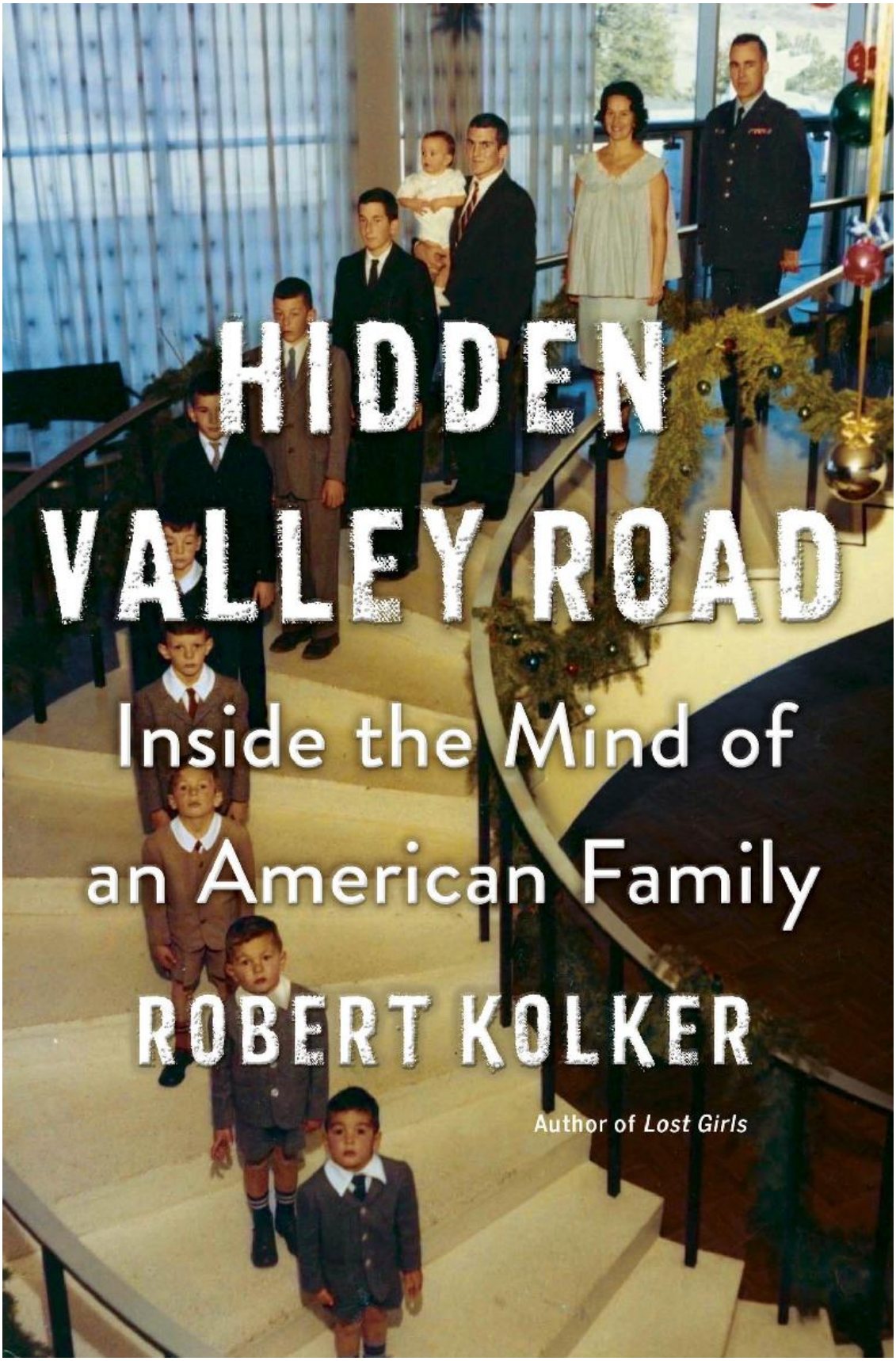
HIDDEN
VALLEY ROAD
Inside the Mind of
an American Family
ROBERT KOLKER
Author of *Lost Girls*

Also by Robert Kolker

Lost Girls

Hidden Valley Road

INSIDE THE MIND OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY

Robert Kolker

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For Judy and Jon

The clearest way that you can show endurance is by sticking with a

family.

—ANNE TYLER

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

1972

Colorado Springs, Colorado

A brother and sister walk out of their house together, through the patio door that opens out from the family kitchen and into their backyard. They're a strange pair. Donald Galvin is twenty-seven years old with deep-set eyes, his head shaved completely bald, his chin showing off the beginnings of a biblically scruffy beard. Mary Galvin is seven, half his height, with white-blond hair and a button nose.

The Galvin family lives in the Woodmen Valley, an expanse of

forest and farmland nestled between the steep hills and sandstone mesas of central Colorado. Their yard smells of sweet pine, fresh and earthy. Near the patio, juncos and blue jays dart around a rock garden where the family's pet, a goshawk named Atholl, stands guard in a mews their father built years ago. With the little girl leading the way, the sister and brother pass by the mews and climb up a small hill, stepping over lichen-covered rocks they both know by heart.

There are ten children between Mary and Donald in age—twelve Galvin kids in all; enough, their father enjoys joking, for a football team. The others have found excuses to be as far from Donald as possible. Those not old enough to have moved away are playing hockey or soccer or baseball. Mary's sister, Margaret—the only other girl, and the sibling closest to Mary in age—might be with the Skarke girls next door, or down the road at the Shoptaughs'. But Mary, still in second grade, often has nowhere to go after school but home, and no one to look after her but Donald.

Everything about Donald confounds Mary, starting with his shaved head and continuing with what he likes most to wear: a reddish brown bedsheet, worn in the style of a monk. Sometimes he completes the outfit with a plastic bow and arrow that his little brothers once

played with. In any weather, Donald walks the neighborhood dressed this way, mile after mile, all day and into the night—down their street, the unpaved Hidden Valley Road, past the convent and the dairy farm in the Woodmen Valley, along the shoulders and onto the median strips of highways. He often stops at the grounds of the United States Air Force Academy, where their father once worked, and where many people now pretend not to recognize him. And closer to home, Donald has stood sentry as children play in the yard of the local elementary school, announcing in his soft, almost Irish lilt that he is their new teacher. He only stops when the principal demands that he stay away. In those moments, Mary, a second-grader, is sorrier than ever that her world is so small that everyone knows that she is Donald's sister. Mary's mother is well practiced at laughing off moments like these, behaving as if nothing is strange. To do anything else would be the same as admitting that she lacks any real control over the situation —that she cannot understand what is happening in her house, much less know how to stop it. Mary, in turn, has no choice but to not react at all to Donald. She notices how closely both her mother and father monitor all of their children now for warning signs: Peter with his rebellion, Brian and his drugs, Richard getting expelled, Jim picking

fights, Michael checking out completely. To complain or cry or show any emotion at all, Mary knows, will send the message that something might be wrong with her, too.

And the fact is that the days when Mary sees Donald in that bedsheet are better than some of the other days. Sometimes after school, she comes home to find Donald in the middle of an undertaking only he can understand—like transplanting every last piece of furniture out of the house and into the backyard, or pouring salt into the aquarium and poisoning all the fish. Other times, he is in the bathroom, vomiting his medications: Stelazine and Thorazine and Haldol and Prolixin and Artane. Sometimes he is sitting in the middle of the living room quietly, completely naked. Sometimes the police are there, summoned by their mother, after hostilities have broken out between Donald and one or more of his brothers.

But most of the time, Donald is consumed by religious matters. Explaining that Saint Ignatius conferred upon him a degree in "spiritual exercise and theology," he spends much of every day and many nights reciting in full voice the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer and a list of his own devising that he calls Holy Order of Priests, the logic of which is known only to him. *D.O.M., Benedictine,*

Jesuit, Order of the Sacred Heart, Immaculate Conception, Mary, Immaculate Mary, Oblate Order of Priests, May Family, Black Friar, The Holy Ghost, Franciscan at the Convent, One Holy Universal, Apostolic, Trappist…

For Mary, the prayers are like a faucet that won't stop dripping. "Stop it!" she shrieks, and yet Donald never does, pausing barely long enough to breathe. She sees what he's doing as a rebuke of her entire family, but mostly of their father, a faithful Catholic. Mary idolizes her father. So does every other Galvin child—even Donald did, before he got sick. When Mary sees her father coming and going from the house whenever he likes, she is envious. She thinks about the sense of control that her father must enjoy by working so hard all the time. Hard enough to get out.

It is the way her brother singles Mary out that she finds most unbearable—not because he is cruel but because he is kind, even tender. Her full name is Mary Christine, and so Donald has decided that she is Mary, the sacred virgin and mother of Christ. "I *am not*!" Mary cries, again and again. She believes that she is being teased. It would not be the first time that one of her brothers has tried to make a fool of her. But Donald is so unmistakably serious—so fervent, so

reverential—it only makes Mary angrier. He has made Mary the exalted object of his prayers—bringing her into his world, which is the last place that she would ever want to be.

The idea that Mary comes up with, the solution to the problem of Donald, is a direct response to the rage she feels. Her inspiration comes from the sword-and-sandals epics that her mother sometimes watches on television. The idea starts with her saying, “Let’s go up to the hill.” Donald consents; anything for the sacred virgin. It continues with Mary suggesting that they build a swing on a tree branch. “Let’s bring a rope,” she says. Donald does as she says. And it concludes at the top of the hill, where Mary selects a tree, one of many tall pines, and tells Donald that she’d like to tie him to it. Donald says yes. And hands her the rope.

Even if Mary were to reveal her plan to Donald—to burn him at the stake, like the heretics in the movies—it is doubtful that he would react. He is too busy praying. He stands tightly against the tree trunk, lost in his own stream of words as Mary walks around the tree with the rope, circling and pulling until she believes he cannot break free. Donald does not resist.

She tells herself that no one will miss him when he’s gone—and

that no one will ever suspect her. She goes searching for kindling and brings back armfuls of twigs and branches, dropping them at his bare feet.

Donald is ready. If Mary really is who he insists she is, he can hardly say no. He is calm, patient, kind.

He adores her.

But on this day, Mary is serious only to a point. She has no matches, no way to make a fire. More crucially, she is not like her brother. She is grounded, her mind rooted in the real world. If nothing else, Mary is determined to prove that, not just to her mother, but to herself.

So she abandons her plan. She strands Donald on the hill. He stays up there, surrounded by flies and pasqueflowers, standing in place and praying for a very long time. Long enough that Mary gets some time to herself, but not so long that he doesn't come back down again.

—

SHE MANAGES A smile now when she thinks about it. "Margaret and I laugh," she says. "I'm not sure others would find it quite so funny."

On a crisp winter afternoon in 2017—forty-five years, a lifetime, after that day on the hill—the woman once known as Mary Galvin pulls

her SUV into a parking space at Point of the Pines, an assisted living facility in Colorado Springs, and walks inside to see the brother she once fantasized about burning alive. She is in her fifties now, with the same bright eyes, though in her adulthood she has chosen to go by a different first name: Lindsay, a name she picked as soon as she left home—a determined young girl's attempt to make a break with the past and become someone new.

Lindsay lives a six-hour drive away, just outside Telluride, Colorado. She owns her own business, staging corporate events—working as hard as her father ever did, crisscrossing the state between home and Denver, where most of her events take place, and Colorado Springs, where she can tend to Donald and others in her family. Her husband, Rick, runs the Telluride ski resort's instruction program, and they have two teenagers, one in high school and one in college. Anyone who meets Lindsay now usually doesn't see past her calm confidence, her easy smile. After years of practice, she has an artful way of pretending as if everything is completely normal, even when the case is quite the opposite. Only a tart, razor-sharp comment now and then suggests something else—something melancholic and immutable, simmering beneath the surface.

Donald is waiting for her in the first-floor lounge. Dressed casually in a wrinkled, untucked Oxford shirt and long cargo shorts, her oldest brother, in his seventies now, looks incongruously distinguished, with wisps of white hair at his temples, a cleft chin, and heavy black eyebrows. He could be cast in a gangster movie, if his voice weren't so gentle and his gait so stiff. "He has a little bit of that Thorazine shuffle still left, the way he walks," says Kriss Prado, a manager at the facility. Donald takes clozapine now, a sort of last-resort psychotropic drug with both a high rate of effectiveness and a high risk of extreme side effects—heart inflammation, low white blood cell count, even seizures. One of the consequences of surviving schizophrenia for fifty years is that sooner or later, the cure becomes as damaging as the disease.

When Donald spots his sister, he stands up, ready to leave.

Usually, when Lindsay visits, it's to take him out to see other family. Smiling warmly, Lindsay says they're not going anywhere today—that she is there to see how he is doing and to talk with his doctors. Donald smiles, too, slightly, and sits back down. No one in his family comes to see him there but her.

Lindsay has had decades to make sense of her childhood, and in many ways that project continues. So far, she has learned that the key

to understanding schizophrenia is that, despite a century of research, such a key remains elusive. There is a menu of symptoms, various ways the illness presents: hallucinations, delusions, voices, comalike stupors. There are specific tells, too, like the inability to grasp the most basic figures of speech. Psychiatrists speak of "loosening of associations" and "disorganized thinking." But it is hard for anyone to explain to Lindsay why, on a day like today, Donald is cheerful, even content, while on another day he is frustrated, demanding she drive him to the state mental hospital in Pueblo, where he has been admitted more than a dozen times over fifty years, and where he often says that he would like to live. She can only guess why, when Donald is brought to the supermarket, he always buys two bottles of All clothing detergent, announcing brightly, "This is the best body wash ever!" Or why, almost fifty years later, he still recites that religious litany: *Benedictine, Jesuit, Order of the Sacred Heart*.... Or why, for almost as long, Donald has consistently and unwaveringly maintained that he is, in fact, the offspring of an octopus.

The most dreadful thing, perhaps, about schizophrenia—and what most sets it apart from other brain conditions like autism or Alzheimer's, which tend to dilute and dissipate a person's most

identifiable personality traits—is how baldly emotional it can be. The symptoms muffle nothing and amplify everything. They're deafening, overpowering for the subject and frightening for those who love them —impossible for anyone close to them to process intellectually. For a family, schizophrenia is, primarily, a felt experience, as if the foundation of the family is permanently tilted in the direction of the sick family member. Even if just one child has schizophrenia, everything about the internal logic of that family changes.

But the Galvins never were an ordinary family. In the years when Donald was the first, most conspicuous case, five other Galvin brothers were quietly breaking down.

There was Peter, the youngest boy and the family rebel, who was manic and violent, and who for years refused all help.

And Matthew, a talented ceramic artist, who, when he wasn't convinced that he was Paul McCartney, believed that his moods controlled the weather.

And Joseph, the most mild-mannered and poignantly self-aware of the sick boys, who heard voices, as real to him as life itself, from a different time and place.

And Jim, the maverick second son, who feuded viciously with

Donald and went on to victimize the most defenseless members of his family—most notably the girls, Mary and Margaret.

And, finally, Brian, perfect Brian, the family's rock star, who kept his deepest fears a secret from them all—and who, in one inscrutable flourish of violence, would change all of their lives forever.

—

THE DOZEN CHILDREN in the Galvin family perfectly spanned the baby boom. Donald was born in 1945, Mary in 1965. Their century was the American century. Their parents, Mimi and Don, were born just after the Great War, met during the Great Depression, married during World War II, and raised their children during the Cold War. In the best of times, Mimi and Don seemed to embody everything that was great and good about their generation: a sense of adventure, industriousness, responsibility, and optimism (anyone who has twelve children, the last several against the advice of doctors, is nothing if not an optimist). As their family grew, they witnessed entire cultural movements come and go. And then all the Galvins made their own contribution to the culture, as a monumental case study in humanity's most perplexing disease.

Six of the Galvin boys took ill at a time when so little was

understood about schizophrenia—and so many different theories were colliding with one another—that the search for an explanation overshadowed everything about their lives. They lived through the eras of institutionalization and shock therapy, the debates between psychotherapy versus medication, the needle-in-a-haystack search for genetic markers for the disease, and the profound disagreements about the cause and origin of the illness itself. There was nothing generic about how they each experienced the illness: Donald, Jim, Brian, Joseph, Matthew, and Peter each suffered differently, requiring differing treatments and a panoply of shifting diagnoses, and prompting conflicting theories about the nature of schizophrenia. Some of those theories could be especially cruel to the parents, who often took the blame, as if they'd caused the disease by something they did or did not do. The entire family's struggle doubles as a thinly veiled history of the science of schizophrenia—a history that for decades took the form of a long argument over not just what caused the illness, but what it actually is.

The children who did not become mentally ill were, in many respects, as affected as their brothers. It is hard enough to individuate oneself in any family with twelve children; here was a family that was

defined by dynamics like no other, where the state of being mentally ill became the norm of the household, the position from which everything else had to start. For Lindsay, her sister, Margaret, and their brothers John, Richard, Michael, and Mark, being a member of the Galvin family was about either going insane yourself or watching your family go insane—growing up in a climate of perpetual mental illness. Even if they happened not to descend into delusions or hallucinations or paranoia—if they didn't come to believe that the house was under attack, or that the CIA was searching for them, or that the devil was under their bed—they felt as if they were carrying an unstable element inside themselves. How much longer, they wondered, before it would overtake them, too?

As the youngest, Lindsay endured some of the worst of what happened—left in harm's way, directly hurt by people she thought loved her. When she was little, all she wanted was to be someone else. She could have left Colorado and started over, changed her name for real, assumed a new identity, and tried to scribble over the memory of all she went through. A different person would have gotten out as soon as she could and never come back.

And yet here Lindsay is at Point of the Pines, checking to see if the

brother she once dreaded needs a heart examination, if he's signed all the forms that need signing, if the doctor has seen him enough. She does the same for her other sick brothers, too, the ones still living. With Donald, for the length of her visit today, Lindsay pays careful attention as he wanders the halls. She worries that he is not taking good enough care of himself. She wants the best for him.

In spite of everything, she loves him. How did that change?

—

THE ODDS OF a family like this one existing at all, much less one that remained intact long enough to be discovered, seem impossible to calculate. The precise genetic pattern of schizophrenia has defied detection; its existence announces itself, but fleetingly, like flickering shadows on the wall of a cave. For more than a century, researchers have understood that one of the biggest risk factors for schizophrenia is heritability. The paradox is that schizophrenia does not appear to be passed directly from parent to child. Psychiatrists, neurobiologists, and geneticists all believed that a code for the condition had to be there somewhere, but have never been able to locate it. Then came the Galvins, who, by virtue of the sheer number of cases, offered a greater degree of insight into the illness's genetic process than anyone

imagined possible. Certainly no researcher had ever encountered six brothers in one family—full-blooded siblings, with the same two parents in common, the same shared genetic line.

Starting in the 1980s, the Galvin family became the subject of study by researchers on the hunt for a key to understanding schizophrenia. Their genetic material has been analyzed by the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, the National Institute of Mental Health, and more than one major pharmaceutical company. As with all such test subjects, their participation was always confidential. But now, after nearly four decades of research, the Galvin family's contribution finally can be seen clearly. Samples of their genetic material have formed the cornerstone of research that has helped unlock our understanding of the disease. By analyzing this family's DNA and comparing it with genetic samples from the general population, researchers are on the cusp of making significant advances in treatment, prediction, and even prevention of schizophrenia.

Until recently, the Galvins were completely unaware of how they might be helping others—oblivious to how their situation had, among some researchers, created such a feeling of promise. But what science has learned from them is only one small portion of their story. That

story begins with their parents, Mimi and Don, and a life together that took flight with limitless hope and confidence, only to curdle and collapse in tragedy, confusion, and despair.

But the story of the children—of Lindsay, her sister, and her ten brothers—was always about something different. If their childhood was a funhouse-mirror reflection of the American dream, their story is about what comes after that image is shattered.

That story is about children, now grown, investigating the mysteries of their own childhood—reconstituting the fragments of their parents' dream, and shaping it into something new.

It is about rediscovering the humanity in their own brothers, people who most of the world had decided were all but worthless.

It is about, even after the worst has happened in virtually every imaginable way, finding a new way to understand what it means to be a family.

THE GALVIN FAMILY

PARENTS

"DON"

DONALD WILLIAM GALVIN

born in Queens, New York, on January 16, 1924

died on January 7, 2003

“MIMI”

MARGARET KENYON BLAYNEY GALVIN

born in Houston, Texas, on November 14, 1924

died on July 17, 2017

CHILDREN

DONALD KENYON GALVIN

born in Queens, New York, on July 21, 1945

married Jean (divorced)

JAMES GREGORY GALVIN

born in Brooklyn, New York, on June 21, 1947

married Kathy (divorced), one child

died on March 2, 2001

JOHN CLARK GALVIN

born in Norfolk, Virginia, on December 2, 1949

married Nancy, two children

BRIAN WILLIAM GALVIN

born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on August 26, 1951

died on September 7, 1973

“MICHAEL”

ROBERT MICHAEL GALVIN

born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on June 6, 1953

married Adele (divorced), two children

married Becky

RICHARD CLARK GALVIN

born in West Point, New York, on November 15, 1954

married Kathy (divorced), one child

married Renée

JOSEPH BERNARD GALVIN

born in Novato, California, on August 22, 1956

died on December 7, 2009

MARK ANDREW GALVIN

born in Novato, California, on August 20, 1957

married Joanne (divorced)

married Lisa, three children

MATTHEW ALLEN GALVIN

born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on December 17, 1958

PETER EUGENE GALVIN

born in Denver, Colorado, on November 15, 1960

MARGARET ELIZABETH GALVIN JOHNSON

born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on February 25, 1962

married Chris (divorced)

married Wylie Johnson; daughters Ellie and Sally

“LINDSAY”

MARY CHRISTINE GALVIN RAUCH

born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on October 5, 1965

married Rick Rauch; son Jack, daughter Kate

Part One

DON

MIMI

DONALD

JIM

JOHN

BRIAN

MICHAEL

RICHARD

JOE

MARK

MATT

PETER

MARGARET

MARY

CHAPTER 1

1951

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Every so often, in the middle of doing yet another thing she'd never imagined doing, Mimi Galvin would pause and take a breath and consider what, exactly, had brought her to that moment. Was it the careless, romantic tossing aside of her college education in favor of a wartime marriage? The pregnancies and the children, one after another, with no plan of stopping if Don had anything to say about it? The sudden move out west, to a place that was completely foreign to her? But of all the unusual moments, perhaps none compared to when Mimi—a refined daughter of Texas aristocracy, by way of New York City—clutched a live bird in one hand and a needle and thread in the other, preparing to sew the bird's eyelids shut.

She had heard the hawk before she saw it. It was nighttime, and Don and the boys were asleep in their new home when there was an unfamiliar noise. They had been warned about coyotes and mountain lions, but this sound was different, the pitch high, the quality

otherworldly. The next morning, Mimi went outside, and on the ground, not far from the cottonwood trees, she noticed a small scattering of feathers. Don suggested they bring the feathers to a new acquaintance of his, Bob Stabler, a zoologist who taught at Colorado College, a short walk from where they were living in the center of Colorado Springs.

Doc Stabler's house was unlike any place they had seen in New York: a home that doubled as a repository for reptiles, mainly snakes, including one that was uncaged—a cottonmouth moccasin, coiled around the back of a wooden chair. Don and Mimi brought their three sons with them, ages six, four, and two. When one of the boys dashed in front of the snake, Mimi shrieked.

"What's the matter?" Stabler said with a smile. "Afraid it's going to bite your baby?"

The zoologist had no trouble identifying the feathers. He had been training hawks and falcons as a hobby for years. Don and Mimi knew nothing about falconry, and at first they feigned interest as Stabler went on about it: how, in medieval times, no one beneath the rank of an earl was even allowed to own a peregrine falcon; and how this part of Colorado was a prime nesting spot for the prairie falcon, a cousin of

the peregrine and every bit as majestic, he said, a thing of beauty. And then, against their better judgment, both Mimi and Don found themselves fascinated, as if they were being let in on one of the great private worlds of a place they were only just beginning to understand. Their new friend made it sound like a cultish thing, an archaic pastime practiced today by a secretive few. He and his friends were taming the same sorts of wild birds once tamed by Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, Mary Queen of Scots, and Henry VIII—and they were doing it very much the same way.

In truth, Don and Mimi may have come to Colorado Springs about fifty years too late. Back then, this part of the state had been an agreeable destination for, among others, Marshall Field, Oscar Wilde, and Henry Ward Beecher, all of whom came to take in some of the natural wonders of the American West. There was Pikes Peak, the fourteen-thousand-foot summit named for an explorer, Zebulon Pike, who never actually made it to the top. There was the Garden of the Gods, the looming natural arrangement of sandstone rock outcroppings that seem staged for maximum effect, like the heads on Easter Island. And there was Manitou Springs, where some of the wealthiest, most refined Americans came to partake of the latest

pseudoscientific cures. But by the time Don and Mimi arrived, in the winter of 1951, the elite sheen of the place had long worn away, and Colorado Springs had gone back to being a drought-ridden, small-minded outpost of a town—such a tiny pinpoint on the map that when the Boy Scout international jamboree was held there, the jamboree was bigger than the town.

So for Don and Mimi to happen upon such a grand tradition right under their noses—the mark of nobility and royalty, right there, in the middle of nowhere—sent shock waves through them both, feeding into their shared love of culture and history and sophistication. They were goners. But joining that club took some time. Aside from Doc Stabler, no one was willing to talk about falconry with the Galvins. Falconry was so exclusive, it seemed, that conventional bird-watching groups of the time had yet to embrace the pursuit of these particular birds.

Mimi could never remember how, but Don got his hands on a copy of *Baz-nama-yi Nasiri,* a Persian falconry text that only in the past few decades had been translated into English. From that book, he and Mimi learned to build their first trap, a dome made of chicken wire, affixed to a circular frame the size of a hula hoop. Following the instructions, they staked a few dead pigeons inside the trap as bait,

with wires of fishing line hanging from the chicken wire above. At the end of each line, they tied slipknots to catch any bird who fell for the ruse.

Their first customer, a red-tailed hawk, flew off, carrying the whole trap behind it; their English setter ran after it and tracked it down. This was the first wild bird that Mimi ever held in her hand. Like a dog chasing a fire truck, she had no idea what to do if she caught one.

Back to Doc Stabler she went, hawk in hand. “Well, you did pretty well,” he said. “Now sew the eyelids together.”

Stabler explained that a falcon’s eyelids protect them as they dive at speeds upward of two hundred miles per hour. But in order to train a hawk or falcon the way Henry VIII’s falconers did it, the bird’s eyelids should be temporarily sewn shut. With no visual distractions, a falcon can be made dependent on the will of a falconer—the sound of his voice, the touch of his hands. The zoologist cautioned Mimi: Be careful the stitches aren’t too tight or too loose, and that the needle never pricks the hawk’s eyes. There seemed any number of ways to make a hash of the bird. What, again, brought Mimi to this moment? She was frightened, yet not entirely unprepared. Mimi’s mother

had made dresses during the Depression—even ran her own business—and she had made sure her daughter knew a few things. As carefully as she could, Mimi went to work on the edge of each eyelid, one after the other. When she was done, she took the long tails of the threads from both eyes, tied them together, and stashed them in the feather on top of the bird's head, to keep the bird from scratching at them.

Stabler complimented Mimi on her work. "Now," he said, "you have to keep it on the fist for forty-eight hours."

Mimi balked. How could Don walk the halls of Ent Air Force Base, where he worked as a briefing officer, with a blinded hawk on his wrist? How could Mimi do the dishes, or look after three small boys?

They divided up the work. Mimi took days, and Don took nights, during his late shifts at the base, tethering the bird to a chair in the room where he spent most of his time. Only once did a senior officer walk in and cause the hawk to "bate"—a falconry term meaning to fly away in a panic. Classified documents went flying everywhere, too. Don had a reputation at the base after that.

But at the end of those forty-eight hours, Mimi and Don had successfully domesticated a hawk. They felt an enormous sense of accomplishment. This was about embracing the wild, natural world,

but also about bringing it under one's control. Taming these birds could be brutal and punishing. But with consistency and devotion and discipline, it was unbelievably rewarding.

Not unlike, they often thought, the parenting of a child.

—

WHEN SHE WAS a little girl, Mimi Blayney would sit under her family's grand piano and listen to her grandmother playing Chopin and Mozart. On nights when her grandmother picked up the violin, Mimi would stare, transfixed, as her aunt danced like a Gypsy along to the music, the logs in the fireplace crackling loudly behind her. And when no one else was around, the pale, dark-haired girl, no older than five, would venture where she was not allowed to go. The Victrola was broken more often than it wasn't, and the records the family owned—thick, grooved platters, more like hubcaps than LPs—were filled with music that Mimi was dying to hear. When the coast was clear, Mimi would put a platter on the machine, place down the needle, and spin it with her finger. She would get about two measures of opera that way,

over and over again.

—

The excavation of levees had worked out well for Mimi's grandfather, Howard Pullman Kenyon, a civil engineer who, long before Mimi was born, founded a company that dredged the rivers of five states, building levees along the Mississippi. Mimi's mother, Wilhelmina—or Billy to everyone—went to a private school in Dallas, and when the teacher would ask, "And what does your daddy do?" she'd coyly reply, "He's a ditch digger." At its wealthiest, during the Roaring Twenties, the Kenyon family owned its own island at the mouth of the Guadalupe River near Corpus Christi, Texas, where Mimi's grandfather dug his own lake and stocked it with bass. Most of the year, the family lived in a grand old mansion on Caroline Boulevard in Houston. In the driveway were two Pierce-Arrows, a fleet that increased by one additional Pierce-Arrow each time one of Grandfather Kenyon's five children came of age.

Mimi grew up with plenty of stories about the Kenyons. In her later years, she would recite those stories to her friends and neighbors and everyone she met, like secrets too delicious to keep to herself. The family's first home in Texas was sold to Howard Hughes's

parents….Howard Hughes himself was a classmate of Mimi's mother at the Richardson School, the academic institution of choice for Houston's upper crust….Obsessed with mining, Grandfather Kenyon once traveled to the mountains of Mexico in search of gold and was briefly held captive by Pancho Villa, until his command of the local geography impressed the Mexican revolutionary so much that the two men struck up a friendship. Out of insecurity or, maybe, just a restless intellect, Mimi would come back to these stories as a way of affirming her status, her pedigree. It felt good to remind herself that there was something special about where she came from.

It made sense, by Kenyon standards, that when Mimi's mother, Billy, found someone good enough to marry, the groom was not just a twenty-six-year-old cotton merchant; he was the son of a scholar who had traveled the world as a trusted advisor to the banker and philanthropist Otto Kahn. The families of Billy Kenyon and John Blayney were perfectly matched, and the young couple seemed destined for a life of high-minded adventure. They set up a home of their own and had two children: first Mimi, in 1924, and then her sister, Betty, two and a half years later. The family's first real crisis came in early 1929, when Mimi's father, who had failed to measure up

to the reputation of his family in practically every important way, exposed Mimi's mother to gonorrhea.

Grandfather Kenyon went after his son-in-law with a rifle, securing a quick divorce for his daughter. Billy and the girls moved back to the family home in Houston. Billy was helpless, on the verge of despair. A divorced, scandalized mother of two little girls—Mimi was five, Betty three—was not going to build any sort of life in the circles that the Kenyon family traveled in. There didn't seem to be a solution to the problem—until, a few months later, Mimi's mother fell for an artist from New York.

Ben Skolnick was a painter who had been just passing through town, on his way to create a mural in California. Ben had good taste, and was raised in a family of creative people, but he stuck out a little in Houston, not just because of what he did for a living but because he was Jewish. Billy's parents made sure to meet with Ben out of town, where no one would see them. But when Ben proposed, Billy's mother encouraged her to accept. No matter what her family might have thought about Ben Skolnick personally or Jews generally, they understood that this was Billy's best hope.

In the summer of 1929, Grandfather Kenyon drove Mimi, her

mother, and her little sister to a boat in Galveston, Texas, which took them east along the Gulf to New Orleans, where they boarded a cruise ship on the Cunard line to New York. On board, the future Mrs. Skolnick and her daughters received invitations to sit at the captain's table, where they were required to have perfect manners, finger bowls included. Mimi got seasick easily, and even when she was well, she failed to enjoy the trip. Not for the last time, Mimi wondered if anything about her life would ever be the same.

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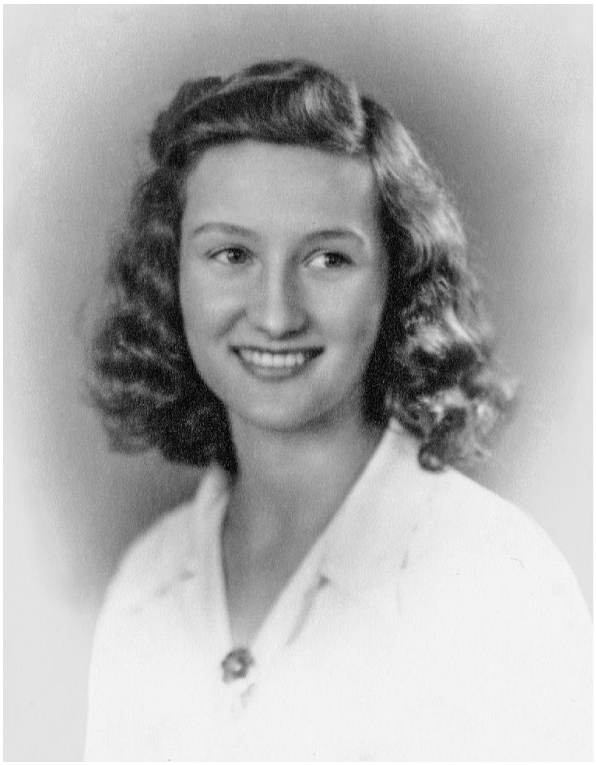
THE NEWLY CONSTITUTED family struggled right away. Ben couldn't find any murals to paint after the stock market crash. Billy, with her refined breeding and eye for fine fabrics, found a job at Macy's. In time, she started a dress business in Manhattan's Garment District that brought the family a little more stability. While she worked, Ben and his family tended to the girls in their tiny house in Bellerose, Queens—the city's edge, practically on the border with Long Island. New York slowly grew on Mimi. Sack lunches in hand, she and her sister could take the bus and subway for a nickel from far-off Queens to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan, then make their way through Central Park, past Cleopatra's Needle to the Museum of

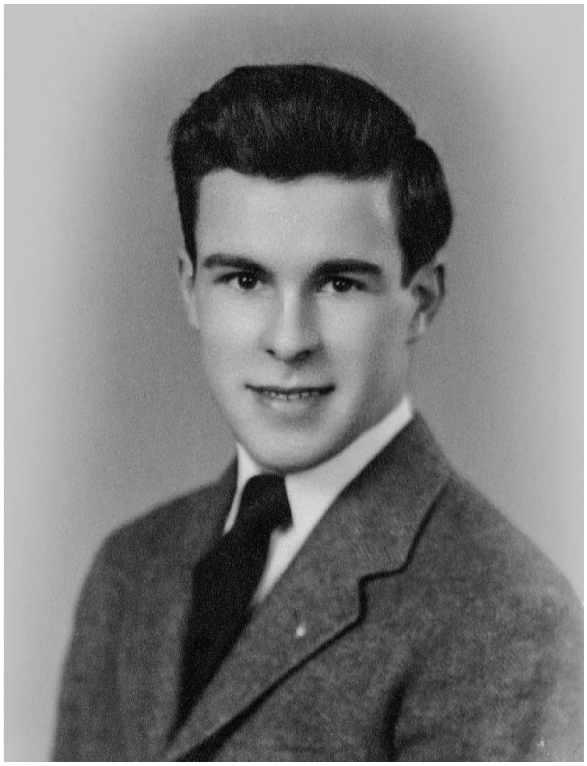
Natural History, and find their way back home before dark. All the New Deal WPA projects allowed Mimi to see theater in ballparks and high school auditoriums. School took her on her first trips to the aquarium and planetarium. Her first ballet, by Léonid Massine, was staged inside the Met. Mimi would never forget the sight of twelve little girls who came all the way from Russia to dance—all, it seemed at the time, just for her. If the first world Mimi had known was the world of the Victrola and the grand piano and the country club and Junior League of Houston, she took more fiercely to this new world. "I loved growing up in New York," she would say. "That's the best education in the world, it really is."

And in the years to come, whenever things seemed awry in her life, Mimi's stories about her charmed New York childhood and gilded Houston family would, all together, paper over the gloom. Grandfather Kenyon hit some hard times in the Depression and had to let the family's loyal servants go, but beneficently permitted them to stay on his property, rent-free….Mimi and her mother once traveled to Texas on the same train as Charlie Chaplin, and she played with the Little Tramp's children (who were rascals in their own right)….In the 1930s, Mimi's mother, Billy, accompanied Grandfather Kenyon back to

Mexico, where she went drinking with Frida Kahlo and shook the hand of her exiled Russian friend, Leon Trotsky….

As far as Mimi was concerned, these stories were better than the one about how much Ben Skolnick liked to drink. Or how she never saw her real father, John Blayney, again, and how much that hurt. Or how deeply, achingly she had longed for a life that would be as safe and secure as it would be extraordinary.





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MIMI MET THE man who would offer her that life in 1937, when they were both still practically children. Don Galvin was fourteen and tall and pale, with hair as dark as hers. She was a year younger, studious

but also quick to laugh. They were at a swim competition, and she'd blown a start, diving in before the whistle blew, and he was sent in to bring her back. After the meet, Don asked her out. That was the first time such a thing had happened to Mimi. She said yes.

Don was a serious-minded boy, college-bound, a reader. All that appealed to Mimi. But he also was handsome in the most wholesome, all-American way: lantern-jawed with slicked-back hair, a matinee idol in the making. Don wasn't an extrovert, and yet when he opened his mouth, people seemed to listen. It was not so much what he said as how he sounded: Don had the voice of a crooner, practically singing everything he spoke, smooth and seductive. With that voice, one of his sons, John, later said, "he could hold you in the palm of his hand."

Mimi's mother was suspicious. There may have been some snobbery at play there. The Galvins were devout Catholics—a tribe as foreign to the Episcopal Kenyon family as a Jewish family would have been before Billy had met Ben. Don's father was an efficiency expert for a paper company, and his mother was a schoolteacher. Neither of these facts did much to impress Mimi's mother.

But there was snobbery on both sides. Don's mother noted how Mimi did all the talking in the relationship. Did that mean she would

ride roughshod over her youngest son? And then came the refrain from both sides that dogged them for years: *You're both so young.* Nothing seemed to convince them that they weren't meant for each other. It was true that their interests weren't completely in line: He loved the Dodgers; she loved the ballet. But when they were fifteen and sixteen, Mimi persuaded Don to take her to *Petrushka* featuring Alexandra Danilova, the ballerina who had left the Soviet Union with George Balanchine. When Don came home raving about the performance, his brothers teased him for days. In the summer, Billy took Mimi on a trip, ostensibly to see Grandfather Kenyon. The not-so-secret agenda was to get Mimi away from Don for a while. It didn't work: Mimi wrote Don letters all the way there and back. Once she came home, Don took her to see *The Wizard of Oz,* and the couple sang and skipped together all the way home. That fall, they went to dances together, and school basketball games and rallies and Friday night bonfires. That spring, they drove out together to warm-weather clambakes on Cedar Beach on Long Island's South Shore.

Slowly, everyone came around. As Don neared graduation, his parents invited Mimi and her family to dinner. The Galvins lived in a nicer house than Mimi's family's place, a Dutch Colonial with a vast

living room covered by a deep, dark red Oriental rug. Billy took notice of this. From that point forward, Don became a welcome guest at Mimi's house on Friday nights to play Scrabble. On return visits to Don's house, Mimi would clown around with Don and his two brothers, George and Clarke, both of whom were as handsome as he was. Even Don's mother thawed a little when Mimi and Don visited the Cloisters, and Mimi wrote a school paper for Don on the tapestries there. Mimi was helping her son to better himself. That was all right with her.

Not everything about their romance was effortless. Every weekend, Don hosted dances as the grand master of the Sigma Kappa Delta fraternity. Mimi went broke making new dresses each week, determined not to let anyone else go with him. There was a price to pay, perhaps, for going steady with the boy the Jamaica High School paper once called "Senior Head School Romeo." *Nothing but an absolute refusal to discuss his affairs of the heart could be obtained from the very secretive and the shy Mr. Don Galvin.*

Something about him—not just his looks, but a relaxed, easygoing self-assurance—made him both irresistible and, in some strange way, unattainable. That air of mystery would work to Don's advantage for

much of his life. From the very start, it was as if Mimi belonged to him, while he belonged to everyone.

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MIMI LOVED DON for his ambition, even if in her heart of hearts she would have preferred that he stay close to home. After high school, he told Mimi he wanted to join the State Department and travel the world. In the fall of 1941, just a few months before Pearl Harbor, he enrolled at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Washington, D.C. A year later, Mimi enrolled in Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, to be closer to him. But it was only a matter of time before the war would catch up with them both.

In 1942, in the middle of his sophomore year at Georgetown, Don enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. The following year the Marines sent him to Villanova, Pennsylvania, for eight months of mechanical engineering training. Before completing the course, the trainees were offered a shortcut to the front lines: If they wanted to, they could transfer to the Navy right away, with a guaranteed admission to Officer Candidate School. Don took the deal. On March 15, 1944, he was off to Asbury Park, New Jersey, for Navy midshipman's basic training, and then to Coronado, California, where he awaited an

assignment. In November, Don received his posting: He would serve as a landing craft operator on the USS *Granville,* a brand-new attack transport ship bound for the South Pacific. Don was going to war.

Not long before Christmas, just a few weeks before shipping out, Don called Mimi long-distance from Coronado. Would she visit? Mimi asked her mother for permission, and Billy said yes. As soon as Mimi arrived, she and Don drove to Tijuana and got married. After the briefest of honeymoons on the road, they returned to Coronado for a tearful farewell. It was during Mimi's long trip home, on a stop in Texas to see her Kenyon relatives, that she experienced morning sickness for the first time.

Their rapid-fire wedding suddenly made sense: During Don's last swing through New York, several weeks before she'd traveled west to be with him, Mimi and Don had conceived a child.

Don's parents, devout Catholics, were not satisfied with a Tijuana wedding. Before shipping out, their son secured a few days' leave and traveled across the country one more time. On December 30, 1944, Don and Mimi took their vows again, this time in the rectory of the Church of St. Gregory the Great in Bellerose, Queens. The next day, Don filled out a Navy form to change his next-of-kin from his parents

to Mrs. Donald Galvin.

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THE BRIDE SPENT months vomiting. Long, unresolvable bouts of morning sickness would be a hallmark of nearly all of Mimi's twelve pregnancies. Her young husband's ship approached Japan in May 1945, just in time for the climax of the American offensive in the Pacific. Don's role was to transport soldiers on small crafts from ship to shore. Listening to the radio for reports on the *Granville,* Mimi nearly fell apart when Tokyo Rose announced that Don's ship had been destroyed. That turned out to be wrong, but just barely. Anchored near Okinawa, Don witnessed boats on either side of him being blown up by kamikazes. He spent hours dragging his dead comrades out of the water. Don would never discuss anything about what he saw or did, not with Mimi. But he survived. And on July 21, 1945, two weeks before the United States dropped the bombs that would bring an end to the war, Don received a telegram aboard the *Granville* from Western Union: IT'S A BOY.

CHAPTER 2

1903

Dresden, Germany

It makes a certain amount of sense that the most analyzed, interpreted, pored-over, and picked-apart personal account of the experience of being psychotically paranoid and wildly delusional would be almost impossible to read.

Daniel Paul Schreber grew up in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century, the son of a renowned child-rearing expert of the period who made a practice of turning his children into test subjects. As a boy, he and his brother are believed to have been some of the first people to experience Moritz Schreber's cold-water treatments, diets, exercise regimens, and a device called the Schreber *Geradehalter,* made of wood and straps, that was designed to persuade a child to sit up straight. Schreber survived that childhood and grew up to be very accomplished, first a lawyer and then a judge. He married and had a family, and with the exception of a brief depression in his forties, everything seemed just fine. Then, at the age of fifty-one, came his collapse. Diagnosed in 1894 with a "paranoid form" of "hallucinatory insanity," Schreber spent the next nine years near Dresden in Sonnenstein Asylum, Germany's first publicly funded hospital for the insane.

Those years in the asylum formed the setting—at least physically—

of *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness,* the first major work about the mysterious condition then known as dementia praecox, and a few years later renamed schizophrenia. Published in 1903, this book became a reference point for practically every discussion about the illness for the next century. By the time the six boys of the Galvin family became ill, everything about how they would be viewed and treated by modern psychiatry was colored by the arguments about this case. In truth, Schreber himself hadn't expected his life story to attract much attention. He wrote the memoir mainly as a plea for his release, which explains why, at many points, he seems to be writing for an audience of one: Dr. Paul Emil Flechsig, the doctor who'd had him committed. The book starts with an open letter to Flechsig, in which Schreber apologizes for writing anything that the doctor might find too upsetting. There is just one small matter Schreber hopes to clear up: Is Flechsig the one who has been transmitting secret messages into his brain for the last nine years?

A cosmic mind-meld with his doctor—"even when separated in space, you exerted an influence on my nervous system," Schreber wrote—was the first of dozens of strange and miraculous experiences related by Schreber over more than two hundred pages. It also might

have been the most coherent. In a manner decipherable, perhaps, to Schreber alone, he wrote passionately about the two suns that he saw in the sky and the time he noticed that one sun was following him around wherever he went. He devoted many pages to an impenetrable explanation of the subtle “nerve-language” that most humans didn’t notice. The souls of hundreds of people, he wrote, used this nerve language to pass along crucial information to Schreber: reports of Venus being “flooded,” the solar system becoming “disconnected,” the constellation Cassiopeia about to be “drawn together into a single sun.”

In this respect, Schreber had a lot in common with the oldest of the Galvin children, Donald, who, years later, would recite his Holy Order of Priests in front of seven-year-old Mary in their family’s house on Hidden Valley Road. Like Donald, Schreber believed that what was happening to him wasn’t just physical but spiritual. Neither he nor Donald nor any of the Galvins were observing their delusions at a remove, with a detached sense of curiosity. They were right there in it, thrilled and amazed and terrified and despairing, sometimes all at once.

Unable to free himself from his circumstances, Schreber did his