



A Lethal Inheritance: A Mother Uncovers the Science Behind Three Generations of Mental Illness.

Victoria Costello

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Every family has secrets; only some secrets are lethal. In Victoria Costello's family mental illness had been given many names over at least four generations until this inherited conspiracy of silence finally endangered the youngest members of the family, her children.

In this riveting story—part memoir, detective story, and scientific investigation—the author recounts how the mental unraveling of her seventeen-year-old son Alex compelled her to look back into family history for clues to his condition. Eventually she tied Alex's descent into hallucinations and months of shoeless wandering on the streets of Los Angeles to his great grandfather's suicide on a New York City railroad track in 1913.

But this insight brought no quick relief. Within two years of Alex's diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, both she and her youngest son succumbed to two different mental disorders: major depression and anxiety disorder.

Costello depicts her struggle to get the best possible mental health care for her sons and herself, treatment that ultimately brings each of them to full recovery. In the process, she discovers new science that explains how clusters of mental illness traverse family generations. Artfully weaving the scientific into the personal, Costello takes a journey to the far reaches of neuroscience and reports back on the startling findings it is yielding about the complex interplay between genes and environment that drives mental illness, and what it now tells us about how parents can trump a lethal inheritance.

She shares the results of long-term U.K. and European family studies identifying the earliest signs of mental illnesses that can be passed on from grandparents to parents and grandchildren. She tracks ongoing clinical trials to reverse the courses of these diseases through early intervention with the latest evidence-based treatments and offers brain-healthy choices individuals and families can make to prevent mental illness—freeing future generations to live healthier, happier lives.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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