarette. Pat's anxiety rose even more. Her chances of controlling her were better in a restricted space. Now she was in the open *She could do anything*. She thought to herself, heart pounding, *What am I going to do? How can I deal with this?*

Forcing herself to stay calm, Pat asked, "Why did you get out of the car?"

“I wanted a cigarette.” Celia smoked two packs a day.

Pat said, “You didn’t have to get out of the car to do that.” Knowing that Celia didn’t do what anyone asked her to do, Pat didn’t know how she was going to coax her mother back into the car. “The sooner we get home the sooner you can relax, and I’ll fix you lunch. It can be whatever you like.” Finally, Celia got back into the car and Pat breathed a huge sigh of relief.

It became very clear to Pat over the next few days that she *could not* take care of an obviously mentally ill woman all by herself. She *could not* control her mother for her own well-being. She *could not* move from New Jersey to be at her beck and call as Celia wanted. Celia had always talked about how she had left teaching to take care of her mother, Martha. Pat wouldn’t be guilted into it. She knew, without a doubt, that if she did that, either her mother would end up killing her in a rage or Pat would kill herself. It simply wasn’t an option.

So, the arrangements were made, and Pat waited for the day to arrive.

She would fix her mother breakfast every morning of the week leading up to the commitment. One morning, particularly angry and aggressive, Celia lunged at Pat. She was dizzy when she got up and stumbled onto the floor. Pat spent the next two hours, trying to lift this woman who weighed 180 pounds, almost twice as much as she did. It was like trying to lift a dead-weight. Every time she put her arms underneath her mother’s, Celia would scream, “You’re hurting me! You’re hurting me!” Finally, unable to get her mother up, she went to a neighbor for help. The neighbor, a sturdy woman almost six feet tall, put her arms under Celia’s and had her up off of the floor and on the couch in one move. She started telling the neighbor that she was hungry, and Pat wouldn’t feed her.

The woman looked at the tray of food on the coffee table and said, “Yes she is, there’s your food right there.”

The day the sheriff was scheduled to pick up Celia, she stumbled into the living room and flopped her bulk down onto the couch. She was dizzy and her eyes were glazed and unfocused. Her brown hair was matted and uncombed and her caramel-colored skin was shiny with sweat. With her *possible* minor stroke and diabetes, Pat knew she

needed to eat. Pat prepared the insulin so Celia could give herself the shot before eating. “Why are you taking so long? I know you don’t want to fix my food anyway,” Celia growled angrily. In the kitchen, Pat made her mother some bacon, eggs, and toast, and rushed as fast as she could while listening to her mother’s loud, persistent complaints. She hurried into the living room with the tray of food and the insulin. She sat it down on the coffee table.

Her mother had stripped off all of her clothes, while she had been in the kitchen and thrown them on the floor. Celia was sprawled back on the couch with one leg on the floor, completely naked. Pat attempted to remain calm. She quickly closed the front door, which opened directly to the front yard. The house was close to the road in back of the school. Celia just said, “I was hot!” Celia’s sister, Leah, lived only a few miles away, but wouldn’t come anywhere near to help because she was so terrified of her sister.

Pat tried to prick her mother’s finger to get her blood sugar reading. Celia screamed and snatched her hand away saying, “Ouch!” She then gave her mother the needle with the insulin but Celia, pushing it away growled, “You do it for me!” Pat had never given anyone a shot before but was going to try anyway. She knew her mother had to take the insulin before she ate even though she hadn’t gotten the blood sugar reading. Celia grabbed the needle with the insulin from Pat’s hand and flung it across the room in a rage screaming, “You’re trying to hurt me on purpose!”

Pat was afraid the sheriff would come while her mother was still sprawled naked on the couch. She tried to get Celia to put a robe on. Her efforts were met with snarls and swipes at her daughter with her hands whenever Pat came near. If she could have gotten up, she would have tried to physically hurt her daughter. Pat’s nerves were on edge and she didn’t know what to do. No one was there to help her. Her father had divorced Celia many years ago and now lived in Ohio. Her brother was in New York City and had emotionally disconnected from their mother. Her Aunt Leah was too terrified of her sister’s rages to come anywhere near her. *Pat was alone* with someone she couldn’t help or control. She felt a knot in her stomach.

She called her aunt telling her what was happening. Aunt Leah, still too terrified to come in spite of the circumstances, said she would call the family minister. So, Pat waited for them to come, hoping they would get there before the sheriff. Stomach queasy and nerves on edge, she wanted to take some of her mother's sedatives, but was uncertain about doing that. She called the doctor who had prescribed them for Celia, and he said it would be okay. She downed a handful to help herself stay calm.

It seemed like the sheriff was taking forever to get there. Barely controlling her nerves and her anxiety, with Celia still naked on the couch, Pat downed another handful of the sedatives. She didn't know how her mother would behave when the sheriff came.

Finally, the minister and his wife arrived. Since Celia was still naked, he stayed outside in the yard while his wife came inside and coaxed Celia into putting on a gown and robe. Pat, now barely able to breath, sneaked into the kitchen and downed a third handful of the sedatives. When Celia was dressed, the minister came into the house. The couple was a comfort to Pat in what was clearly a situation fraught with tension, walking a thin line between Celia's calm and rage. Pat slipped into the kitchen to take some more of the sedatives because she thought that she was on the verge of completely *losing it*, not knowing how her mother was going to react. But she didn't have a chance to swallow that fourth handful of sedatives because, at that moment, the sheriff's car arrived.

Pat called her aunt who drove over quickly while the minister and his wife were guiding Celia to the sheriff's car. Leah stayed in her car, slouched down, so Celia wouldn't see her and waited for Pat to get in.

Celia was strangely calm and cooperative and didn't fight it at all. Pat was too stressed to remember that people like her mother behave nicely when outside people are around. She and Aunt Leah followed the sheriff's car to the next town.

Celia remained calm. She didn't ask any questions about what was happening, why, or who was doing this to her. She was calm as she was transferred to the state hospital car. Her only concern was, "Where's my purse?" Pat gave her mother a change purse with a few

coins in it, and that seemed to satisfy her. Celia looked straight ahead as the car drove away.

Pat seemed dizzy and reacted in slow motion to what was happening. The sedatives were kicking in. She felt weak and dropped into the car seat, head nodding, her eyes fighting to stay open. She watched the hospital car drive away. She took a deep, exhausted breath, numbed by what she'd had to do. *It Was Over*. Aunt Leah took her home with her, not to her mother's. Pat didn't want to be alone.

Feeling weak, drained, and numb, Pat dropped onto a bed and fell into a deep sleep. She slept more than twelve hours, far into the next day. Her Aunt Leah was concerned and finally woke her up. She didn't know Pat had taken so many sedatives, but she knew something was wrong and insisted that she get up and they go for a walk.

Pat got up, though still feeling listless, tired, and weak, she followed her aunt up the road in front of her house. Soon she realized that she had throbbing headache, worse than any she'd ever had. When they got back to the house, she felt hungry, and Aunt Leah fixed her something to eat.

Still weak and listless, Pat dropped into a chair at the kitchen table. When the plate of food was placed in front of her, she ate slowly, slumped, head down. Lifting the fork to her mouth, it was as if her arm weighed a ton, she didn't have the strength to lift it and she could barely hold her head up or keep her eyes open.

After resting a few days, she made the twelve-hour drive back to New Jersey.

3. Early Years

Celia was a plump caramel-colored wiggly ball of arms and legs. Her brothers took their parents word that it was a girl. She had no hair, tightly clenched fists, and when she opened her eyes, they could see that they were amber. Those eyes stared intensely at them, as though sizing them up. As she got older, that intense stare would turn into a big gummy smile across her chubby face. The brothers all took turns holding, cooing to, and playing with the baby. Celia felt she was important to everyone around her. She felt loved. Della looked after her when their Mama wasn't around. When Della had to help Mama in the garden or with the chickens, she kept a close eye on Celia to make sure she didn't put anything dangerous in her mouth.

When Celia could toddle around, she was either at Mama's skirt tail in the kitchen as she fixed breakfast or supper or crawling over her brothers when they were playing games in the evening. Whenever she hurt herself, she tottered over to Mama, who would stoop her tall frame down and wrap her arms around her baby. Mama's arms and kisses always made her feel better before she went back to playing.

When Celia was a toddler, she really liked when her brothers played with her. The older boys tickled and teased her, sometimes lifting and tossing her into the air. The younger ones played games with her and she would run along after them if Della let her. She admired her older sister who was twelve years older. Her sister was treated differently as the first daughter. But she felt special and loved. When Celia wasn't being coddled by her mother or being bounced on her daddy's knees, she was always with Della.

The boys played rough when they were outside, so Della didn't let her try to run after them. Instead, she made up little games that they could play to distract her. Celia loved *patty cakes* and, for some reason, wallowing around in wet mud. Of course, Mama wasn't too happy when Celia came inside covered from head to foot in mud, giggling and clapping her hands. Della had to clean her up before dinner.

Sometimes, Celia tried to help when Mama was picking vegetables from the garden for supper. Della loved to take her baby sister with her to pick wild blackberries so Mama could make a pie, one of those cobblers that the family loved. Celia would grab the sweet berries and usually ate more than she put in the basket. Della and her brothers were guilty of the same. But they made room after supper for the pie that Mama made.

After supper, Celia was usually curled up in her daddy's lap as Mama cleaned up the kitchen with Della's help. The boys were trying to sneak a last piece of pie before bed while Celia eventually dropped off to sleep. She liked daddy's lap almost as much as Mama's arms. She was her daddy's baby girl, and she felt his love. He didn't have to say anything, and he usually didn't.

Usually, Martha moved around quickly, in the house, going outside, in the garden, helping Robert and the three older boys in the fields if necessary. Della was looking after the younger boys and Celia in the house and around the yard.

Then she started to slow down. When Celia was two years old, she noticed that Mama didn't always stoop down to hug her or pick her up anymore. She felt a little sad. When she would cling to Mama's legs or reach her arms to be picked up, Mama would sit in a chair and take her baby onto her lap. After being comforted, she'd squirm down to the floor and go back to playing.

Mama's stomach started to look like she was trying to hide a watermelon. Celia couldn't figure out why she would do that? One day Celia walked up to her Mama in the kitchen and reached up to lift the bottom of her shirt. There was no watermelon in there, just Mama's tummy! Seeing Celia's surprise, Martha sat down and took her onto her lap and said, "You're going to have a new baby brother or sister."

Celia looked at her Mama with concern in her wide amber eyes and asked in her best almost two-year-old voice "I'm not going to be the baby anymore?"

Mama gave her a hug and said, "You're always going to be my baby." The child wiggled down and looked back at her Mama with those amber eyes, a pout on her face. She wasn't sure about this new baby.

One night, Celia knew that something was wrong because Mama was making moaning sounds and holding her back. Robert sent the older boys to get the doctor.

They now had a horse and buggy. They stopped by Celia's house, the midwife, to tell her it was time. Celia got in her buggy and rode to the Vance farm. Robert stayed with Martha to comfort her as much as he could. Della took the younger boys and Celia over to their Aunt Susie's and then came back home to help her father while they waited for the doctor to come. The midwife got there first.

The doctor followed the three older boys back to the Vance farm in his own wagon. After a few hours, Martha gave birth to another girl. She didn't have as hard a time as she did giving birth to baby Celia. The baby girl was round and plump and cried from the minute she came out. They decided to call her Cornelia after Robert's mother. Della went to get the three younger boys, Luther, Booker, and Babe, and baby Celia. They all came home from Aunt Susie's.

They all crowded into the room to meet the new baby. Mama looked tired but happy. They were excited and craning their necks to get a look at the baby's chubby cheeks as Mama had her cradled in a blanket. Holding her big sister Della's hand, Celia hung back a little bit. They all coaxed her to move in closer, and Della picked her up so she could get a better look. She looked down at this new . . . creature. She didn't want to sit on the bed with Mama or touch *it*. She finally wiggled down and sat cross-legged on the floor, playing with her shoe strings.

She wasn't *the baby* anymore. She didn't like the way they were all fussing over the new baby and was a little mad at Mama. Celia didn't know what that funny feeling was in her stomach that felt like worms as she looked up at everyone crowding around this . . . new baby.

4. Not “The Baby” Anymore

Celia was no longer the baby in the family. Things just weren't the same anymore, although Papa still worked the farm every day and the three older boys, William, Robert, and Boaz always helped him. They were gone most of the day, only coming in for lunch. Mama was always in the kitchen cooking when she wasn't outside in her garden or in the chicken yard collecting eggs. When the younger boys, Luther, Book, and Babe weren't running around and playing, they were helping their Mama.

Della was usually inside or on the porch watching baby Cornelia and making sure toddler Celia didn't get into too much trouble. Sometimes, Celia would cross her arms, tuck her head, and stare at Della with those amber colored eyes when she seemed to be paying too much attention to that baby. She wasn't giving all of her attention to Celia anymore. When Cornelia wasn't sleeping, she was crying. Every time she cried, Della would run to see what was wrong and try to rock and cradle her when Mama wasn't around. Sometimes when Della was helping Mama in the kitchen, she would tell Celia to watch baby Cornelia. Celia liked her better when she was quiet.

Mama was in and out of the house, in the garden, in the chicken coop, and in the kitchen fixing lunch then supper. When Papa and the older boys came to the house for lunch, they all sat to eat together. They were all silent eating Mama's delicious food, until. . . baby Cornelia started crying. Then they started trying to see what was wrong, Papa lifting her up and rocking her, the boys took turns cooing and playing with her, Della running around helping Mama get ready to feed her. Celia couldn't understand why the baby didn't eat the same thing as the rest of them. Why did she have to suck on Mama's chest? Well, at least it shut her up.

Papa went back out to work and William, Robert and Boaz went with him. Mama sent a quart mason jar of water for each of them for when they got thirsty. That would last until they came back to the house for supper. Luther, Book, and Babe, not yet old enough to help their father in the fields, helped Mama clean the chicken coop and

played in the barnyard. Della helped Mama in the house, in the garden, watched the baby and Celia, and only called Mama when Cornelia was crying and hungry.

This is how it was every day except Sunday. On Sunday, the boys, Della, toddler Celia, and baby Cornelia, dressed in the clothes that Mama and Aunt Susie had made for them, would all pile into the back of the wagon. Papa with Mama holding baby Cornelia sitting up front as they drove the horse and buggy to the country church about a mile away from their farm. Usually Cornelia would start fussing and crying and Mama would have to feed her. It was bad enough seeing Mama feed Cornelia at home with her sucking on Mama's chest. Seeing her do it at church made Celia wish she could sit somewhere else. Sometimes, she managed to toddle over and sit near Aunt Susie.

All the time, *all* the time, everyone seemed to be cooing over Cornelia, even at church. Sometimes, they would still play with her, but only after playing with Cornelia.

One Sunday after church, Papa drove the wagon real fast going back home, whipping the horse so it would go faster. All the kids were bouncing around in the back holding on as tightly as they could. Papa seemed to be mad about something but was silent. Mama held on tight to the wagon seat with one hand, holding baby Cornelia in her other arm. She was silent too as she occasionally looked at Papa. When they got home, Papa went straight to the barn to put the horse and buggy away. He finally came into the house and Mama set the food out that she had cooked the day before and everybody sat and ate together.

The meal was noisy, but Papa was still silent. He said nothing to the younger boys, who were rough housing after super. After a while, Mama told them to go outside to do that. Before they went outside, they played a little with Celia, and that made her feel special again. Then they turned to play with baby Cornelia, making Celia feel left out again. Everybody always did that. Celia crawled to a corner and played with a rag doll Mama had made for her a long time ago when she was the baby. She sat there with the doll, just staring at her younger brothers Luther, Book, and Babe; big sister Della . . . and *that baby*. Her amber eyes flicked from person to person. Papa was still in a foul mood, and when she tried to crawl onto his lap, he just said,

“Not now, baby.” Mama was still busy in the kitchen. She felt like nobody cared about her.

She went outside and walked toward the chicken coop. The older boys weren’t paying any attention to her and Della was still in the house with Mama and baby Cornelia. There were some baby chicks inside the chicken yard. Celia reached her tiny arm through the chicken wire and tried to grab one of the them. They scurried away. . . like everybody else did.

Then Celia remembered how Mama would throw something into the yard and they would come running. She grabbed a handful of grass and threw it inside the fence. Some of the chicks came running toward her. Through the fence she swiped her tiny hand again until she was successful in grabbing one of the baby chicks. She pulled it back through the fence cupping it in both hands. She watched the wiggly ball of yellow fur struggle at first then calm down. It was looking around, all the time making a funny “peep, peep, peep” sound. Celia wondered if she were crying, calling for *her* mama.

Celia closed her hands completely covering the chick and felt it struggling again. She opened her hands just enough for the chick to stick its head through her thumbs and forefingers. She didn’t want it to get away, so she held it tighter and tighter. It kept peep, peep, peeping and wiggling. Celia just wanted it to be quiet. She squeezed and squeezed until the peeping stopped. Its fuzzy yellow head fell to the side against her fingers, its mouth open.

Her brothers ran over and asked her “What are you doing?” She looked up still holding the chick’s limp body.

Looking wide-eyed at her brothers then back down at the chick, she said, “It wouldn’t be quiet.”

They took the chick and put it somewhere they didn’t think the dogs could get at it. They knew that if the dogs got a taste of chicken, they would have trouble keeping them out of the chicken yard after that. If the dogs got at all of the newly hatched baby chicks, they wouldn’t grow into roosters or hens. That meant no more eggs, no more chicken for supper especially on Sunday, and Mama’s fried chicken was mouthwatering. Mama dearly loved her chickens, their

eggs, and all the new baby chicks that hatched each year. If they didn't have chicks every year the chicken yard would soon be empty.

They took Celia's hand and led her back into the house. She looked back in the direction of the chicken yard and remembered how it felt to squeeze that chick until it went limp and stopped that *peeping* noise.

Cornelia's constant crying and whining just made Celia mad. The only time she was quiet was when she was asleep. When she was awake and crying somebody always came to see what was wrong. Celia felt like nobody paid any attention to her when that baby was crying. When Celia was hurt, they would check to see if she was okay, then they'd go back to the baby. Celia started to feel disconnected, not a part of the family.

When Celia was three and Cornelia was about eighteen months, they thought she was old enough to watch the baby as she slept when Della was busy helping Mama in the kitchen or outside in the garden helping her gather some vegetables for dinner. If the baby started to cry, she was supposed to come and get them. The older boys, as always, were helping Papa in the fields. The younger boys, when they got tired of playing inside, would go outside and make up games or help Mama and Della in the garden.

One day, baby Cornelia woke up with only Celia there. She started crying. Celia looked up quickly from playing with her rag doll. She thought, *Oh no, she's crying!* She ran to the window to see where Mama and Della were. She couldn't see the garden from the window, so she went to the back door. She called out for Mama but didn't see anybody coming. She went back to the room where Cornelia was still crying. She had rolled off of the bed and was waddling toward the kitchen still crying. They would be mad at her if baby Cornelia waddled into the kitchen or out the door. She pulled the screaming child back to the bed and struggled to get her back up on it. Celia thought that if she gave the baby her rag doll she would stop crying.

Cornelia just screamed louder. Celia pushed the rag doll onto her face, but the baby twisted her head from side to side, her arms and legs flailing about. Celia got up on the bed to make sure the doll was pressed close to her face. She wrapped her arms around Cornelia and

pressed it closer. It was like putting her hands around the baby chick and squeezing until it stopped moving and got limp and quiet.

Cornelia finally stopped moving and was quiet. She lay still on the bed, on her back with her head turned to the side. Celia stared at her for a long time thinking, *At Least She's Quiet Now*. She put a light blanket over the baby, took her rag doll and sat back down on the floor and continued to play.

Celia looked up from adjusting her doll's dress when she heard voices. It was Mama and Della coming back into the house. They looked into the room and saw that Celia was playing with her doll and Cornelia was still asleep. Mama asked, "Is the baby alright?"

"Yes, Mama. She moved around a little bit, but then she went back to sleep. She's quiet now."

Mama and Della went back to the kitchen to start supper. A little while later Papa and the older boys, and then the younger boys, who had been out outside playing, came into the house when supper was ready. Della, with Celia's help, set the table.

Mama went to see why the baby was still sleeping in spite of all the commotion that was going on. Something wasn't right. Mama walked over to the bed and picked up the baby's limp body. She was not waking up. Mama shook her a little bit. Martha laid her child back down on the bed, still attempting to wake her. She noticed that Cornelia's lips were blue. She let out a blood-curdling scream. Robert and the other children ran into the room. They were all excited and talking because the baby wouldn't wake up. They shook the bed, touched her face, called her name . . . Nothing. Mama started rocking and moaning and crying looking at the lifeless body of her baby lying on the bed.

Celia walked over to her Mama and tried to comfort her, saying, "Don't cry, Mama; you have me. I'm still your baby."

The next few days were filled with a flurry of activity. Uncle Henry, Aunt Susie, and their five kids, Aaron, Mollie, David, young Susie, and Amanda came often. The eight Vance kids and the five Mickens's kids played in the yard, running around and having fun, and the younger ones always included Celia in their games.

One day, a man in a funny looking black suit came with a box and took the box away with him when he left. The adults were inside and spoke in hushed tones with sad faces. Martha acted like she felt her heart had been ripped out. Sometimes, Celia would walk up to her Mama when she was sitting in a chair, put both hands on her cheeks and try to make her face not look sad. Cornelia had disappeared. Celia thought, *That's okay; I'm the baby again.*

One day, not too long after that flurry of activity, Mama and Papa made all the kids dress in their *Sunday Best*. They put on their Sunday clothes too. Celia was a little confused because she knew it wasn't Sunday. Papa said they were going to the church. All of the kids except Celia sat in the back of the wagon. She sat on the wagon seat between her Mama and Papa. Mama put her arm around her, and she felt special again. She looked up and saw that both Papa and Mama had that sad look on their faces.

When they got to the church, the kids piled out of the back of the wagon. Instead of rough housing and playing before going inside, they walked quietly behind Mama and Papa who were looking straight ahead. Mama was holding Celia's hand.

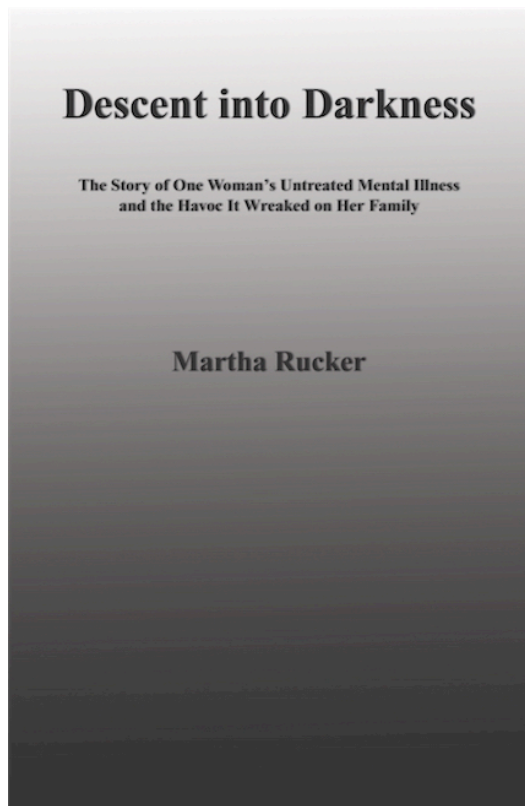
Inside, Celia saw that the church was filled with a whole bunch of people she didn't know. She did see Uncle Henry, Aunt Susie, and her cousins. She smiled and waved at them. Everyone sat down after Mama, Papa, and the kids sat down. Seated in the front row between her parents, Celia noticed a little box at the front of the church. It was like the one that the strange man in black had taken away with him after Mama had screamed and cried when Cornelia wouldn't wake up. There were bunches of flowers around it.

A man she knew was the preacher got up and started to speak. He asked Mama, Papa, and anyone else who wanted to, to come up and look inside the little box. Celia's Papa picked her up and walked toward the box. She looked down and saw Cornelia inside. She thought, *She looks like she's sleeping and she's still quiet.* She looked at her Papa and he looked stone-faced. Celia turned to look at her Mama, next to them, and could see that she was shaking. When she saw Cornelia, she started moaning and crying like she had when she couldn't get Cornelia to wake up. Papa helped her as they went back to

their seats, then the boys and Della went up. They were all crying as they came back to their seats. Some of the other people got up to go look at Cornelia in the box, including Uncle Henry, Aunt Susie, and her cousins. Finally, they were all back in their seats.

The preacher started talking again. Martha took Celia into her lap and wrapped her arms around her baby, still crying softly. Papa sat stone-faced. Celia looked around over her mother's shoulder and was surprised to see that other people besides her Mama, brothers, and sister were crying. *Were they all sad to see Cornelia sleeping and quiet?*

Mama's arms around her felt nice and she went to sleep while the preacher was still talking. When she woke up, now in Papa's arms, everyone was walking out of the church into the trees that came almost up to the side of the church. Sometimes, she, her brothers and sister Della, and their cousins would play at the edge of the trees before going back home from church on Sunday. Now they walked further into the trees until they came to a hole in the ground. Then some men, including Uncle Henry, lowered the box into the hole with some rope. People were crying even louder now, and Mama was crying louder than anyone else. She sounded like their dogs when they were howling at night. Celia wanted to laugh but put her hand over her mouth to stop her giggle from coming out. Robert was still stone-faced as he held Celia in one arm with the other around Martha as she continued to shake and cry. Finally, the rest of the children followed them back to the wagon, and they rode home in silence.



The main character exhibits aberrant behavior at an early age showing an eerie lack of understanding after killing a baby chick and her baby sister. She wasn't stopped and grew up to abuse husband, mother, siblings and children. She spirals into bi-polar, paranoid, delusional and psychotic behavior.

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