

the war on drugs without addressing the opioid crisis. Yet this was the rhetorical needle that Madeleine Sackler somehow managed to thread. It was a deft performance. For the most part, she was able to weigh in, sagely, on the plight of America's prison population without being asked to account for her own familial connection to one of the underlying drivers of that crisis. Were her films financed, to any great or small extent, by OxyContin money? The subject almost never came up, but when it did, she would state vaguely that she hadn't spent her own money to make the films, but not offer any further detail. During the years she spent developing *O.G.*, before the production was financed, Jeffrey Wright was under the distinct impression that she was funding the development herself.

Jonathan Sackler had always scrupulously followed press coverage of the OxyContin problem, poring over press clippings and bristling at any characterizations that he perceived to be unfair. He had expressed concerns inside the company about how public health campaigns to prevent opioid addiction might end up hurting sales of OxyContin. The whole family was sensitive to negative press. Even as an old man, Raymond would still inquire about whether anything could be done to induce the *Times* to be "less focused on OxyContin." But Jonathan was also particularly keen to make sure that if journalists were going to refer to the opioid epidemic and potentially mention OxyContin and Purdue, they at least not mention the connection to the Sackler family. The company hired numerous public relations specialists to help with this delicate campaign to keep the family name *in* any positive stories about philanthropy and movie premieres but *out* of any negative coverage relating to the prescription opioids they sold. This effort had been remarkably successful. The family was, for the most part, not mentioned in negative media stories about Purdue. The source of the Sacklers' wealth continued to seem obscure and distant, as though the fortune had been acquired long ago.

On the rare occasions when Madeleine was asked directly about the apparent disconnect between the social justice message of her films and the specific provenance of her own personal fortune, she was dismissive. In a generous profile of Madeleine that was published in *The New Yorker*, Jeffrey Wright pointed out that a lot of the men inside Pendleton prison had little personal agency in ending up where they did. "All the negligence,

abuse, addiction,” he said, “a lot of these guys never had a chance.” Yet when the author of the piece, Nick Paumgarten, mused aloud to Madeleine that the film might represent some form of expiation—a subtle acknowledgment of her family’s sins and an effort, through art, to atone—she challenged the premise of the question. There was nothing to expiate, she responded, asserting that when it came to the opioid crisis, she felt no sense of moral responsibility or, really, even personal connection. Her family background was a mere distraction, she insisted. Was she not entitled, as a filmmaker, to have her work simply judged on its own merits? “It pains her,” Paumgarten wrote, “to think that the perception of her project...would be tainted in some way by her pedigree.”

Jeffrey Wright had learned about Madeleine’s family while he was working on the project. At one point, he asked her about her background, but she deflected, clearly preferring not to talk about it. When Wright saw her documentary, he was struck by a moment when one of the inmates, a goateed man named Cliff, talks about his difficult childhood—and how his mother “had a prescription drug problem.” It troubled Wright that Madeleine could include such a scene with no disclosure of her own connection to the story. “It becomes polluted when you don’t acknowledge who you are, when you’re hiding your place in it all,” he thought. The stories of the men in the film were important, he believed, and the impulse to tell those stories was worthy, even urgent. “But when you take that element of transparency out of the equation, when doing that hides the significance of *your* story as it relates to *their* stories, then there’s something rotten that can’t be expunged,” he said. As a consequence, the film is “fundamentally flawed,” Wright concluded, “because there is something incredibly fraudulent about that, and deceptive.”

When *O.G.* premiered, Madeleine made an appearance on the red carpet in an elegant all-black ensemble and was celebrated at parties. She posed for photographs with the former Obama administration official and CNN personality Van Jones and with the Black Lives Matter activist Shaun King. Before the premiere, Wright had sent Madeleine an email, praising the “honesty and openness” of the men in her documentary. But there is an “elephant” in the room, he wrote. “You’ve provided a tremendous gift to those men. Something the likes of which they’ve rarely, if ever, been

given.” But they know “nothing of your story,” he pointed out. “You never spoke to me about any of that. I was aware and only once tried to broach the subject with you. You didn’t open up about it. I went on with my work.” Wright wanted to address it now, though. “Do you think you should take into consideration that this will become part of the dialogue around these films?” he asked.

Madeleine never responded.



Madeleine was, in some ways, typical of the third generation of Sacklers. Many of them had done summer internships at Purdue, but the only member of this generation who went on to have any direct involvement in the family company was Madeleine’s cousin David, Richard Sackler’s son. As a high school student, David had interned at Purdue. He studied business at Princeton and became an investor. He had some of his father’s off-putting interpersonal tendencies; he could be brusque and domineering, and he would sit in meetings with his eyes glued to his phone, appearing to be preoccupied, only to look up suddenly and interject with a difficult question. He set up his own investment group, which listed, as its offices, 15 East Sixty-Second Street, the old limestone town house where his father and Richard Kapit had scored furniture for their college apartment back in the 1960s. The family still owned the building.

David took a seat on Purdue’s board in 2012. “I think my dad’s vision was that I would replace him at some point,” he said later, suggesting that Richard saw a direct line of succession in which he would hand to his own son the business that his father handed him. David was loyal to Richard and seemed to share some of his combative partisanship on behalf of the company. He derided critics of Purdue as “cynics.” The 2007 guilty plea had been, in his telling, a small matter of a “number of sales reps” who made a few misstatements before the company could weed them out.

In joining the board, David took his place in a self-selecting subset of the family that continued to manage Purdue. “Raymond and Mortimer had worked so hard to build this company,” one longtime Purdue executive pointed out. “They had seen failures and setbacks.” But the younger

generations “grew up thinking that they were the smartest people in the room, because they’d been told that their whole lives.” They drove cars that were provided by the company and used cell phones paid for by the company. (According to a subsequent court filing, Purdue ended up paying \$477,000 for the personal phone bills of a handful of Sacklers.) When Kathe was having computer trouble at her mansion in Westport, she would telephone Purdue headquarters to have them send a company tech. “Richard would say, ‘I’m going to Europe in two weeks and I have my flight ready, but I just saw that gas prices are lower and Delta’s having a special, and can you look into what would be cheaper?’” Nancy Camp, the former administrative assistant, recalled. “All of this to save \$200. And after I did the research, he would end up keeping his original flight.”

“They would just *inflict* themselves on us,” a former Purdue executive who dealt with the family recalled. “What Kathe liked to do was call you to her office late in the day and just lecture you for hours,” he said. “Nobody on the business side would ever pull her into any kind of business discussion because she wasn’t helpful in any sense of the word. Everybody called her ‘Dr. Kathe,’ but I don’t know that anyone was really impressed with her doctoring credentials.”

To some employees, this air of self-importance could seem comical. “They liked that sense that they were serious businesspeople,” one former staffer who dealt with the family pointed out. “They confused being good at something with stepping in shit and getting lucky. The thing I found specifically with the family was that the next generation, they struck gold in the backyard, basically. It’s like you moved to Odessa, Texas, and said, ‘What is this black stuff coming out of the ground?’ Outside of OxyContin, the company has never been that successful. Without OxyContin it would be this sleepy \$50 million pharma company you’d never heard of.” But the success of the one drug had given rise to a self-regarding aura of superhuman business prowess, the staffer continued. The Sacklers had come to think of themselves as “the smart billionaires who knew better.” More than one person who worked at Purdue during this era likened the experience to the acidly humorous HBO show *Succession*, in which a trio of overindulged adult children vie, haplessly, to seize control of a conglomerate built by their hard-driving father.

Mortimer sought the counsel of a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst named Kerry Sulkowicz, a sought-after “leadership confidant” who served as a guru for business executives. Though he was wealthy by any standard, Mortimer nevertheless found that he could occasionally overextend himself. When his father was alive, Mortimer could turn to him for a “bridge” loan, but now, when he found himself in a pinch, he had to request an emergency cash infusion from one of the family trusts. At one point, he shared with Dr. Sulkowicz a set of talking points he had drafted for the awkward conversation with the trustees. “Start off with saying I am not happy,” he wrote. “I am falling significantly behind financially.” He was prepared to sell “artworks, jewelry, stock positions,” but even so, he needed assistance with a “shorter term cash flow problem.” What Mortimer needed, he said, was “\$10 million near term and a possible additional \$10 million.” That, he promised, was “the MAX.”

Part of the problem, he complained, was that he was so busy working on behalf of the family business and having to “play hardball with Richard and Jon,” which was stressful, and perhaps not the most productive use of his energies. “I have been working for years on Purdue at what I consider to be a considerably discounted value relative to what MY TIME IS WORTH,” he wrote. “I am LOSING money by working in the pharma business.” He suggested that the loan could be “reported in the trust accounts as loan/cash flow assistance to family members but not be specific.” He didn’t want everyone in the family to realize he was having issues. “I don’t want to hear my siblings’ opinions on this, and I don’t need more stress for this. I need to have this resolved,” he wrote. “This needs to happen, the question is only how much DRAMA will be needed for this to happen.” He noted that “historically,” his father had been “more than willing to help me.”

David Sackler was disdainful of his cousin Mortimer. His wing of the family had been more careful about money. It was a point of pride. His uncle Jonathan boasted about how little money he spent; David joked that Jonathan’s “wardrobe hasn’t seen a dollar invested in it for a decade.” When David got married and wanted to buy a bigger apartment, Richard signaled his disapproval, and David sent his father and mother an emotional email. “I realize dad isn’t great with email, so he may not read this,” he wrote, but he wanted to “voice some thoughts.” He had been working hard

to “manage the family fortune,” and it hadn’t been easy. “Beyond pushing myself to excel, I work for a boss (Dad) with little understanding of what I do.” Rather than being supportive of his efforts, Richard characterized his work as ““terrible, bad, shitty, crappy, broken, in the doldrums’ or any other derisive term you’d like to lob at me.” Part of his job, David acknowledged, was “managing dad.” He was Richard’s “right hand for everything,” and he worked tirelessly to “make the family richer.” This might look easy, David said. But it is “quite literally the hardest job in the world.”

There were certain pathologies that had passed down within the Sackler family, David observed. His grandfather, Raymond, had “started a pattern of behavior that is very hurtful. By holding money over people’s heads while getting them to work for family enterprises, he was able to exert a huge amount of control.” Richard himself had said numerous times that he hated this dynamic, David pointed out. Yet here was Richard expecting total devotion to the family business while trying to manage David’s spending. It wasn’t like David wanted “to live like Mortimer Jr. or his siblings,” he groused. “I don’t have life goals of a plane, yacht or anything crazy like that.” He just wanted a bigger home! Besides, even Richard flew private, and nobody gave him a hard time about that.

“I’m like Dad,” David wrote. “I stuck it out for the family and took the stress that comes with it. I accepted the manipulation to work towards my goals and help the family.” Most of the Sacklers, he noted, did not do so. In fact, most of the Sacklers were more like Madeleine: they pursued their own interests outside the pharmaceutical industry and lived lives that bore no apparent connection to opioids, apart from being subsidized by them. Madeleine’s brother, Miles, was a computer programmer in California; her sister, Clare, was also a filmmaker. Richard’s daughter Rebecca was a veterinarian. His other daughter, Marianna, had spent several years as an employee of Purdue and Mundipharma, but ultimately stopped working (“she’s got no career, and likely will never have one,” David remarked) and now lived in a \$12 million home in the Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco. One of Mortimer’s grandchildren, Jeffrey—whose mother, Ilene, still served on Purdue’s board—started a popular chain of restaurants in New York called the Smith.

But Mortimer's heirs were mostly concentrated in London. There was Samantha, his daughter from the marriage to Geri Wimmer, who had married an entrepreneur in the coffee business and purchased a £26 million home in Chelsea that had previously belonged to the actor Hugh Grant and the film producer Jemima Khan. Samantha was very taken with art deco design and set out to restore the house, which featured a big secluded garden, in pristine 1930s detail. There was Mortimer's son from his third marriage, Michael Sackler, who like Madeleine and Clare had gone into the film business, starting a financing company called Rooks Nest Ventures, after the family estate in Berkshire. They had offices just off Soho Square. Michael's sister Marissa founded what she described as a "non-profit incubator," called Beespace, which supported the Malala Fund and other causes. Marissa did not like the term "philanthropist," she told the magazine *W*. She preferred to think of herself as a "social entrepreneur." She made "social investments" and delivered keynote speeches and spoke in an impenetrable patois of corporate buzzwords.

When Richard Sackler graduated from medical school, Félix Martí-Ibáñez had tried to impress upon him the sort of esteem he would enjoy in life because he bore the Sackler name. This was only more true now, and perhaps nowhere more so than in London. The name was *everywhere* in the United Kingdom. There was the Sackler Building at the Royal College of Art, the Sackler Education Centre at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Sackler Room at the National Gallery, Sackler Hall at the Museum of London, the Sackler Pavilion at the National Theatre, the Sackler Studios at the Globe Theatre. In 2013, the Serpentine Gallery was renamed the Serpentine Sackler, with a gala opening co-hosted by *Vanity Fair* and the New York mayor, Mike Bloomberg (who was a friend of the family). One of the stained-glass windows in Westminster Abbey was dedicated to Mortimer and Theresa. It was decorated in lovely reds and blues depicting the seals of Harvard, Columbia, NYU, and other recipients of the family's largesse. "M&T Sackler Family," the window said. "Peace Through Education." The Sacklers' impulse to slap their name on any bequest, no matter how large or small, might have found its surreal culmination at the Tate Modern, the cavernous temple to modern art that occupies an old

power station on the south bank of the Thames, in which a silver plaque informs visitors that they happen to be riding on the Sackler Escalator.

Mortimer and Theresa Sackler had donated more than \$100 million to the arts and sciences in the U.K. After Mortimer's death, Theresa was awarded the Prince of Wales Medal for Arts Philanthropy. When this distinction was conferred, Ian Dejardin, the Sackler director of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, remarked, "It's going to be difficult not to make her sound utterly saintly."

Most of this charitable giving was administered by the Sackler Trust, based in London, and the heirs of Raymond and Mortimer benefited from a series of other trusts in which the proceeds from OxyContin—those regular disbursements of hundreds of millions of dollars—were kept. Since its release nearly two decades earlier, OxyContin had generated some \$35 billion. A sizable amount of this revenue was channeled not through London or New York but through the tax haven of Bermuda, where, for decades, an anonymous-looking modern office building on a narrow street lined with palm trees had served as a clearinghouse for the family's wealth. The building was known as Mundipharma House.

By routing money through Bermuda, the Sacklers had avoided paying hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes, according to one former financial adviser to the family. This was not illegal, and it wasn't as though the family had not bestowed ample gifts upon the countries in which its members happened to reside. They just preferred that the gifts be on their own terms—to the arts and sciences, with naming rights—rather than be left to the discretion of the state.



Mundipharma House was named for the network of international companies that the Sacklers controlled, which were known as Mundipharma and which sold the company's various products abroad. As sales of OxyContin began to plateau in the United States, the Sacklers had been turning their attention to new markets in other parts of the world. In board meetings, the family was frequently informed by staff that further growth in the United States might be unrealistic, particularly because doctors and patients appeared to be growing more mindful of the potential

hazards of strong opioids. But for Mundipharma, the future looked more promising. In Latin America and in Asia, hundreds of millions of people were joining the middle class. These people suddenly had access to better health care and more money to spend on health and wellness. So, even as Purdue contended with a host of lawsuits in the United States, Mundipharma set out to cultivate a new market for painkillers abroad. To succeed in this effort, the company employed a familiar playbook. Eyeing a new market, Mundipharma would begin by producing statistics that suggested the region was suffering from a crisis of untreated pain. When Mundipharma moved into Mexico in 2014, company representatives announced that twenty-eight million people in the country were living with chronic pain. And that was nothing compared with Brazil, where the number was eighty million. In Colombia, the company suggested that twenty-two million people—47 percent of the population—were suffering from this “silent epidemic.”

Two decades earlier, Purdue had engaged physicians to serve as paid speakers, delivering lectures at conferences, spreading the gospel of pain management, arguing that the best and safest means for treating chronic nonmalignant pain was opioids. Now the company did the same thing abroad, turning, in some instances, to the very doctors who had been so obliging the first time. They called these paid representatives “pain ambassadors,” and the company flew them to emerging markets to promote opioids and warn about the dangers of opiophobia. “You show up, do a presentation and then you get back on the plane,” Dr. Barry Cole, a pain specialist from Reno, Nevada, told the *Los Angeles Times*. Cole had helped the company promote OxyContin in the United States back in the 1990s, but now he had a new sideline as a pain ambassador and traveled the world, educating other doctors about the benefits of strong opioids in places like Colombia, Brazil, South Korea, and the Philippines.

Some of the physicians the company dispatched were not, perhaps, the most esteemed representatives of their field. There was a Florida doctor, for instance, Joseph Pergolizzi Jr., who hawked a pain-relieving cream of his own invention on cable TV and flew to Brazil for Mundipharma to advise medical practitioners about “the tools you need to properly address pain.” In making this pitch, Mundipharma often relied upon the same discredited

literature that Purdue had employed decades earlier, citing the letter to the editor in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that suggested less than 1 percent of patients develop a problem with opioids and telling physicians that it was “almost impossible for those with chronic or severe pain to become addicted.”

In 2014, Richard Sackler enthused that the company’s growth in emerging markets “is exceptional and ahead of forecast.” Jonathan Sackler was similarly bullish, saying, in an email that year, that if the family was “smart and diligent around emerging markets,” they could continue to make money on opioids “for decades to come.” The Sacklers appointed an executive named Raman Singh to serve as CEO of the company’s Asian operations, based in Singapore. With long black hair, shiny suits, and an impish smile, Singh exemplified a certain hustle. “This is where the growth is coming from,” Singh announced. Between 2011 and 2016, annual revenues for Mundipharma Emerging Markets, which he oversaw, grew 800 percent, to \$600 million. In India, Mundipharma pushed its own expensive opioids as an alternative to cheap, Indian-made morphine. But the real prize, as Singh pointed out, was China. “China is so critical to our trajectory,” he said, explaining that the company sells five different opioids, including OxyContin, in China. “We have been very, very successful in commercializing for pain,” Singh said. By 2025, he hoped, China might overtake the United States as the number one market for the Sacklers’ products.

Given China’s fraught history with opioids—the country fought the Opium Wars in the nineteenth century to stop Britain from dumping the drug there, which had given rise to a scourge of addiction—one might assume that there would be formidable barriers to entry when it came to an effort by Mundipharma to change the culture of prescribing. But the company was ravenous for new customers and prepared to engage in marketing tactics that were extreme even by the standards of Purdue. Mundipharma China had been established back in 1993, the same year that the Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology opened in Beijing. The *China Medical Tribune*, which Arthur had founded, now boasted a readership of more than a million Chinese doctors. In seeking to convince physicians and patients in China that opioids were not, in fact, dangerously

addictive, Mundipharma assembled a huge sales force. They were under a great deal of pressure from the company to perform, and they were encouraged with the type of aggressive incentive structure that the Sacklers had always favored. Come in over the company's quarterly sales targets and you could double your salary. Come in under and you could lose your job. Mundipharma supplied the reps with marketing materials that included assertions about the safety and effectiveness of OxyContin that had long since been debunked. The company claimed that OxyContin was the World Health Organization's preferred treatment for cancer pain (it isn't). According to an investigation by the Associated Press, Mundipharma reps in hospitals actually donned white coats and pretended to be doctors themselves. They consulted directly with patients about their health concerns and made copies of people's confidential medical records.

Mundipharma released a series of flashy promotional videos about its products and its global ambitions, featuring images of smiling patients from a range of different ethnicities. "We're only just getting started," one of the videos said.



In 2013, Purdue staff informed the Sackler board members that overdose deaths had more than tripled since 1990 and that these deaths were only the "tip of the iceberg," because for every individual who died of an overdose, there were a hundred others suffering from prescription opioid dependence or abuse. When Sam Quinones published his book about the crisis, *Dreamland*, in 2015, he pointed directly to the complicity of the Sackler family, just as Barry Meier had in his book, *Pain Killer*, twelve years earlier. But this criticism did not seem to stick. The Sacklers continued to move through the world largely unencumbered by any association with the opioid crisis. At Tufts University, where the Sacklers had donated generously for decades and the School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences was named after the family, a committee voted against assigning *Dreamland* to incoming medical students, because the school felt it should show "deference" to its donors and not endorse a book that might undermine the family name. When *Forbes* magazine added the Sacklers to its tally of the wealthiest

families in the United States and acknowledged the source of their wealth by describing them as “the OxyContin Clan,” no universities or art museums expressed any discomfort about accepting Sackler money. “I’m glad they picked a really nice picture,” Richard said, of the accompanying photograph, which featured his mother and father, beaming, at an awards ceremony in Europe. The article pegged the family’s wealth at \$14 billion, but Richard couldn’t say if this was accurate. Nobody ever “sat down and... did an inventory,” he said.

This sort of press coverage—the rich list in *Forbes*—might be faintly embarrassing. But the Sacklers could live with it. And staff at Purdue were working hard to make sure that the family name remained unsullied by the more incendiary coverage that occasionally cropped up about OxyContin. “I’m quite pleased with where we ended up,” Raul Damas, an executive in charge of public affairs, concluded in an internal email after a press story about a lawsuit involving OxyContin. “There’s almost nothing on the Sacklers and what is there is minimal and buried in the back.” This was the status quo that the company had become accustomed to. Dame Theresa Sackler could still appear at champagne ribbon cuttings to say a few words and flash a magnanimous smile. Madeleine Sackler could still show up at film festivals and offer trenchant observations about rehabilitation for ex-convicts and the dilemma of the urban poor. The family could weather negative coverage of the company, even coverage in which the Sackler name might appear, provided it did so only on the margins. But all of that was about to change.

Chapter 24

IT'S A HARD TRUTH, AIN'T IT

ONE DAY IN AUGUST 2015, a plane landed in Louisville, Kentucky, and Richard Sackler stepped out, surrounded by attorneys. The State of Kentucky had sued Purdue, in a case that originally started eight years earlier, charging the company with deceptive marketing. Greg Stumbo, the state attorney general who initiated the lawsuit, had lost a relative to a fatal overdose of OxyContin. The whole region had been decimated by the drug.

Purdue fought the case with its customary rigor, pushing to move the proceedings elsewhere, on the ground that the company could not get a fair trial in Pike County, Kentucky—the rural stretch of coal country where the state intended to try the case. In support of this motion, Purdue commissioned a demographic study of Pike County and submitted it to the court as an illustration of potential bias in the jury pool. The report was revealing in ways that Purdue might not have intended. According to the filing, 29 percent of the county's residents said that they or their family members knew someone who had died from using OxyContin. Seven out of ten respondents described OxyContin's effect on their community as “devastating.”

A judge ruled that Purdue could not shift the venue for the trial, and it looked as though the company might actually be forced to fight this case in a Pike County courtroom. The lawyers bringing the case wanted Richard Sackler to sit for a deposition. This had never happened in any of the hundreds of cases that had been filed relating to OxyContin abuse, even though Richard's family owned Purdue and he had been president and chairman of the board. Attorneys for the company fiercely resisted the idea that Richard might be forced to fly to a place like Kentucky and answer

questions, under oath, about OxyContin. But eventually, the defense team had no further recourse, and the judge ordered the deposition to happen.

Richard had been living in Austin. In a town with a conspicuous overrepresentation of brainy rich eccentrics, he almost fit in. He had developed a friendship with a courtly law professor named Philip Bobbitt who was about Richard's age and had also grown up in great privilege. Bobbitt was over-credentialed in a way that could only appeal to Richard: he had advised numerous presidents on foreign affairs and now taught at the University of Texas Law School, Columbia, *and* Oxford, jetting from one institute of higher learning to the next to deliver lectures, and he was the author of ten turgid volumes on military strategy and constitutional law. Bobbitt had a fondness for seersucker suits and fat cigars, and he liked to blow smoke rings and relate wistful anecdotes about his "celebrated uncle," Lyndon Johnson, and discourse grandly on important subjects. He was Richard Sackler's kind of guy.

"Richard is an odd duck," one former Purdue employee said, describing a man who seemed, increasingly, to inhabit an alternate reality of his own fussy design. "His life's falling apart and he's recommending a book you should read." In theory, his physical exile, nearly two thousand miles away in Texas, might have bought the leadership at Purdue some respite from his obsessive interventions. They had hired a new CEO named Mark Timney in early 2014. Timney came from Merck, and this was the first time that an outsider—someone who was not a member of the family or a longtime loyalist—had been brought in to run Purdue. One of Timney's goals, which he announced upon arrival, was to change the corporate culture at Purdue. He recognized that some things had gone wrong in the past, and he believed that some of the dysfunction in the firm stemmed from its origins as a family business. He wanted, in the words of someone who worked closely with him, to "make it a company you would recognize"—to make it look more like Merck. To that end, he wanted less direct intervention in the company by the Sackler family. But this was, to say the least, a challenging mandate, because Purdue had always done things a certain way. Disentangling the family from the family business would prove, very quickly, to be impossible.

In Texas, Richard was perpetually on email, and even from afar he continued to exercise tremendous influence over the company. “Our major problem has been our failure to diversify the US product line and ameliorate the squeeze on OxyContin,” he wrote in a 2014 email to other family members. “However, in the years when the business was producing massive amounts of cash, the shareholders departed from the practice of our industry peers and took this money out of the business. Now, unfortunately, the decline in the US sales of OxyContin has reduced our income and free cashflow.” Even so, Richard remained hopeful and determined. “The companies have provided the family for over 60 years,” he wrote. The “Raymond family is optimistic about the prospects for the overall business,” and he felt certain that “persistence will be rewarded.”

The challenge Richard faced when it came to Purdue was to persuade the Mortimer side of the family to stay the course and reinvest in the business. Because there were so *many* Mortimer heirs, there had been a pronounced tendency, on that side of the family, to focus on the periodic distributions of cash. Privately, Richard’s son, David, who was becoming an increasingly influential voice on the board, complained to his father, and to his uncle, Jonathan, about attempts by the A side to “pillage” cash from the company. He mocked the bizarrely “bureaucratic” manner in which they carried on, likening their decision-making process to “the DMV.”

Raymond Sackler was now ninety-five years old. But well into his twilight years he continued to drive his Jaguar from the Greenwich estate at Field Point Circle to the office in Stamford. The prospect of this ancient potentate, hands on the wheel, weaving through traffic on I-95 was sufficiently disconcerting to Purdue Pharma’s security team that sometimes they would dispatch two escort cars to accompany Raymond—one in front, one behind—to make sure that he didn’t hit anyone. Some people in the company assumed that Raymond was on the brink of senility, stationed behind his desk, dressed in a suit and tie, a wax museum smile on his face. He would offer the occasional visitor a cookie, but he didn’t appear to be doing much of anything. It was also whispered, by some who had known the Sackler family for decades and held the older generation in high esteem, that Purdue’s reckless devotion to opioids was a predilection of Richard and

the younger cohort, whereas Raymond—*had he only known*—would never have stood for it.

But the truth was that Raymond knew precisely what was going on at the company. A year before Richard flew to Kentucky for the deposition, his father forwarded him a memo about Purdue's strategy, which addressed the company's plans to bolster profits by pushing for patients to be placed on higher doses of opioids for longer periods of time, and acknowledged that such a strategy was predicated on overcoming objections from physicians who believed that this might not be the best thing for the patients themselves. "We should discuss it when you have time," Raymond wrote. When McKinsey made a presentation to the board about how the Sacklers could reverse the decline in OxyContin profits by increasing sales calls on the most prolific high-volume prescribers, Raymond presided over the meeting. "The room was filled with only family, including the elder statesman Dr. Raymond," one of the McKinsey executives wrote in an email afterward, noting that the family was "extremely supportive" of the consultants' recommendations. In the words of another member of the McKinsey team, the Sacklers "gave a ringing endorsement of 'moving forward fast.' "

Just after nine o'clock that morning in Louisville, Richard settled into a chair at a conference table in the law offices of Dolt, Thompson, Shepherd & Kinney on the outskirts of town. He wore a nondescript blue suit and a pressed white shirt, with a lapel microphone affixed to his tie. Richard had recently turned seventy, but he still looked healthy and vigorous. He shifted in his chair, his small eyes remote and quizzical. Ready for battle. To one of the attorneys representing the State of Kentucky, a young prosecutor named Mitchel Denham, this showdown, which had been such a long time coming, felt ripe with meaning. "We were face-to-face with the guy whose company had helped to *create* the opioid epidemic," he recalled.

The questioning would be led by Tyler Thompson, a seasoned personal injury lawyer who was based in Louisville and had an affable self-assurance and a rich Kentucky drawl. Richard stared at Thompson, his eyes lidded, his face a mask of exquisite condescension. He was not going to make this easy.

“On July 30th of 2014, were you a director of Purdue Pharma?” Thompson asked.

“Not that I’m aware,” Richard replied.

Thompson produced a document and handed it to Richard. “Does that appear to be your name?”

“That does.”

“And it’s dated July 30th, 2014. It says, ‘Declaration of Dr. Richard Sackler. I am a director of Purdue Pharma.’ ”

“If that’s what it says,” Richard said, with a shrug, “then that’s what it says.”

“I’ve seen upwards of sixty-nine different corporations, perhaps, that the Sackler family owns,” Thompson continued. “Is that correct?”

“If you’ve counted them,” Richard said. “I don’t know.”

Thompson had entertained no illusions about this pharma baron being an accommodating witness. But even so, he was startled by Richard’s tone. There wasn’t any lip service to the suffering that the Sacklers’ drug had visited upon Kentucky. Richard couldn’t even *feign* compassion. It seemed to Thompson that the general impression Richard was trying to convey, not just with his answers but with the tone of his voice and his body language, was that he was above all this. “A smirk and a so-what attitude, an absolute lack of remorse,” Thompson marveled later. “It reminded me of these mining companies that come in here and do mountaintop removal and leave a mess and just move on. ‘It’s not in my backyard, so I don’t care.’ ”

“Have you ever gone back and studied the history of addiction?” Thompson asked Richard.

“I’m not a student of that literature,” Richard replied.

“Did you ever do any studies on abuse liability for OxyContin before you all put it on the market?”

“I’m not aware of any.”

Richard’s voice was deep and gruff. His demeanor was surly and brimming with disdain. He tried to minimize his role in the company, saying that he was involved “at a supervisory level, not an active level.” He “didn’t do any of the work,” he claimed. “I was not a salesperson.” But

through discovery, the Kentucky lawyers had obtained a raft of internal company documents that told a different story. Thompson started asking Richard about his own emails, highlighting the decisive role that he had played in the marketing blitz for OxyContin, even quoting the “Blizzard of ’96” speech that Richard delivered at the Wigwam resort in Arizona for the launch of the drug nearly twenty years earlier. Looking through his old memos and statements, Richard was confronted—in a way that he never had been during the federal case in Virginia or in any of the countless other lawsuits that had been brought against the company—with evidence that he himself had been the architect and ringleader of the OxyContin campaign. At one point, he seemed almost to concede as much, reflecting, with a kind of wry bemusement, that “this whole experience” of being forced to go back and review all the details of the launch of OxyContin was “like reliving a third of my life.”

“I don’t regret trying to energize our sales force,” he told Thompson defiantly. “I think that was my mission.” He was not “embarrassed” by the tone he had adopted, he continued. “I think it was very reasonable.” Asked about the OxyContin promotional campaign that suggested this was a drug “to start with and to stay with,” Richard said that it was not a phrase he had coined himself, but added, “I wish I could lay claim to it.”

“Do you believe Purdue’s marketing was overly aggressive?”

“No.”

“Do you think putting these three thousand doctors on your speakers bureau caused them to write more prescriptions for OxyContin?”

“I don’t think it would have had an effect.”

As the deposition dragged on, Richard was cryptic and evasive. “I don’t know,” he murmured, again and again, in response to Thompson’s questions. “I don’t recall.”

“You ever do any follow up to find out whether the participants in the ‘I Got My Life Back’ video actually got their life back or wound up having problems with dependency on OxyContin?” Thompson asked.

Richard said that he hadn’t. But OxyContin was a highly effective painkiller, he insisted.

“But whether it’s effective or not also depends on other factors, such as abuse,” Thompson pointed out. “I mean, you can kill somebody and take away their pain. But that wouldn’t be effective, would it?”

No, Richard allowed, with a flash of dry amusement. “I don’t think that death would be considered a sign of efficacy.”

In preparing for the trial, Mitchel Denham had discovered an old photograph of the 1997 Pikeville High School football team. Nearly half of the young men in the picture either had died of overdoses or were addicted. “It was going to be a pretty good visual,” he said. But Denham never got the opportunity to present the photo to a jury, because before the case could go to trial, Purdue paid \$24 million to settle it.

This was a coup for the Sacklers. The settlement was more than Purdue’s original offer—the company had initially proposed that it pay the state just half a million dollars—but it was still totally incommensurate with Pike County’s needs. In settling the case, Purdue admitted no wrongdoing. And one of the key conditions of this resolution, which Purdue insisted upon, was that all of the millions of pages of evidence that the Kentucky attorneys had amassed through discovery—including Tyler Thompson’s videotaped deposition of Richard Sackler—would be sealed forever from public view. This was an important element in the company’s strategy. A dozen or so judges in different cases around the country would ultimately sign off on similar requests to seal records. In Kentucky, Purdue directed the prosecutors to “completely destroy” all of the files.

“That’s the main reason these folks don’t go to trial,” Mitchel Denham concluded. The Sacklers had always preferred to settle cases rather than litigate the culpability of the company (or, worse, of the family) in open court. If a case ever reached the point where lawyers were actually presenting evidence to a jury, Denham pointed out, “all these documents could end up in the public record.” After the settlement, a medical news website, STAT, sued to have Richard’s deposition unsealed. A state judge ruled in STAT’s favor. But Purdue immediately appealed. That deposition represented the most extensive remarks ever made by a member of the Sackler family about the controversy surrounding OxyContin. The family would go to great lengths to prevent it from becoming public.



Inside the reflective-glass ziggurat of Purdue's home office in Stamford, there was an encroaching sense that public scrutiny was becoming impossible to avoid. The *Los Angeles Times* had run a major story in 2013 about the ways in which Purdue tracked the suspicious prescribing habits of dodgy doctors. "Over the last decade, the maker of the potent painkiller OxyContin has compiled a database of hundreds of doctors suspected of recklessly prescribing its pills to addicts and drug dealers, but has done little to alert law enforcement or medical authorities," the paper reported. The so-called Region Zero list, which included more than eighteen hundred names, had been a closely guarded secret. Purdue defended its conduct by pointing out that it maintained this database in order to steer its own sales reps away from such doctors, and told the newspaper that it had reported 8 percent of the doctors on the list to law enforcement. But when it came to the other 92 percent of physicians who appeared to be inappropriately prescribing, the company said that it had no duty to act. "We don't have the ability to take the prescription pad out of their hand," a Purdue attorney, Robin Abrams, said.

Of course, until a pill mill was actually shut down by the medical board or the police, Purdue continued to reap the proceeds from all those fraudulent OxyContin prescriptions, and while company officials might want a pat on the back for steering sales reps away from such establishments, pill mills were, generally speaking, pretty reliable prescribers. "Nobody *needed* to call on the really shady doctors," the former Louisiana rep Dodd Davis pointed out. "That business was going to come, regardless." Those doctors are a "gold mine," Keith Humphreys, a psychology professor at Stanford who had served as a drug policy adviser in the Obama administration, told the *Times*. "And the whole time they're taking the money, knowing that something is wrong," he continued. "That is really disgusting."

As if the Region Zero exposé weren't damaging enough, the public affairs department at Purdue had learned, by the time Richard Sackler traveled to Kentucky, that it wasn't a stand-alone article; the paper was preparing a series. Raul Damas, the Purdue public affairs executive, sent an

update to the Sacklers about a “mitigation effort” to thwart the series, “marginalizing the LAT’s unbalanced coverage.” But there wasn’t much that the company could do. One day, one of the reporters, Scott Glover, managed to reach Richard Sackler on his personal phone. Startled, Richard quickly ended the call.

Richard demanded to see all correspondence between the *Times* and the company. But the Sacklers seemed, even to their own staff, to be living in a state of willful disconnection. Richard had set up a Google alert for “OxyContin,” to make sure he received all the latest news on the drug. But he complained to Raul Damas at one point, “Why are all the alerts about negatives and not one about the positives of OxyContin?” Damas offered to reconfigure the search terms so that Richard would receive only news items that were flattering.

In 2016, the *Los Angeles Times* released another big story, this one about the fact that OxyContin, which for twenty years had been marketed as a painkiller to be taken on a twelve-hour dosing schedule, might not in fact actually work for twelve hours. Purdue had known about this problem since before the drug was even released, when patients in clinical trials complained that their pain was returning before the twelve-hour mark, the paper revealed. But the company had sought to obfuscate the issue, because the whole marketing premise for OxyContin was that patients had to take it only twice a day. The article noted that over the years since its release “more than 7 million Americans have abused OxyContin.”

Next, the *Times* published a third investigative piece that was, if anything, more incendiary. Under the headline “OxyContin Goes Global,” it described how the Sacklers had shifted their attention to promoting opioid use in developing markets, through Mundipharma. “It’s right out of the playbook of Big Tobacco,” the former FDA commissioner David Kessler told the newspaper. “As the United States takes steps to limit sales here, the company goes abroad.”

After the story was published, several members of Congress wrote an open letter to the World Health Organization, urging it to help stop the spread of OxyContin and calling out the Sacklers by name. “The international health community has a rare opportunity to see the future,” the lawmakers wrote. “Do not allow Purdue to walk away from the tragedy

they have inflicted on countless American families simply to find new markets and new victims elsewhere.”

At Purdue, there had been a tendency, over the ups and downs of two decades selling OxyContin, to adopt a bunker mentality. During periodic spikes in negative publicity, senior management would send out company-wide emails, reassuring staff that they had been maligned, once again, by a “biased” media narrative and unscrupulous reporters who always assumed the worst about Purdue while overlooking all of the great things that the company was doing. But the *Los Angeles Times* stories occasioned some internal dissent, prompting what could have been an inflection point for the company. Some employees were dismayed when they read the articles. They had known that Mundipharma was pushing opioids abroad, but not that it was using precisely the techniques that had gotten Purdue into trouble in the United States. Asked by some members of staff to account for these allegations, Stuart Baker, the company lawyer, was dismissive. Mundipharma was not breaking the law in those other countries, he asserted. So he didn’t see the problem.

A schism was developing between a younger generation of executives, who had come in with the new CEO, Mark Timney, and believed that Purdue urgently needed to remake itself if it was going to survive, and an old guard who had been with the Sacklers for decades and insisted that the company had nothing to apologize for. To many in the younger camp, Purdue seemed wildly dysfunctional and antique. “You wouldn’t come in off the street and say, ‘Oh my God! This is exactly how you should run a company! Every *Harvard Business Review* article was wrong!’ ” one former executive said, with a chuckle. At a publicly traded company, there might have been a genuine reckoning after the 2007 guilty plea, with a bunch of people fired and a real commitment to systemic reform. But at Purdue, even David Haddox, who coined the term “pseudo-addiction,” still held a senior position. “To this day I’m just dumbfounded that passed the sniff test for all those years,” another new-guard employee said of the concept of pseudo-addiction. “The solution is just ‘Give them *more* opioids!’ I don’t think you need a PhD in pharmacology to know that’s wrong.”

Some members of the new regime were shocked to discover company old-timers who had held jobs for decades and seemed to possess no

discernible talents, apart from loyalty to the Sacklers. Nobody could say with any confidence what these people *did* all day. Yet their job security seemed absolute. They might well be unemployable in the real world, but they stayed on the payroll, and this only solidified the loyalty that many staff members felt toward the family. When Mark Timney came in, he sought to introduce standards-based evaluation procedures, of a sort that you might find at a regular company. “A lot of people are going to leave,” Timney announced at a meeting in the ground-floor auditorium. “Some are going to get let go. Others are going to decide that this is no longer the place for them. And that’s fine.”

But if Timney thought that longtime Purdue employees, many of whom enjoyed direct relationships with the Sacklers, were going to allow him to transform the company without a fight, he was mistaken. “There were two camps,” one executive who took part in these discussions recalled. Among the new guard, there was a sense that the opioid crisis had now taken on such catastrophic proportions that it was no longer a viable option (if it ever had been) to keep selling opioids without so much as a gesture of conciliation. At this point, more than 165,000 Americans had lost their lives to prescription opioid abuse since 1999. Overdoses had now surpassed car accidents to become the leading cause of preventable death in America. In a midyear update to the Sacklers in June 2016, staffers told the family that, according to surveys, nearly half of all Americans knew someone who had been addicted to prescription opioids.

“Purdue needs a new approach,” some of the new-guard executives proposed. In a meeting, they made a presentation, “A New Narrative: Appropriate Use.” That it would represent a sharp departure from precedent for Purdue Pharma to begin advocating the “appropriate” use of opioids might have been an indication of just how out of touch the Sacklers had become. In any case, they rejected the proposal.

One unadvertised hazard in the life of a plutocrat is that the people around you can be prone to yes-man sycophancy. In theory, you should be able to avail yourself of state-of-the-art counsel. But instead, you often get lousy advice, because your courtiers are careful to tell you only what they think you want to hear. The danger, whether you are a billionaire executive or the president of the United States, is that you end up compounding this

problem yourself, by marginalizing any dissenting voices and creating a bubble in which loyalty is rewarded above all else. The Sacklers took pride in being loyal to those who showed great loyalty to them. If you stood by the family, they would take care of you. But it was an unwritten corollary in the company that anyone who quit to take another job would be blacklisted from returning, for life. Consequently, the Sacklers remained insulated by a retinue of stalwarts who both shared and reinforced the family's view that the company was being unfairly maligned and had done nothing wrong. Among the members of this faction, one former executive recalled, "Nobody was outraged about what the *L.A. Times* uncovered. The reaction was silence."

Mark Timney advocated making some allowances when it came to the opioid crisis. He brought in a new general counsel, Maria Barton, who was a former federal prosecutor, and she too pushed for a change in the corporate culture. In what amounted to a small heresy by the traditional standards of Purdue, Barton suggested that it might not be the most appropriate thing for a portrait of her predecessor Howard Udell to hang in the company library. Raul Damas, who had served in the White House under George W. Bush, and another public affairs executive, Robert Josephson, who had previously worked for World Wrestling Entertainment, counseled the Sacklers to find a way to address the crisis.

But arrayed against these revisionist voices was a chorus of company old-timers, like Haddox, and the lawyer Stuart Baker, and a pair of lobbyists, Burt Rosen and Alan Must, and an executive named Craig Landau who had served in a variety of positions at the company, including medical director, and was now running Canadian operations for Purdue. Staff proposed to the Sacklers that they establish a foundation to help address the opioid crisis and devote some of their philanthropic energies to addiction treatment centers and other remedies. The family refused. There was a defensive perception, among the old guard, that *any* sort of charitable gesture related to the fallout from OxyContin might be construed as an admission of wrongdoing. "If you do something for addiction," the old guard loyalists told the family, "you're admitting culpability."

Howard Udell might be dead, but his ghost lived on. "That was the Udell philosophy," one former executive observed. "Concede absolutely nothing."

The Sacklers declined even to release a general statement, in their own names, acknowledging that the opioid crisis existed and conveying a modicum of compassion. Staff prepared a dozen different versions of such a statement and urged the family to sign off on one of them and release it. But the Sacklers refused.

This reticence was all the more striking given that in other quarters of what Richard called the “pain community,” some allies of the Sacklers were beginning to express second thoughts. “Did I teach about pain management, specifically about opioid therapy, in a way that reflects misinformation? I guess I did,” the King of Pain, Dr. Russell Portenoy, said in 2012. As it turned out, the risk of addiction with these drugs was significantly higher than he had thought, Portenoy now acknowledged. In fact, they might *not* be the optimal course of therapy for long-term chronic pain, after all. Portenoy had delivered “innumerable” lectures about addiction over the course of his career that, he now admitted, “weren’t true.” The reality, he told *The Wall Street Journal*, is that “data about the effectiveness of opioids does not exist.” Nor was Portenoy alone in disavowing some of the classic bromides of the big campaign for more painkiller prescribing. “It’s obviously crazy to think that only 1% of the population is at risk of opioid addiction,” Lynn Webster, of the Purdue-sponsored American Academy of Pain Medicine, acknowledged. “It’s just not true.”

Richard did not like the negative press coverage. “Did you read any articles about me?” he wrote to a friend in 2016. “If so, is there a reason you didn’t ask me about them? It’s curious because it wouldn’t have been any more quiet on email, SMS or phone if the Globe was publishing my obituary!” But rather than come out swinging in a public manner and make the case for his family and his company, Richard opted for the cultivated obscurity that the Sacklers had always preferred. The family might have raged, privately, about the utter righteousness of their own conduct, but that did not mean that they were prepared to be associated, publicly, in any way with Purdue. A new generation of company lackeys was still playing the old shell game devised by Arthur Sackler and his brothers as far back as the 1950s, though with each new press story it got harder to sustain. “Sackler family members hold no leadership roles in the companies owned by the family trust,” one draft press statement suggested. But that seemed too

flagrantly, checkably untrue, so staff amended it to the more moderate claim that members of the family “hold no management positions.” Even that was misleading—eight members of the family still sat on the board of directors, and some of them were maniacally interventionist when it came to management—so, having prepared the statement themselves, the PR team at Purdue opted to have one of the family’s foreign entities release it, because the latest round of questions was about Mundipharma’s practices abroad, and, as such, nobody in the United States wanted to be responsible. “The statement will come out of Singapore,” they decided.



One justification that the Sacklers often repeated, to themselves and to others, about their role in the controversy surrounding OxyContin, was that the drug had been approved by the FDA. There were some inside the FDA who felt that the agency’s approval of the drug and Purdue’s associated marketing claims had been a major mistake. At a 2001 meeting with Purdue, an FDA official, Cynthia McCormick, told the company that some of the clinical trials it had done were misleading and “should never have gone into the label for OxyContin.” She complained that because of Purdue’s message about the drug being “good for whatever ails you,” OxyContin was “creeping into a whole population of people where it doesn’t belong.” David Kessler, who was the head of the FDA when OxyContin was approved, characterized the de-stigmatization of opioids that OxyContin helped to initiate as one of the “great mistakes of modern medicine.”

Apart from a few dissenting voices, however, the FDA had been a reliable ally for Purdue over the years. Craig Landau, the longtime Purdue executive who had been a protégé of the Sacklers’ and served as medical director, would frequently telephone the official in charge of analgesics at the agency. “He’d call him up,” one staffer who worked with Landau recalled. “That’s completely unusual. You don’t call up the head of the division you have products with just to have a chat.” The staffer had the impression that Purdue enjoyed “a very inappropriate relationship with that division at the FDA.”

A representative for Purdue strenuously denied this characterization, saying that “all of Dr. Landau’s relationships at FDA were formal and appropriate.” But dating back to the days of Arthur Sackler and Henry Welch, the pharmaceutical industry had found many ways to compromise personnel at the FDA. The malfeasance didn’t always entail bribery or some other obvious quid pro quo. It was sometimes enough for the overeducated staffers earning civil servant salaries at the FDA to know that when they chose to leave government, as Curtis Wright had done after he gave OxyContin its approval, there would be lucrative jobs and consulting opportunities awaiting them.

In fact, when a federal agency finally sought to take on the opioid industry, it wasn’t the FDA at all, or any Washington agency, for that matter, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. In 2011, the CDC described the crisis of addiction and death that was sweeping the country as an epidemic. One factor that had contributed to this public health problem, many observers agreed, was that so many American physicians had learned what they knew about opioid prescribing from the drug companies themselves. So the CDC set out to create a set of nonbinding guidelines that could assist doctors in determining when to prescribe opioids and, in the process, hopefully reduce the overprescribing of these drugs. The agency convened a panel of experts and made a point of seeking out specialists who did not receive funding from the pharma industry.

This immediately set off alarms at Purdue. “CDC does not want to hear from pharma companies,” Burt Rosen, Purdue’s lobbyist in D.C., wrote in an internal email. The experts assembling the guidelines “have to be clear of any pharma funding,” he noted, which would make it more difficult for the company to exert its influence. The guidelines “are meant to be restrictive,” Rosen warned. Once completed, they could represent “the nation’s legal standard for opioid prescribing.”

“On it,” David Haddox replied. As concerns about opioids had intensified over the years, Purdue had become very active, behind the scenes, in lobbying against any measures, at either a state or a federal level, that might impinge upon its business. According to a study by the Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity, Purdue and other drug

companies that manufacture opioid painkillers spent over \$700 million between 2006 and 2015 on lobbying in Washington and in all fifty states. The combined spending of these groups amounted to roughly eight times what the gun lobby spent. (By comparison, during the same period, the small handful of groups pushing for limits on opioid prescribing spent \$4 million.) One former DEA official described the influence that this lobby exerted over Congress as a “stranglehold.” At the state level, Purdue had also fought measures that were designed to help shut down pill mills, arguing that such steps might limit the availability of opioids to pain patients. Richard Sackler had tracked these developments personally and worked with staff to devise strategies for fighting state initiatives to control the crisis.

In addition to the lobby groups, Purdue could count on its array of industry-funded astroturf organizations. Rosen had created the Pain Care Forum to, as he put it in a 2005 email to Howard Udell, “provide for some unified direction” in the “pain community.” The forum brought together many of the patient advocacy groups and their corporate backers. Now they had a new unified directive: go to war on the CDC guidelines.

“We know of no other medication that’s routinely used for a nonfatal condition that kills patients so frequently,” Tom Frieden, the CDC’s director, said of opioids. More Americans were “primed” to start using heroin, he noted, because of their exposure to prescription opioids. The reformulation of OxyContin had actually been quite dangerous, in Frieden’s view, because it created a perception (reinforced, once again, by the FDA) that these drugs were safe. “It was no less addictive. People thought it was less addictive, but that was a big distraction,” Frieden said. “The company knew damn well what it was peddling, and I think that’s the right word—peddling.”

The draft guidelines counseled doctors to prescribe these drugs not as the remedy “to start with and to stay with” but instead as a last resort, after trying other drugs or physical therapy. The CDC would also advise doctors to prescribe the smallest amount of the drugs and the shortest course of treatment for acute pain. This might have seemed like a reasonable and relatively modest response to a public health emergency. But it ran directly counter to Purdue’s strategy of encouraging doctors to prescribe OxyContin

in *stronger* doses for *longer* periods of time. For Purdue and other pharma companies, the CDC guidelines seemed threatening, because even though the advice might be nonbinding, if it were to be adopted by insurers or hospitals, it could have a significant impact on their business. So Purdue found common cause with its competitors in the painkiller industry and launched a full-on blitz.

David Haddox had long sparred with the CDC. There was no opioid epidemic, he argued in a position paper that he prepared for the agency. CDC officials might like to throw around “provocative language,” but it was unclear to Haddox “why these particular problems are considered to be of epidemic proportions.” It was true that there was an epidemic, he allowed, just not the one the CDC kept talking about. The *real* epidemic, Haddox said—in fact the “#1 public health problem in the United States”—was untreated pain. Why is chronic pain not portrayed as an epidemic? Haddox wondered. Back in the 1990s, Purdue had estimated that 50 million people suffered from undiagnosed chronic pain. These days, Haddox suggested, the number might be as high as 116 million. More than a third of the country! How was that not an epidemic? And untreated pain, he added, can be every bit as “devastating and disabling for the individual as can be the consequences of abuse and addiction, up to and including death.”

When the draft guidelines were initially released, members of the Pain Care Forum attacked them, saying that they were not based on solid evidence and criticizing the CDC for not releasing the names of the outside experts who had advised the agency. One member group, the Washington Legal Foundation, argued that this failure to disclose the names amounted to a “clear violation” of federal law. Another group, the Academy of Integrative Pain Management, asked Congress to investigate the CDC. It was important to Richard Sackler that these front groups be perceived as independent from Purdue. When Burt Rosen was asked, in a subsequent deposition, whether he had played any role in the intervention by the Washington Legal Foundation, he said, “I don’t recall being involved.” Asked whether Purdue had played a role, he said flatly, “I don’t have any knowledge beyond what I’ve stated.” (In 2016, the year that it rebuked the CDC, the Washington Legal Foundation received a larger-than-usual contribution from Purdue of \$200,000.)

The Pain Care Forum produced its own set of “consensus guidelines,” which opposed any sort of measure that might create “new barriers” to medication, and prepared a petition with four thousand signatures warning about the danger of stigmatizing pain patients. The group’s argument was that the experts that the CDC had assembled were all biased. But of course, the very groups raising this allegation were all funded by Big Pharma. Under fire, the CDC ended up delaying the guidelines, but they were eventually released in 2016. Opioids should not be treated as a “first-line therapy,” the guidelines advised. “As a civilization we somehow managed to survive for 50,000 years without OxyContin,” one doctor, Lewis Nelson, who advised the agency on the guidelines, said. “I think we will continue to survive.”

But there was also some validity to the concern that in the face of the new guidelines and enhanced scrutiny of prescribers by the authorities, physicians might swing too hard in the other direction, abruptly cutting off patients who had come to depend on these drugs. That, too, could have major negative consequences for public health, driving patients onto the black market, or neglecting the legitimate suffering of people who were living with chronic pain. It was an excruciatingly delicate problem, from both a policy and a medical point of view—and it was compounded by the fact that most physicians were not trained in how to gradually taper a patient off opioids. The industry had taught doctors how to get people on these drugs, but not how to get them off.



In 2017, Mark Timney’s contract was up as CEO of Purdue Pharma. The Sacklers chose not to renew it. “There were people pushing the family to change,” one executive who worked with Timney recalled. “But in the end, they didn’t want to change.” The old guard celebrated Timney’s ouster, and the remaining members of the new guard began to plan their own exits. The message was clear: trying to reform the company was a good way to get sidelined or fired. The loyalists had staked their fortunes on the Sacklers. Some of the very people Timney had pushed out of the company now came back. According to another employee who was there during this period, the

corporate ethos, once again, was that loyalty would be rewarded: “This whole group of people looked back at what happened with Udell and Goldenheim and Friedman and said, ‘They took care of them.’ ”

The Sacklers selected as Timney’s replacement the CEO of the Canadian business, Craig Landau. Having spent most of his career at Purdue, Landau was perceived as the ultimate Sackler loyalist. As medical director, he had been instrumental in the reformulation of OxyContin. He was not someone who was going to challenge the Sacklers, or urge them to make any apologies or charitable contributions that they did not want to make. Nor was Landau going to try, as Timney had, to reduce the family’s direct intervention in the company. On the contrary, when he prepared his business plan for the job, Landau seemed to concede that his role as chief executive would be largely ceremonial. He described Purdue as the “Sackler pharma enterprise.” In case there was any uncertainty about who would be calling the shots, he characterized the company’s board, which the Sacklers still dominated, as “the de facto CEO.” Other companies might be giving up on opioids, Landau acknowledged, because the legal and reputational costs were just not worth it. But that was an *opportunity* for Purdue. Rather than diversify away from the business that had brought them so much wealth and trouble, Landau suggested, the company should pursue an “opioid consolidation strategy” as other firms “abandon the space.”

One innovative idea the company discussed was a proposal, devised by McKinsey, to offer rebates each time a patient who had been prescribed OxyContin subsequently overdosed or developed an opioid use disorder. These payments of up to \$14,000 would not go to the patient who had been harmed, but to big pharmacy chains and insurance companies, such as CVS and Anthem, to encourage the pharmacies to continue selling OxyContin and the insurers to continue paying for it, even in the face of such potentially lethal side effects. (The company did not end up going through with this idea.)

The month after Landau was appointed, Raymond Sackler died. He was ninety-seven. “He worked the day before he was stricken ill,” Richard said with pride. This was the last link to the original ownership of the company. And there seemed to be a strong sense, among the younger Sacklers, that

they would push forward, defiant, and beat back those who tried to stop the family or slow it down.

Chapter 25

TEMPLE OF GREED

IN 2016, NAN GOLDIN was dividing her time between apartments in Berlin, Paris, and New York. A small woman in her early sixties, with pale skin, a frizzy crown of red-brown curls, and an ever-present cigarette, Goldin had been taking pictures for half a century and was considered one of the most important American photographers alive. She had been raised in the middle-class suburbs of Washington, D.C., in a family that placed great emphasis on propriety. Both of her parents had grown up poor, but her father had managed to go to Harvard, at a time when few Jewish students were admitted to the university. “Most of all, my father cared about Harvard,” she once remarked. The fact that he had managed to earn that unimpeachable distinction was “the biggest thing in his life.”

When Nan was eleven years old, her older sister Barbara, who was eighteen, lay down in the path of an oncoming commuter train near Silver Spring, Maryland, and killed herself. Nan had worshipped her older sister, but Barbara was troubled, an unconventional child who was prone to wild outbursts. Their parents had chosen to commit her, against her will, in a series of psychiatric institutions. These were not public hospitals like Creedmoor asylum, but smaller private facilities, and Barbara cycled in and out of their bleak wards for six years before choosing suicide. When police officers visited the home to inform the family, Nan overheard her mother say, “Tell the children it was an accident.” Devastated, and brimming with resentment for her parents, Nan left home at the age of fourteen. She lived in foster homes and in a commune for a while. She attended a hippie school in Massachusetts, where somebody gave her a camera, and she started taking pictures. She was good at it. At nineteen, she had her first show, in a little gallery in Cambridge.

Goldin's photography was a defiant rejection of the way in which her parents saw the world—or, rather, chose not to see it. In the stifling aspirational ecosystem of suburban Maryland, Barbara's suicide, like her unconventionality in life, had been a source of embarrassment and shame for the Goldin family. Prompted, in part, by "all the denial around her suicide," Nan decided to "make a record that nobody can revise." She would not obfuscate the truth of her life, however atypical or marginal or vulnerable it might be. She would expose it. She started taking candid snapshots of herself and her friends and her lovers and her friends' lovers, in dimly lit bedrooms and skanky bars. She was living a beatnik life on the fringes of society, among drag queens in Provincetown and artists and sex workers in New York City. Her photos had a luminous palette and captured her subjects in raw, discomfitingly intimate moments. Above all, her work had a bracing candor. In perhaps her most famous photo, *Nan One Month After Being Battered*, she stares directly into the camera, her face made up with cherry-red lipstick and penciled brows, her left eye bruised and swollen half-shut from a beating administered by her boyfriend.

Goldin was living in a loft on the Bowery, in the East Village, when the AIDS crisis hit. Many of her closest friends and artistic influences were gay men, and one by one they started dying. Suddenly she found herself taking pictures in hospital wards and hospices. She eventually grew close to the gay artist and activist David Wojnarowicz, who was close with another friend and mentor of hers, the photographer Peter Hujar. In 1987, Hujar died. Nan had been reckoning with a demon of her own during these years. Drugs had been a regular feature of the worlds she had inhabited since leaving home as a teenager, and during the 1970s she had started using heroin. Like a lot of people who use heroin, she found a certain glamour in it, until she didn't. She used the drug on and off for years, but in the late 1980s, it took over. Wojnarowicz had used heroin, too, but he managed to quit. So in 1988, Goldin entered rehab.

She emerged, sober, the following year, looking forward to a reunion with her friends. But when she got back to the city, it had changed. The pace of death had accelerated. In 1989, she curated a seminal exhibit at a downtown gallery called *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*. The show featured art by people whose lives had been impacted by AIDS.

Wojnarowicz wrote an essay for the catalog in which he singled out the right-wing political establishment for refusing to fund research into HIV, allowing the epidemic to proceed unchecked. Part of the reason American political leaders stood by for so long and did nothing to intervene was a moralistic attitude that the gay men and intravenous drug users who were getting sick in such large numbers had nobody to blame but themselves—that AIDS was, in effect, a lifestyle choice. Some of the art in the show was by friends who had already died, like a self-portrait by Hujar. Another one of the artists, Goldin's friend Cookie Mueller, died just a few days before the exhibit opened. It was as if a great plague had swept through Goldin's whole community. Wojnarowicz died three years later.

Nan Goldin lived. But she often felt a kind of survivor's guilt, thinking of the friends, so many of them now gone, who stared back at her from her own photographs. Her work found new admirers. Museums ran retrospectives. Eventually, those pictures of her dead friends would hang on the walls of some of the most illustrious galleries in the world. In 2011, the Louvre opened its palatial halls to Goldin, after hours, so that she could stroll through the broad marble galleries, barefoot, and take pictures of the artworks on display, for an installation in which she juxtaposed images of paintings from the museum's collection with photographs from her own oeuvre. The chronicler of life on the margins had become canonical.

In 2014, Goldin was in Berlin when she developed a severe case of tendinitis in her left wrist, which was causing her a great deal of pain. She went to see a doctor who wrote her a prescription for OxyContin. Goldin knew about the drug, knew its reputation for being dangerously addictive. But her own history of hard drug use, rather than making her more cautious, could sometimes mean that she was cavalier. I can handle it, she figured.

As soon as she took the pills, she could see what the fuss was about. OxyContin didn't just ameliorate the pain in her wrist; it felt like a chemical insulation not just from pain but from anxiety and upset. The drug felt, she would say, like "a padding between you and the world." It wasn't long before she was taking the pills more quickly than she was supposed to. Two pills a day became four, then eight, then sixteen. To keep up with her own needs, she had to enlist other doctors and juggle multiple prescriptions. She had money; she had received a major grant to work on new material and

was preparing for a show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. But her efforts to source pills had come to feel like a full-time job. She started crushing pills and snorting them. She found an obliging dealer in New York who would ship her pills via FedEx.

Three years of her life disappeared. She was working throughout, but she was sequestered in her apartment, entirely isolated from human contact, seeing virtually no one, apart from those she needed to see to get her pills. She would spend days counting and recounting her collection of pills, making resolves and then breaking them. What kept her in this spiral was not the euphoria of the high but just the fear of withdrawal. When it hit, she could summon no words to capture the mental and physical agony. Her whole body raged with searing, incandescent pain. It felt as if the skin had been peeled right off her. She did a painting during this period of a miserable-looking young man in a green tank top, his arms festering with boils and wounds. She titled it *Withdrawal/Quicksand*. At a certain point, her doctors caught on to her and she was struggling to access enough black-market OxyContin, so she lapsed back into using heroin. One night, she bought a batch that, unbeknownst to her, was actually fentanyl, and she overdosed.

She didn't die, but the experience frightened her. So in 2017, at the age of sixty-two, Goldin checked back in to rehab. She did this at an excellent clinic in rural Massachusetts, a facility associated with McLean Hospital. She knew that she was fortunate to have access to treatment; only one in ten people who are addicted to opioids do. And she felt lucky to be able to afford a level of care that most could not; the McLean program cost \$2,000 a day. She worked with the same doctor who had gotten her sober back in the 1980s. After two months, Goldin had managed to purge the drug from her system. It felt similar, in some ways, to her experience of coming out of rehab three decades earlier: those first wobbly steps, after a long period of seclusion, back in the direction of the living. But she felt now, just as she had in 1989, that she was coming back to a world that had been decimated by a plague. The death count from prescription-opioid-related overdoses had surged past 200,000. According to the latest figures from the CDC, when you factored in illicit heroin and fentanyl, in addition to prescription opioids, 115 Americans were dying each day. One day while she was still in

recovery, in the fall of 2017, she read an article in *The New Yorker* about the drug that had nearly killed her, about the company that made the drug, and about the family that owned the company.



It was not as though the Sacklers had not been written about before. Barry Meier and Sam Quinones had detailed the history of the family and the company in their books. But until then, the Sacklers had tended to be presented as one strand in a complex narrative involving OxyContin, Purdue, pain doctors, patients, and the burgeoning opioid crisis. This was no surprise, and no shortcoming on the part of the prior reporting: because the Sacklers were so secretive, and Purdue was a privately held company, it had been difficult, up to that point, to tell a story in which the culpability of the family was front and center.

The *New Yorker* article, which I wrote, took a different approach, focusing squarely on the family and highlighting both the role that they had played in directing the company and the dissonance between the Sacklers' unblemished reputation in philanthropic circles and the sordid reality of their fortune. "I don't know how many rooms in different parts of the world I've given talks in that were named after the Sacklers," Allen Frances, the former chair of psychiatry at Duke University School of Medicine, said in the article. "Their name has been pushed forward as the epitome of good works and of the fruits of the capitalist system. But, when it comes down to it, they've earned this fortune at the expense of millions of people who are addicted. It's shocking how they have gotten away with it."

In a coincidence of timing, the *New Yorker* article came out the same week that *Esquire* published a piece about the Sacklers, by Christopher Glazek, with a remarkably similar premise. "We were directed to lie. Why mince words about it?" a former Purdue sales rep told Glazek. "The Fords, Hewletts, Packards, Johnsons—all those families put their name on their product because they were proud," the Stanford psychiatry professor Keith Humphreys said. "The Sacklers have hidden their connection to their product."

Suddenly the family was facing a level of scrutiny completely out of proportion to anything they had encountered in the past. In the weeks after the articles were published, a fissure emerged, for the first time in public, between the Arthur wing of the family and the Mortimer and Raymond wings. When I was working on my article, I tried to get members of Arthur's family to offer an opinion on the legacy of Purdue, this company that Arthur purchased for his brothers. But they would not make any statements on the record expressing even the slightest criticism of the business decisions of the other branches of the family.

After this new wave of publicity, that changed. Elizabeth Sackler, who had endowed the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum and maintained a Twitter feed full of urgent exclamations about the perfidy of Donald Trump and her allegiance to Black Lives Matter, belatedly made a statement in which she distanced herself from her cousins. In an interview with the website Hyperallergic, she said that Purdue's role in the opioid crisis "is morally abhorrent to me." Her father died in 1987, she pointed out, long before the introduction of OxyContin, and she and her siblings had agreed to sell their one-third stake in Purdue to her uncles soon thereafter. So, none of Arthur's heirs had profited from OxyContin, she insisted.

Jillian Sackler, Arthur's widow, was still alive, living in a full-floor apartment in a neoclassical building on Park Avenue, surrounded by paintings and sculptures. She also spoke up for the first time, saying that Arthur "would not have approved of the widespread sale of OxyContin." The heirs of Arthur's brothers "have a moral duty to help make this right and to atone for any mistakes made," she said. Both Elizabeth and Jillian agreed that Arthur was entirely beyond reproach. He "was an amazing man who did tremendous good, and I am just so proud of him," Jillian said. In a flourish that seemed only appropriate for the widow of Arthur M. Sackler, she handed out to reporters a dense CV with the names of her various board appointments and the foundations to which she had contributed.

The question of whether it was fair for the descendants of Arthur Sackler to be tainted by the controversy over OxyContin was an interesting one. On the one hand, it was indisputable that Arthur had indeed died before the launch of the drug and had hardly been speaking with his brothers by the

end of his life. On the other hand, it was Arthur who created the world in which OxyContin could do what it did. He pioneered medical advertising and marketing, the co-opting of the Food and Drug Administration, the mingling of medicine and commerce. So many of the antecedents of the saga of OxyContin could be found in the life of Arthur Sackler. The heirs of Arthur were caught in a delicate bind of their own creation. During his lifetime, and to an even greater extent after his death, people like Jillian and Elizabeth had served as wards of his legacy, burnishing the memory of the man and endlessly enumerating (and often overstating) his accomplishments. Arthur had felt, in life, that he deserved credit for a great deal of what his brothers built, and this sentiment was echoed long after his death by his admirers. “Sackler founded a dynasty,” the hagiographic biography that was privately published by Jillian Sackler’s foundation declared, explaining that he set his brothers up in business and was personally responsible for much of Purdue’s success. A description of Arthur’s life on Sackler.org, a website maintained by Jillian, describes how he “initiated fact-based medical advertising,” then “purchased the pharmaceutical company Purdue Frederick, and started all the other family businesses.”

In January 2018, Nan Goldin published some new work in *Artforum*. It featured a series of her photographs from her time in Berlin. She had chronicled the years of her addiction, taking pictures of pill bottles and prescriptions, the banal paraphernalia of her own abuse, and self-portraits when she was high. She contrasted these images with new photos that she had taken of clean geometric signage bearing the Sackler name in various art galleries around the world. “I survived the opioid crisis,” Goldin wrote in an accompanying essay, in which she harked back to her own early activism during the AIDS crisis. “I can’t stand by and watch another generation disappear.” Instead, she wanted to raise a call to arms. “The Sacklers made their fortune promoting addiction,” she declared. “They have washed their blood money through the halls of museums and universities around the world.” It was time, she said, to “hold them accountable.”

If this was going to be some kind of campaign Goldin was launching, it would put Elizabeth Sackler in a tricky spot. She identified not just as a progressive and a patron of the arts but as an activist. “I admire Nan

Goldin’s courage to speak about her story and her commitment to take action,” Elizabeth wrote in a letter to *Artforum*. “I stand in solidarity with artists and thinkers whose work and voices must be heard.”

But Goldin, with her particular allergy to the bullshit stories that families tell, was having none of it. Arthur might have died before OxyContin was introduced, she said, but “he was the architect of the advertising model used so effectively to push the drug.” And he made his money on tranquilizers! It was a bit rich, she thought, for the Valium Sacklers to be getting morally huffy about their OxyContin cousins. “The brothers made billions on the bodies of hundreds of thousands,” Goldin said. “The whole Sackler clan is evil.”



The Sacklers were furious about this new coverage. One particular item in *The New Yorker* had incensed some members of the family. The piece suggested that Purdue, “facing a shrinking market and rising opprobrium,” had not given up the search for new users, and pointed out that “in August, 2015, over objections from critics, the company received F.D.A. approval to market OxyContin to children as young as eleven.”

This was true. Purdue had received permission from the FDA to sell OxyContin to juveniles, despite the long history of children overdosing and dying from the drug. But the Sacklers objected that Purdue had not *sought* this permission. Rather, the company was simply complying with FDA regulations that required it to perform clinical trials to see whether the drug could be prescribed to kids. In an indignant letter to *The New Yorker*, an attorney for the Raymond Sackler side of the family, Tom Clare, asserted that Purdue did not “voluntarily” run these trials, but “did *soonly* to comply with FDA’s mandate” (emphasis his). Moreover, he stressed, the company had promised, of its own accord, that it would not actively *market* the drug for children.

You could see why the family might be sensitive to the optics of such an inference. But leaving aside the fact that Purdue, at this stage, was expecting some sort of merit badge for not explicitly marketing an opioid directly for use by kids, it was simply not true that this process had been

initiated solely to placate the FDA. In fact, Purdue's own internal documents include numerous instances of company officials describing the "pediatric indication" as something that they were very much pursuing. In January 2011, when Craig Landau drafted his "goals and objectives," as chief medical officer, for the year, one of the items on the list was obtaining FDA approval to sell OxyContin to children.

The real reason that the Sacklers were angry over this passage about the pediatric indication was more complicated. According to people who worked at Purdue at the time, the company had wanted to obtain the pediatric indication for years. But the reason was not that the FDA was requiring them to or that the Sacklers thought there was a huge new market for the painkiller among children. Rather, it was because securing a pediatric indication from the FDA is yet another crafty way of extending the patent for a drug. In a pair of laws, the Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act and the Pediatric Research Equity Act, Congress had authorized the FDA to offer certain incentives to drug companies if they undertook clinical trials to see how their drugs worked on children. At this point, OxyContin had enjoyed patent exclusivity for twenty years—far longer than most pharmaceuticals. This was a credit to Purdue's fiendishly brilliant attorneys. Now, if they could secure the pediatric indication, it would potentially entitle them to an additional six months of exclusivity. The Sacklers claimed that they were obligated by the law to do the clinical trials, but they weren't compelled so much as incentivized. One former executive pointed out that in 2011 six more months of exclusivity could have "meant more than a billion dollars" in revenue. As such, the executive continued, a determination had been made that "it was worth the bad optics." As early as 2009, a budget presentation discussed the idea of securing a pediatric indication in terms of "impact on exclusivity and value created." An email from the younger Mortimer Sackler that same year raised the specter of the "patent cliff" for OxyContin and wondered about "the extension from doing pediatric trials."

The company did end up getting the pediatric indication. But for technical reasons, they were denied the extension of exclusivity, which left them very unhappy and primed, perhaps, to be sensitive to nasty press reports implying that the family might have wanted to sell opioids to

children, when what they were really after was an extra six months of monopoly pricing. And even in the face of an unprecedented tide of bad press, the family was still on the lookout for other ways to sell opioids. A few weeks after the *New Yorker* article came out, even as Jonathan Sackler raged about negative coverage depicting his family as greedy pill profiteers, he proposed to Purdue that the company consider launching yet another opioid. Richard continued to demand information about sales, to a point where staff at the company did not know how to respond. “I think we need to find a balance,” one employee wrote to another, “between being clear about what the reality looks like...and just giving so much bad news about the future that it just makes things look hopeless.” The family was committed to their strategy of urging patients to take bigger doses for longer periods of time. McKinsey had counseled that this was the way to protect company profits. But this advice defied an emerging medical consensus that such an approach was not the best way to address chronic pain. The CDC had recently announced that there was “insufficient evidence” to indicate that these drugs continued to relieve pain in patients who took them for more than three months, and warned that nearly a quarter of all patients who took opioid painkillers long term could become addicted.

Some executives had urged the board to recognize that the strategy of being an integrated pain management company was not working and that they needed to diversify. In 2014, Kathe Sackler had been involved in discussions on an initiative called Project Tango. The idea was that one natural area into which Purdue could now branch out was selling drugs that treat opioid addiction. Richard Sackler himself had been part of a team of inventors who applied for a patent to treat addiction. (The patent application described people who become addicted to opioids as “junkies” and lamented “the drug-related criminal activities resorted to by such addicts in order to raise enough money to fund their addiction.”) According to a PowerPoint presentation for Project Tango, the “Abuse and Addiction market” would be a “good fit and next natural step for Purdue.” In some ways, this initiative was a riff on a business model that Purdue had long employed. One side effect of opioid use is constipation, and for years Purdue’s sales reps had marketed the company’s trusty laxative, Senokot, as a useful chaser to OxyContin. With a frankness that even the Sacklers might

have found unsettling, the Project Tango presentation declared, “Pain treatment and addiction are naturally linked.” The presentation noted that “the opioid addiction space could be an exciting entry point for Purdue.”

But in the end, the board voted not to proceed with Project Tango. This was part of a pattern. There seemed to be a recognition at Purdue that the company needed to develop or license other product lines. But anytime the board was presented with potential candidates that weren’t opioids, the Sacklers would inquire about how profitable they would be. “There were efforts to make them diversify,” one former executive recalled. They looked at products for Parkinson’s. For migraines. For insomnia. “But the board wasn’t interested. The profit margins weren’t the same as with opioids.” This was a high bar—few pharmaceutical products are as profitable as OxyContin—so the Sacklers passed on one proposal after another. “They had no interest at all in developing non-opioid products,” another former executive recalled. “Their biggest interest was in selling as much OxyContin as possible.” Craig Landau, after he was appointed CEO, paid lip service to the idea of exploring other product lines, but the reality, according to this executive, was that “Craig is a businessman. All Craig ever talked about was how much of the business a certain segment of the pain population was. ‘This is 10 percent of our business.’ ‘This is 15 percent of our business.’ He never said the word ‘patient,’ but he talked about the business all the time.”

A third former executive recalled the pressure of going before the family to pitch new business ideas: “Going to a Sackler board meeting is like going to a bad Thanksgiving dinner, with two sides of the family that just don’t get along. You’ve got Richard on the Raymond side pulling in one direction and Kathe on the Mortimer side pulling in the other, and they’re all fighting and you’re standing in the front of the room and asking to go to slide 2.” But it was futile. There was “no interest in developing other product lines,” the former executive recalled. However novel the proposal, “it wasn’t OxyContin.”

The good news for the Sacklers was that even after the exposés in *Esquire* and *The New Yorker* it appeared that the negative publicity would do little to unsettle the family’s philanthropic relationships or its stature in polite society. After the magazine articles were published, *The New York*

Times contacted twenty-one cultural establishments that had received significant sums from the Sacklers, including the Guggenheim, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Met. “But few institutions seem concerned that the money they have received may be tied, in some way, to a family fortune built on the sale of opioids,” the paper reported. None of the museums or galleries issued a statement about the Sacklers that was less than supportive or indicated that they would return donations or refuse to accept gifts from the family in the future. Some were openly protective. “The Sackler family continue to be an important and valuable donor,” a spokeswoman for the Victoria and Albert Museum told the paper, adding that museum officials were “grateful for their ongoing support.” Oxford University was similarly steadfast, announcing that there was “no intention to reconsider the Sackler family and trusts.”



On a chilly Saturday afternoon in March 2018, Nan Goldin walked into the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She was dressed in black from head to toe and wore a long black muffler around her neck and bright red lipstick, her crimson hair flopping down over her eyes. Once she was inside the museum, she made her way to the Sackler Wing.

She had not come alone. When she reached the hall, with its great wall of banked glass looking out onto the park, she blended into the throng of afternoon museumgoers, but she was quietly coordinating with a group of a hundred or so other people who had arrived, incognito, just as she had. Suddenly, at 4:00 p.m., they started shouting, “Temple of greed! Temple of Oxy!” Someone unfurled a black banner that said, FUND REHAB.

Goldin had started a group, modeled on the 1980s AIDS activists whom she had so admired. They called themselves PAIN, which stood for Prescription Addiction Intervention Now, and they had been meeting in Goldin’s Brooklyn apartment and planning a spectacular action. As dozens of protesters chanted, hundreds of people stood around gawking, taking videos with their phones. A number of press photographers, who had been tipped off in advance to be there, snapped photos. Goldin had decided that she wanted to hit the Sacklers where they lived—in the elite milieu of the

art museum. The Met had some of Goldin's photos in its permanent collection, and now she would leverage her own standing in that world—and her distinct identity as a revered artist who happened to be recovering from an OxyContin addiction—to call on cultural institutions to refuse Sackler money and to demand that the family use its fortune to fund addiction treatment.

“We are artists, activists, addicts,” she announced, taking up position between a pair of imposing black stone statues. A few of her fellow activists had strung up a banner that said SHAME ON SACKLER, and now Goldin stood before it. “We are fed up,” she said. The protesters had stationed themselves around the great reflecting pool that had been the centerpiece of so many glittering parties. They reached into their bags and pulled out orange pill bottles; then they hurled the bottles into the pool. “Look at the facts!” they shouted. “Read the stats!”

Met security guards swooped in, trying to get the protesters to settle down and leave, but instead they collapsed onto the floor in a symbolic “die-in.” For a few minutes they lay there, arrayed like scattered corpses, to represent the toll of OxyContin. Then they rose and marched out, past the Temple of Dendur, through the cavernous marble halls of the Met, which Arthur, Mortimer, and Raymond had worked so hard to make their own. They waved banners and chanted, their voices ringing through the galleries. “Sacklers lie! Thousands die!” As they marched out of the building and down the steps, Nan Goldin turned and shouted, “We’ll be back!”

In the Sackler Wing, nearly a thousand orange pill bottles bobbed in the reflecting pool. They were, in their own modest way, little pieces of art, each carrying a specially designed, very realistic-looking waterproof label. It said,

OXYCONTIN

Prescribed to you by the Sacklers.

Chapter 26

WARPATH

THE ISLAND OF TASMANIA lies 150 miles off the south coast of mainland Australia, in one of the more remote locations on earth. In a place called Westbury, on the northern part of the island, fields of long-stemmed opium poppies quiver in the breeze around the Tasmanian Alkaloids facility. The flowers are mostly pink, with occasional flashes of mauve or white. But these aren't normal poppies. They're a special variety of super poppy that's been genetically engineered to produce a higher proportion of thebaine, an alkaloid that is the key chemical precursor for oxycodone. At the Westbury facility, the poppies are harvested, then processed into a concentrated extract that is flown to the United States, where the raw narcotic material can be processed into oxycodone and other opioids.

This is the breadbasket of the opioid boom. Though it is only about the size of West Virginia, Tasmania grows 85 percent of all the thebaine in the world. During the 1990s, just as Purdue Pharma was developing OxyContin, a company owned by the pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson developed this new strain of opium poppy. Johnson & Johnson started out as a family business like Purdue. People tend to associate the brand with wholesome products like Band-Aids and baby shampoo. But the company has also played a critical role in the opioid crisis. With the launch of OxyContin, Johnson & Johnson's Tasmanian subsidiary, which owned the facility, ramped up production. In a 1998 agreement, it committed to supplying Purdue's "entire worldwide requirements" for the raw narcotic material to produce OxyContin.

This turned out to be quite a commitment. As demand soared, the Tasmanian Alkaloids facility had to encourage local farmers, who had previously grown other crops, like cauliflower or carrots, to switch to

poppies. They did this in much the same manner that Purdue sought to stimulate its sales reps, by creating incentive programs and bestowing all-expenses-paid vacations and luxury cars. The weird economics of the poppy rush were such that a weather-beaten Tasmanian farmer might spend a long workday tending the fields on the back of a tractor under the blazing sun, then climb into his souped-up climate-controlled Mercedes for the drive home. At the height of the boom, in 2013, seventy-four thousand acres in Tasmania were devoted to the crop. Poppies had become so profitable, one company accountant joked, that you could up the ante on the incentives and “give them a 747,” and if it got the farmers to grow more opium poppies, it would be worth it.

Historically, the DEA had regulated the quantity of these drugs that could legally be brought into the United States. But the burgeoning opioid industry pushed to raise these limits, lobbying doggedly, and over time the DEA accommodated. The opioid crisis is, among other things, a parable about the awesome capability of private industry to subvert public institutions. Just as the FDA was compromised and Congress was neutralized or outright co-opted with generous donations and some federal prosecutors were undermined with a back-channel appeal in Washington while others were mollified with the promise of a corporate job, just as state legislators and the CDC were hindered and sabotaged when they tried to curb opioid prescribing, the DEA was not immune to these pressures and proceeded to soften its position under a steady barrage of industry encouragement. Between 1994 and 2015, the quota of oxycodone that the DEA permitted to be legally manufactured was raised thirty-six times. A subsequent report by the inspector general of the Justice Department criticized the DEA for being “slow to respond to the dramatic increase in opioid abuse.”

Of course, it wasn't just Purdue applying pressure. This would become a central plank in the Sackler family's defense. In 2016, Johnson & Johnson sold the Tasmanian Alkaloids facility. Physicians were becoming more cautious about prescribing opioids. And by that point, many Americans were surveying the carnage that two decades of widespread opioid prescribing had created, and looking around for someone to blame. Sounding very much like Arthur Sackler in 1961, when he insisted to the

panel of U.S. senators that the McAdams agency was really just a minor concern, the Sacklers protested that OxyContin's market share was never more than 4 percent.

There was some truth in this. Janssen, the pharmaceutical branch of Johnson & Johnson, had its own opioids, a pill called Nucynta and the fentanyl patch Duragesic, which the company knew was being abused as early as 2001. Then there was Endo (which had Opana), and Mallinckrodt (with Roxicodone), and Teva (with Fentora and the fentanyl lollipop Actiq). And there were others. It was a crowded field. "We are not the only company that marketed opioids," David Sackler would fume. "Johnson & Johnson was massive," he exclaimed, whereas OxyContin was just "this tiny, niche little product with tiny market share."

It was frustrating for the family to feel singled out. In legal papers, lawyers for Purdue complained about "scapegoating." Their biggest competitors were also ensnared in litigation. But nobody was writing unflattering exposés about the CEO of Endo or the board of Mallinckrodt.

While this refrain about the smallness of Purdue always featured prominently in the repertoire of defenses that the Sacklers and their company employed, it was deliberately misleading in several important respects. To begin with, the percentage of total opioid prescriptions was perhaps not the best metric for understanding Purdue's actual role in the marketplace, because that statistic treats every pill the same and does not account for either the size of the dose or the duration of the prescription. The only way that the Sacklers could arrive at their 4 percent market share figure was by including, in the category of opioid prescriptions, even short-term prescriptions for low-dosage medicines like Tylenol-Codeine. OxyContin is an incredibly potent drug. What made it revolutionary—what made the Sacklers so *proud* of it—was the innovative mechanism that enabled Purdue to pack forty or eighty milligrams of oxycodone into a single pill. Moreover, OxyContin was the drug to "start with and to stay with." Purdue's business model was predicated on pain patients who would take the drug month in, month out. For years. For *life* in some cases. Purdue priced its pills aggressively, and sales representatives were incentivized to push patients to "titrate up" their doses, in no small measure because the more massive the dose, the more massive the profits for the company.

According to a study by *The Wall Street Journal*, when you take into account the dosage strength of each pill, Purdue actually accounted for a market-leading 27 percent of all oxycodone sold. In a separate analysis, ProPublica found that if you adjust for potency, in some states Purdue's market share of all opioid painkillers—not just oxycodone—was as high as 30 percent.

In making the case that they had only ever been bit players, the Sacklers and Purdue pointed a finger at their old adversaries, the generic makers. If you want to know where the great bulk of the prescription opioids come from, they suggested, that's where you should look. "OxyContin was introduced in a market dominated by generic opioids," a Purdue spokesman told *The New Yorker* in 2017. The vast majority of prescriptions for opioid pain medications is for generics, he said. But to some who worked at Purdue and were familiar with the convoluted holdings of the Sackler clan, this talking point seemed egregiously insincere, because the Sacklers secretly owned another pharmaceutical company, in addition to Purdue, and it was one of the biggest manufacturers of generic opioids in the United States.

Rhodes Pharmaceuticals was located on a country road in the town of Coventry, Rhode Island, and surrounded by formidable security. The company appeared to be intent on maintaining a low profile; for several years, the website was "under construction." The Sackler family's history with Rhodes, which would eventually be uncovered by the *Financial Times*, dated back to the period following Purdue's guilty plea in the federal case in Virginia. Four months after the plea, the Sacklers established Rhodes. The company was set up as a "landing pad" for the family, according to a former senior manager at Purdue, in case they needed a fresh start following the crisis over OxyContin. Rhodes became the seventh-largest opioid manufacturer in the United States, just behind the generic giant Teva and well ahead of Johnson & Johnson and Endo. Rhodes produced a generic version of MS Contin, but also immediate-release oxycodone, a drug that was widely abused. An article on Purdue's website, "Common Myths About OxyContin," complained about the "misperception that all oxycodone abuse involves OxyContin," suggesting that immediate-release

oxycodone was also to blame, without acknowledging the awkward fact that the Sacklers happened to produce both drugs.

Inside Purdue, staff recognized, following the reformulation of OxyContin in 2010, that the company's boasts about the safety of its tamper-resistant opioid might ring hollow if the public understood that a related company, Rhodes, was still busy producing immediate-release oxycodone that was *not* tamper-resistant. In one internal email, a Purdue executive, Todd Baumgartner, discussed the "secretive" manner in which the company sought to obfuscate this contradiction.

Multiple Sacklers played an active role in Rhodes. Dame Theresa and Kathe served on one committee. Mortimer served on another. But according to one longtime Purdue executive who worked closely with the Sacklers, the family member who was most intimately involved was Jonathan. "Jonathan became the champion for Rhodes generic," the executive said. "That was his baby."

The most decisive flaw in the Sacklers' argument about the comparative size of their market share, however, was that when all of these rival pharmaceutical companies began to promote their own powerful opioids, they were following a trail blazed by Purdue. OxyContin was the "tip of the spear," in the words of one Purdue chemist who worked on the drug. Richard Sackler and his team in the 1990s had recognized a significant market barrier—the widespread stigma associated with strong opioids in the medical establishment—and executed a brilliant strategy to remove that barrier and clear the way. Purdue itself acknowledged, in 2001, that the company's promotional efforts helped to bring about a "paradigm shift." Rival drugmakers might have come to supplant Purdue in the marketplace. But they were the followers, not the leader. In a 2002 presentation for Johnson & Johnson, a team of consultants from McKinsey had acknowledged as much. OxyContin "created" a market, they said.



In the view of Mike Moore, an attorney, it seemed that Purdue Pharma and the Sackler family were "the main culprit." They "duped the FDA, saying OxyContin lasted twelve hours," Moore said. "They lied about the

addictive properties. And they did all this to grow the opioid market, to make it okay to jump in the water. Then some of these other companies, they saw that the water was warm. And they said, ‘Okay, we can jump in, too.’ ”

Moore was in his sixties but looked younger, rail thin, with a bit of a drawl. He came from Mississippi, where he had served as attorney general from 1988 to 2004. During the 1990s, Moore had been regarded as an up-and-coming figure in the Democratic Party, a southern liberal with law-and-order cred who was often compared to Bill Clinton and who, some thought, might one day be a future presidential candidate himself. As attorney general, he excelled at drumming up publicity and at the messy backroom politics associated with putting together coalitions. By his own admission, Moore was a big-picture guy. The fine nuances and endless citations of a legal brief were not his strong suit. But he had passion and energy and charisma in spades, as well as a righteous fervor.

In 1994, Moore decided, along with a coalition of other lawyers, to take on Big Tobacco. Employing an unconventional and risky legal strategy, he became the first state prosecutor to sue cigarette companies in an effort to hold them accountable for the lies that they had told about the health consequences of smoking. He and his allies launched a sequence of lawsuits in which private attorneys collaborated with states to sue the tobacco firms. This was the case that Barry Meier had covered for the *Times*, and it ended in a resounding win for Moore. The defendant companies agreed to the largest corporate legal settlement in U.S. history. Moore and his fellow state prosecutors and plaintiffs’ lawyers forced the companies to acknowledge that they had lied about the risks associated with smoking. They got billboards taken down, cigarette vending machines banned, sports promotions canceled. They got rid of Joe Camel, the iconic cartoon mascot, as well as the Marlboro Man. And they forced the companies to pay a landmark fine of more than \$200 billion.

In 2004, Moore stepped down as attorney general and opened his own law firm. In the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, he helped secure a \$20 billion settlement from BP. He had developed a reputation as a giant slayer, a guy who could bring even the most ferocious corporate behemoth to heel. He’d tangled with the best lawyers on the planet and

won. He'd made a considerable fortune of his own, in contingency fees. When the director Michael Mann wanted to make a movie called *The Insider* about the tobacco litigation, most of the real-life characters were played by actors, like Russell Crowe and Al Pacino. Mike Moore played himself. He had a certain swagger.

He also had a nephew who was addicted to opioids. One night in 2006, the nephew had sustained a gunshot wound after an altercation with his wife (his memory of the evening was sufficiently hazy that he couldn't say for sure whether he shot himself or she shot him). A doctor prescribed Percocet. It became an addiction, and by 2010 he was buying fentanyl on the street. Moore did his best to help, but the nephew was in and out of rehab, overdosing and recovering, then overdosing again.

Moore had been involved in a series of civil cases against Purdue back in 2007, culminating in a \$75 million settlement in which the company admitted no wrongdoing and all the internal documents produced in discovery were sealed. But now he got to talking with some of his old colleagues from the tobacco litigation about trying to apply that model to the opioid makers. To Moore, the similarities were straightforward. "They're both profiting by killing people," he said.

But this raised an interesting question. The Sacklers had always espoused a fundamentally libertarian view when it came to the line of work that they were in. The family produced a product and put it into commerce. What people did with that product was not the family's responsibility. Purdue's critics argued that this was very similar to the case of Big Tobacco: if you lie about the risks associated with your product, then you should bear some responsibility when people rely on those assurances and take it, with fatal consequences. To others, however, the appropriate analogy was not cigarettes but firearms: it has been next to impossible, in the United States, to hold gun makers liable for deaths that result from their products. Guns could be said, to an even greater degree than addictive pharmaceuticals, to lead to bad outcomes that are not hard to predict. Nevertheless, gun manufacturers (and their lawyers and lobbyists) have argued, successfully, that they should bear no responsibility for what their customers do with their product. When someone is injured or killed by a gun, there is always some irresponsible individual who actually pulls the trigger, which, gun

makers argue, should absolve those who manufactured and marketed that gun of any liability. The Sacklers took the view that the same should go for OxyContin. To the degree that people are misusing the drug and overdosing, the blame lies with any number of potentially irresponsible parties—the prescribing doctor, the wholesaler, the pharmacist, the trafficker, the abuser, the addicted person—but not with the manufacturer. Not with Purdue. Much less the Sacklers.

Collaborating with a loose consortium of lawyers, several of whom were fellow veterans of the tobacco wars, Moore looked at all of the cases that had been brought in the past against Purdue and other opioid makers. They reviewed the guilty plea in Virginia in 2007 and all of the other cases in which Purdue had settled to avoid trial (and then buried the evidence). None of these results seemed particularly satisfying, especially when considered in light of the pernicious impact that OxyContin and other opioids had inflicted on communities across the country and the astronomical profits that the companies enjoyed. So Moore and his fellow lawyers initiated a new wave of lawsuits. The suits would be brought by state attorneys general but also by cities and counties and Native American tribes. They agreed to pool their resources, sharing information and documents, and pursue not just Purdue but the other major manufacturers, and the wholesalers, and the pharmacies. “The companies might be able to win one case, but they can’t win fifty,” Moore said. “There’s going to be a jury somewhere, someplace that’s going to hit them with the largest verdict in the nation’s history.”

Before long, the sheer number of cases against Purdue and other companies had reached a point where they had to be bundled together into what is known as a multidistrict litigation. There were multiple defendants: Purdue and other manufacturers like Johnson & Johnson and Endo; the big pharmaceutical distributors, like McKesson, which supplied the drugs wholesale to pharmacies; and the pharmacy chains themselves, like Walmart and Walgreens and CVS. The theory of these lawsuits was that Purdue pioneered the deceptive marketing tactics and others followed. According to the CDC, the opioid crisis was costing the U.S. economy nearly \$80 billion a year. If American taxpayers were going to shoulder that cost, Moore and his fellow attorneys argued, it seemed only fair that the drug companies should, too. In a court hearing in January 2018, Dan Aaron

Polster, a federal judge in Ohio who had been appointed to oversee the multidistrict litigation, noted the great urgency of these proceedings. “We’re losing more than fifty thousand of our citizens every year,” he said. “One hundred and fifty Americans are going to die today, just today, while we’re meeting.”

Ohio was an apt forum for this showdown. By 2016, 2.3 million people in the state—approximately 20 percent of the total population—received a prescription for opioids. Half of the children who were in foster care across the state had opioid-addicted parents. People were dying from overdoses at such a rate that local coroners had run out of room in which to store all the bodies and were forced to seek makeshift alternatives. None of the states had enough money or resources to contend with the problem. In light of this urgency, and the sheer complexity of the litigation, Polster urged the parties to arrive at some kind of settlement, rather than fight these cases out one by one. Purdue and the other corporate defendants were also eager to avoid trial.

As the threat of litigation intensified, Purdue officials in Stamford engaged with a small PR firm called the Herald Group, which specialized in digging up opposition research. The group proposed a plan to make state prosecutors “think twice” about joining the litigation, starting with “a deep dive on Mike Moore and his current and past associates.” If they could just discredit Moore, one Herald Group executive suggested, it might “give pause” to other attorneys who were thinking of joining the lawsuits. “Moore and his ilk are rich, greedy trial lawyers who make hundreds of millions of dollars suing companies,” the group pointed out. One idea that they proposed was to build a website called LearJetLawyers.com. “Learjet Lawyers associates the plaintiff’s attorneys with wealth and aligns them with Wall Street, not Main Street,” they suggested. “This imagery further damages their credibility and bolsters the narrative that they are not fighting for the common person.”

When *The Wall Street Journal* ran an editorial criticizing the lawsuits and arguing that state attorneys general were just seeking to “pad their budgets” at the expense of the pharma industry, Purdue executives celebrated. A Herald Group representative reported that they had “worked with” the writer on the piece.

Mike Moore made no secret about wanting money. He once referred to Johnson & Johnson as “a huge pocket.” There is also an entirely reasonable critique to be made of the motivations of personal injury lawyers, who work on contingency and reap outsized fees in success. But it was more difficult to assail the dozens of attorneys general initiating cases, who argued, as Moore did, that the purpose of these suits was to obtain desperately needed funds to build treatment centers, finance research into the science of addiction, and purchase Naloxone, a drug that can be used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

In an interview in February 2018, Moore noted that “the Sacklers have not been named” as defendants in any of the cases. They appeared to remain insulated by the artfully cultivated perception that apart from voting on board resolutions from time to time, they played little role in the family business. But at that very moment, Moore noted, attorneys were trying to find a way “to break through the corporate veil so that they can name the owners.”



The Sacklers, for their part, were finally starting to freak out. “I received a call today from Mary Woolley,” Jonathan informed other members of the family, referring to the head of a group called Research!America, to which the Sacklers had donated generously. Just seven months earlier, Woolley had eulogized Jonathan’s father, Raymond, praising his “keen business insights, personal kindness, extraordinary generosity and determination to advance research.” His “legacy,” she suggested, “is a model for all those aspiring to serve the public good.” But now Woolley informed Jonathan that her organization had experienced a change of heart. “Apparently the bad publicity around Purdue and the family has led their board to decide to rename the Raymond & Beverly Sackler Prize,” Jonathan wrote. The decision had come about after some past recipients of the prize (“she would not divulge who”) expressed their discomfort at being associated with the Sackler name and inquired about whether they could call the award something else on their CVs.

“Obviously, this will add to the pressure on other boards to take a similar course,” Jonathan warned, adding, “We should be prepared.” One museum, the South London Gallery, had already backed away from the family, quietly returning a donation. The Academy Award–winning actor Mark Rylance, who had previously served as artistic director of the Globe Theatre in London, publicly urged the Globe to refuse any further donations from the Sacklers. What Jonathan was worried about, he informed a company lawyer, was “a domino effect.”

The family convened a weekly conference call, at 8:00 a.m. each Tuesday, to discuss the crisis with their ever-expanding retinue of lawyers and public relations advisers. Everyone seemed to have their own representatives, and the number of participants just kept growing. Mortimer would go to a party and meet someone who recommended a new consultant; then that person would pop up on the call. “All of a sudden you have six different PR firms ringing the cash register, saying, ‘For \$50,000 a month, I’ll do whatever you want,’ ” one person who advised the family during this period said. Jonathan Sackler would personally wordsmith advertisements that the company put out to defend itself.

“The issue was that the family never wanted to admit guilt,” the person who advised the Sacklers recalled. At one point, Maria Barton, Purdue’s general counsel, had told them, “Unless the *family* starts saying something, whatever the company does will get drowned out by the family’s silence.” Some of the Sacklers felt that it was time to issue a statement of some kind, but nobody could come to an agreement about what it should say. When a transcript of Richard Sackler’s Kentucky deposition, which the family had fought so hard to keep sealed, leaked to the website STAT, there was a wave of coverage about Richard’s heartless comments regarding people who had become addicted to his drug. Mortimer and his wife, Jacqueline, were embarrassed by these revelations and horrified that they had become public. They wanted Richard to express some remorse over his statements.

Richard’s mother, Beverly, had stepped down from the board, at the age of ninety-three, at around the time the *Esquire* and *New Yorker* articles were published in 2017. She had never been particularly involved in the business, even when she was on the board. When a journalist reached Beverly at home in Connecticut one day to ask about the controversy engulfing

Purdue, she said, “I don’t know what I can say about the company except that they’ve been so careful always to keep from harming anybody.” As the scrutiny intensified, the rest of the Sacklers stepped down from the board, one by one. Richard was first. Then David. Then Theresa, and eventually Ilene, Jonathan, Kathe, and Mortimer.



Nan Goldin had established a weekly meeting of her own. Her group PAIN met on Wednesday nights in her apartment. It was a friendly and diverse coalition, consisting of artists, activists, longtime friends of Goldin’s, people who were in recovery, and people who had lost loved ones to the epidemic. The meetings had a loose, digressive vibe, which belied the fact that the group was planning a series of ever more ambitious demonstrations. Like a paramilitary cell, they communicated on encrypted phone apps and kept their “actions” shrouded in secrecy. They drew up a “hit list” of museums that had taken Sackler funding. Goldin was on the warpath.

In April 2018 she showed up on the National Mall and entered the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Trailed by a posse of protesters, she took up position under a lacquer wood sculpture called *Monkeys Grasp for the Moon*, which hung from the ceiling above. Arthur’s family still insisted that he should bear no taint of OxyContin, but Nan Goldin begged to differ. “Arthur’s skill was marketing pills!” she shouted. “Addiction equals profit!” Her followers produced orange pill bottles, some of them labeled “Valium,” and tossed them into a fountain.

One evening in February 2019, the crew filtered into the Guggenheim, where Mortimer Sackler had been a longtime trustee. They climbed the famous walkway that snakes around the central atrium. Then, on a signal, protesters on different levels unfurled bloodred banners, with black text:

SHAME ON SACKLER
200 DEAD EACH DAY
TAKE DOWN THEIR NAME

From the highest reaches of the Guggenheim, members of the group threw thousands of little slips of paper into the air. Like ticker tape at a parade, the paper fluttered and pinwheeled, forming a cloud. Each one was a little “prescription,” meant to evoke the blizzard of prescriptions that Richard Sackler had summoned at the launch of OxyContin.

“It’s time, Guggenheim!” Goldin bellowed. She was not a naturally charismatic speaker. She was shy by nature, nervous about public speaking; even with a megaphone in her hand, she often looked self-conscious and distracted. And there was something wraithlike about her. Something fragile. She had been sober for barely two years. She felt a deep sense of kinship with the people she encountered who had struggled with addiction or who had lost loved ones to it. The members of PAIN tended to mother Goldin, looking after her. There was a palpable sense within the group that her activism had become an organizing principle through which she was managing her own recovery.

Goldin’s most powerful weapon as an activist was her eye. Someone had alerted *The New York Times*, and a photographer showed up at the Guggenheim and took position on the ground floor, then pointed the camera up at the ceiling as the prescriptions floated down into the rotunda. It was an extraordinary image, with the white slips flickering through the museum’s white interior, past the bright red protest banners. Goldin and her fellow activists had wanted it to look like an actual snow flurry, so they printed eight thousand prescription slips, to ensure that there were enough to fill the space. The photo ran alongside an article in the paper: “Guggenheim Targeted by Protesters for Accepting Money from Family with OxyContin Ties.”

The following month, the Guggenheim announced that after a two-decade relationship in which the Sacklers had donated \$9 million, the museum would no longer accept any future donations from the family. The same week, the National Portrait Gallery in London revealed that it had turned down a \$1.3 million gift from the Sacklers. Two days after the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate announced that it would not “seek or accept further donations from the Sacklers.”

This was the domino effect Jonathan Sackler had worried about. The museums would not “take the name down,” as Goldin had demanded: “We

do not intend to remove references to this historic philanthropy,” the Tate said; the Guggenheim let it be known that there were “contractual” stipulations that meant that the Sackler Center for Arts Education must continue to carry that name. But this unprecedented move by cultural institutions to distance themselves from the Sacklers had clearly happened because of Goldin’s influence. In addition to framing each protest as if it were a photograph, she had boldly exercised her own leverage as a prominent figure in the art world. Prior to the National Portrait Gallery’s decision, Goldin let it be known that the museum had approached her about doing a retrospective. “I will not do the show,” she told *The Observer*, “if they take the Sackler money.” When news broke that the museum had declined the gift, Goldin felt vindicated. “I congratulate them on their courage,” she said.

The following month, at the London opening of a solo show by the German artist Hito Steyerl at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, Steyerl delivered a surprising speech. “I would like to address the elephant in the room,” she said, and then proceeded to denounce the Sacklers, encouraging other artists to rally behind the cause of disentangling museums from the family. She likened the relationship between the art world and its toxic patrons to being “married to a serial killer.” What was needed, she said, was “a divorce.” The museum promptly announced that, though it might be named after the Sacklers, the Serpentine had “no future plans” to accept gifts from the family.



These protests were not without consequences for the protesters. One night, one of Goldin’s close deputies in PAIN, Megan Kapler, was leaving Goldin’s Brooklyn apartment when she noticed a middle-aged man sitting behind the wheel of his car, watching her. A few days later, Kapler left her home in another part of Brooklyn to walk her dog and saw the same man. They made eye contact. She kept walking. When she turned back to look at him, the man was taking her picture with his phone.

The members of PAIN assumed that the Sacklers must have arranged for them to be followed, but also that the man was probably a subcontractor of

some sort and that it would be very difficult for them to prove definitively whom he was working for. A few days later, he appeared in front of Goldin's home once again. This time, members of the group went outside and filmed him. He wouldn't speak to them, but he didn't hide, either. He stood, leaning on his car, a smirk on his face, and began to clip his fingernails. Had he been sent to monitor them or intimidate them? In a way, it didn't matter. His presence was an affirmation. Their campaign was working. In May, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, home to the original Sackler Wing, announced that it would "step away" from gifts that it determined were "not in the public interest."

At one point, Goldin found out that Madeleine Sackler's prison documentary, *It's a Hard Truth, Ain't It*, would be premiering at the Tribeca Film Festival. She arranged to attend the screening, along with several of her comrades. They brought pill bottles, entered separately, and sat in the audience. There was supposed to be a Q&A after the film, but Madeleine seemed visibly uncomfortable. She must have been alerted to the unwelcome guests. Soon, a security guard approached Goldin and escorted her out of the theater.

"Do you know who made this film?" Goldin said to passersby outside. She handed pill bottles to curious strangers and denounced the documentary as "reputation washing." Of Madeleine, Goldin said, "She presents herself as a social activist but she has been enriched through the addiction of hundreds of thousands of people." In her view, any Sackler heir who "took the money" and made no effort to speak out was "culpable."

When a reporter from *The Guardian* asked Madeleine about her family, she replied that she had been working "more than full-time" on her films and her work was her "sole focus." She did not want to talk about her family. Pressed on the fact that she was tremendously wealthy because of OxyContin, and asked whether she had a problem with that, she said, "With what, exactly?"

Madeleine's argument, insofar as she could be bothered to articulate it, seemed to be that she should be judged solely on her work and not on the basis of any business that her family happened to own. She "never worked at the company or had any influence in it," she said. (After the interview, *The Guardian's* press invitation to the festivities was revoked.)

“The Sackler name has become synonymous with the opioids crisis,” Nan Goldin said. “I want to ask Madeleine, is that the legacy you want? Why not use your name, money and influence to address the crisis, and take responsibility?”



Purdue was reeling. In February 2018, the company had announced that it would lay off half its sales force and would no longer promote opioids to physicians. This might have seemed like a considerable concession to the outside world, but internally the company had already calculated that because OxyContin was a “matured” product, the business would still collect hundreds of millions of dollars of profit from so-called carryover sales of the drug, even without a sales force. That summer, the company went further, eliminating its sales force altogether, and saying that Purdue was “taking significant steps to transform and diversify beyond our historic focus of pain medications.”

But it was too late now for reinvention. Russell Portenoy, the King of Pain, had signed on to join the multidistrict litigation as a witness against Purdue and other companies, in exchange for being dismissed as a defendant himself. He acknowledged that he personally had become aware of “serious opioid related adverse outcomes” as early as the late 1990s, though he continued to publicly downplay the risks of the drugs. As for Purdue, he said, even among the defendants in the multidistrict case, it deserved a special distinction. No other company “had previously promoted an opioid drug as aggressively, or encouraged the use of an opioid by non-specialists,” he said.

But the biggest threat to the Sacklers surfaced in January 2019, when the attorney general of Massachusetts unveiled a legal complaint that did something no other prosecutor had done in twenty years of litigation against Purdue: it named eight members of the Sackler family—Richard, Beverly, Jonathan, David, Theresa, Kathe, Mortimer, and Ilene—as defendants.

Chapter 27

NAMED DEFENDANTS

RICHARD SACKLER'S DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, Joss Sackler, was married to his son, David. She'd been living in Park Slope, in Brooklyn, when she met her future husband on a blind date. Joss thought of David as a "finance guy"—serious, punctual, maybe a bit conventional—whereas she was something more exotic. The daughter of a Canadian diplomat, she had gone to high school in Japan and nurtured a youthful ambition to become a spy. Instead, she went to graduate school in linguistics at the City University of New York. When Raymond Sackler was still alive, Joss and David would spend weekends with him and Beverly at the family compound in Greenwich. Joss found Raymond (or "Poppi," as his grandchildren called him) very impressive. He was this "highly regarded scientist and businessman," she would say. "He was knighted in France and in England." In the mansion overlooking the Long Island Sound, Raymond would receive eminent visitors. He commanded tremendous respect, it seemed to Joss, and just an "outpouring of love." Raymond was such a luminary, in fact, that Joss decided that until she finished graduate school, she should probably keep her maiden name, Jaseleen Ruggles, because she didn't want "preferential treatment." Her dissertation was about the "narco-propaganda" of drug cartels in Mexico and how these criminal drug rings endeavor, as she put it, "to garner public support from local communities."

With her dissertation in hand, Jaseleen Ruggles became Joss Sackler. She might have looked the part of a billionaire's wife—slim and blond and very fit, with lips that puffed and puckered. But she was no mere trophy, she insisted. She started a club for young rich women who drink wine, or, as she referred to it, a "members only, female-led collective celebrating the intersection of art, wine, fashion, and culture." She was a trained sommelier

(“Level II”) and called the group Les Bouledogues Vignerannes, the “winemaking bulldogs.” LBV for short. “Joss is a threat assessor by training and her research focuses on the risk assessment of violent threats made by the Mexican Cartels,” a biography (since removed) on her website declared. She was also “an avid adventurer,” “a target shooter, a rock climber, and a mountaineer” who spoke “English, French, Spanish and Farsi.”

Like Madeleine Sackler, Joss felt strongly that because she personally did not sit on the board of Purdue, she had no meaningful connection to the pharmaceutical empire and it should certainly not constrain her ability to chase her own dreams. But the association was proving difficult to shake. In an accident of exquisitely awkward timing, it was during the period when the Sacklers were encountering a new level of scrutiny from legal authorities and the press that Joss decided to realize her own long-held ambition to turn LBV into a fashion brand. She produced a series of sporty ensembles in Day-Glo colors that were inspired by her passion for mountain climbing. “I’m committed to make this successful,” she vowed, noting that LBV had the potential to become “the next all-American, ready-to-wear, couture-infused brand.” She described the venture, in a Facebook post, as “my own women’s initiative unrelated to Purdue, aimed at promoting women’s empowerment.”

But whereas Madeleine had been quite adept at convincing people in her professional circles that her art should be judged on its own merits, without reference to her status as an opioid heiress, Joss would have a rougher time of it. After a fashion reporter from *The New York Times* expressed an interest in her collection, she agreed to an interview, only to be bombarded with impertinent questions about her family. In an indignant web post, Joss framed this contretemps as a gender issue, saying, “Stop talking about who the men in my life are and review the fucking neon hoodies.” (The *Times* fashion writer, Matthew Schneier, was privately amused by this, observing to a friend that, had he actually focused on the clothes themselves, the article might have been much harsher.)

Here was Joss’s predicament: if you imagine the members of the Sackler clan arrayed across concentric circles of culpability, she lived uncomfortably close to the bull’s-eye. Her father-in-law was the father of

OxyContin. Her husband was the only third-generation Sackler to serve on the board. And her situation was exacerbated by the fact that unlike the family she married into, Joss Sackler stubbornly refused to remain silent. She threw parties (“\$700/Guest, LBV Curated Wines”). She and David paid \$22 million in cash for a mansion in Bel Air, then told people that they were angry the sale had been reported in *TMZ* and other media outlets, despite having chosen, to handle the transaction, a celebrity real estate agent from the TV show *Million Dollar Listing*. And she kept giving interviews. “I support my family 500 percent,” Joss told *Town & Country*. “I believe they will be completely vindicated. But they have nothing to do with LBV.” For that article, Joss met the reporter at a restaurant on Gramercy Park. “They’re going to regret fucking with a linguist,” she said, of her detractors. “They already do.” During the interview, with no encouragement from the reporter, she literally ordered the suckling pig. This Marie Antoinette routine was so over the top (could she possibly be sincere? Or was this some kind of conceptual art performance?) that it seemed custom engineered for the gossip pages, and before long *Page Six* was chronicling Joss’s every outré utterance. The paper crowned her “the Lady Macbeth of Opioids.” She responded by sending one of the reporters, by text message, an emoji of a middle finger.



One major source of Joss’s troubles was a woman named Maura Healey, who was serving her second term as the attorney general of Massachusetts. Healey was in her mid-forties. The first openly gay attorney general in the United States, she had grown up in New Hampshire, just over the state line, the oldest of five children who were raised by a single mother. She played basketball at Harvard, then spent a couple of years playing the sport professionally in Europe. She wasn’t tall—she was five feet four, with a dimpled smile and an informal manner—but she was tough, and it would become a standard quip in her repertoire of one-liners that as a short woman playing pro basketball, she had learned how to “take on the big guy.” Healey always said this in jest. But if it was a laugh line, it was also a warning.

Opioids had hit Massachusetts especially badly. Healey had started investigating in 2015, right after she took office in her first term, because on the campaign trail people from across the state kept telling her about how these pharmaceuticals had devastated their communities. One of Healey's campaign volunteers had a son with an opioid dependency. The woman Healey put in charge of this new investigation, her deputy attorney general, Joanna Lydgate, was close to someone who had overdosed. Along with her staff, Healey began to focus on Purdue. One of her attorneys, Sandy Alexander, started by visiting the medical examiner's office and requesting the death certificates of people in Massachusetts who had died of opioid overdoses since 2009. He cross-checked those names with people who had prescriptions for Purdue's painkillers. The company had always claimed that instances of so-called iatrogenic addiction—people becoming addicted when they were prescribed the drug by a doctor and took it as directed—were practically unheard of. But Alexander was able to confirm that over the last decade, in Massachusetts alone, 671 people filled prescriptions for Purdue painkillers and subsequently died of opioid-related overdoses.

In June 2018, Healey held a press conference in Boston. She invited representatives of a group that assists families who have lost loved ones to opioid-related deaths, and she announced that she was suing not just Purdue Pharma but the eight family members who had served on the company's board. Corporations don't run themselves, she reasoned. They're run by people. And she wanted to name names. "The public deserves answers," Healey said. "That's what this lawsuit is about." A few months later, just before Christmas, Healey announced her intention to file an amended version of her lawsuit, which would supply some of those answers to the public.

Purdue and the Sacklers had employed their usual tactics. As local counsel, they hired a woman named Joan Lukey, who happened to be Healey's friend and mentor and had served as the finance chair on her campaign. This did not strike Healey as a coincidence. Before Healey could formally name the Sacklers in the suit, Mary Jo White traveled to Boston with a team of lawyers, to explain to her why that would be a mistake. But Healey, who earlier in her career had practiced at Wilmer, one of the very white-shoe law firms that represented Purdue, was openly dubious when it

came to this sort of backroom overture. Healey knew about White by reputation, and admired her, as someone who had blazed a trail for other women in the law. “It pains me to look at somebody like Mary Jo White, who represented them in 2007 and continues to represent them,” she said. “Not that there isn’t room to represent corporations, that’s worthy work. But this corporation? These people? It’s no different from representing a drug cartel, in my mind.” When Purdue sent its lawyers, Healey opted not to attend the meeting herself, sending her trial attorneys instead. “I had no interest in meeting with them, particularly because some of them are people I have personal relationships with,” she said. “I wanted distance from that. Let them talk to my lawyers.”

The multidistrict litigation had created a huge trove of sealed documents that had been secured from Purdue and other pharma companies. Dan Aaron Polster, the Ohio federal judge overseeing the litigation, had ruled that the attorneys who were party to the proceedings could have access to the documents but that otherwise they must remain hidden from public view. “I don’t think anyone in this country is interested in a whole lot of finger pointing,” Polster had asserted. “People aren’t interested in depositions, and discovery, and trials.” But now Healey and her prosecutors requested access to the sealed files and received some twelve million documents related to Purdue.

The sealed records told the story of OxyContin as it had played out inside the company, and Healey’s team found that while the Sacklers had succeeded for many years in keeping the family name off the opioid crisis, in the private papers of Purdue it was *everywhere*. There were emails from Richard micromanaging the marketing staff and emails from Kathe discussing Project Tango and emails from Mortimer complaining about his disbursements and emails from Jonathan wondering what the company could do to stop their opioid profits from slipping. There were emails from more than one chief executive at Purdue complaining that the constant interference by the family made it impossible for the CEO to do his job. The Sacklers didn’t just own Purdue, the Massachusetts prosecutors realized. They ran it. Healey’s team updated their complaint, incorporating this explosive new material.

But before they could make the complaint public, Purdue's lawyers intervened, pleading with the state judge overseeing the case in Massachusetts, Janet Sanders, to "impound" the document, preventing it from being released. In a hearing, a Purdue lawyer suggested that Healey had "cherry picked" evidence. But Judge Sanders, invoking the public interest, said, "My antennae go up when there's a request to heavily redact any public filing in a case like this." She issued a ruling saying that Healey's unredacted complaint should be released. In her opinion, Judge Sanders pointed out that Purdue's stated concerns—that the release would "embarrass individuals and spark public outrage"—were not exactly a compelling basis for keeping the complaint suppressed. She also invoked a dark precedent in Massachusetts: the shameful history of local courts "impounding" information in cases involving allegations of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests.

This decision might have come as a shock to Purdue, which had been so successful, for decades, in persuading judges to keep its compromising internal documents secret. Judge Polster in Ohio had been much more accommodating, so the company's lawyers now made an emergency appeal to him, to see if he might intervene and prevent the complaint about the Sacklers from becoming public. "We did not produce these documents to the Massachusetts AG," a Purdue lawyer, Mark Cheffo, complained in a teleconference with the judge. The company had turned over the documents in the context of the federal litigation, but now they were being used in a different arena, with different rules.

"I'm not very happy with the Massachusetts AG either," Judge Polster grumbled. But his hands were tied, he said. If a state judge in Massachusetts had ordered the full complaint to be released, Polster, as a federal judge in Ohio, had no authority to defy that directive. "I can't control what a state court judge does," he said.

Cheffo was furious. If the complaint is made public, he vowed, then they would all wake up the next morning to "an incredible news cycle."

He was right. Maura Healey believed that in addition to being a mechanism for justice and accountability, the law has another function: truth seeking. For decades, Purdue had obscured the nature and extent of its own culpability by settling cases and sealing records. By contrast, when the

Big Tobacco litigation ended, the records weren't sealed or destroyed. Instead, an archive was established, with fourteen million documents from the cigarette companies, and this became an indispensable resource for historians, journalists, and public health specialists. By including a great deal of sensitive, never-before-seen information in her complaint, and then pushing to make the complaint public, Healey was seeking to establish an incontrovertible record of how this historic crisis of addiction had been born.

On January 31, Healey released her 274-page complaint. It alleged that the named Sacklers “made the choices that caused much of the opioid epidemic.” The document was studded with meeting minutes and board presentations and internal emails, and it presented a catalog of breathtaking venality. Staff at Purdue had warned the Sacklers in the past that the company’s internal documents might one day come back to haunt them, and now that day had come. Healey used the Sacklers’ own emails to lay out the chain of command through which the family had managed the company. (The suit also named, as defendants, eight current and former executives and members of Purdue’s board who weren’t part of the family.) The complaint illustrated, in vivid detail, Richard Sackler’s demonization of those who were unfortunate enough to become addicted to Purdue’s flagship product. It reproduced the exchange in which Richard had inquired about the possibility of selling OxyContin in Germany as an over-the-counter drug, and the email in which he expressed his disappointment (“Blah, humbug”) upon learning that Purdue was selling only \$20 million worth of OxyContin a week. It contained numerous instances, many of them quite recent, of the Sacklers expressing an interest in persuading doctors to put patients on higher doses of opioids for longer periods of time, notwithstanding the widespread medical consensus (and guidance from the CDC) that doing so would sharply increase the risk of addiction.

Some of the most shocking details in the complaint concerned the manner in which, years after the guilty plea in Virginia, Purdue sales representatives continued to call on dodgy doctors. One doctor, Fathalla Mashali, who ran a chain of clinics in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, was described by Purdue reps in 2010 as a “very good new target.” When the company learned that Mashali was under investigation by authorities in

Rhode Island, it instructed reps to continue calling on him in Massachusetts. One Purdue rep described the scene at the doctor's office in 2013 as so crowded that patients had brought "their own 'beach type' folding chairs to sit on because at any given time, he can have 35 or more patients waiting." Mashali eventually lost his medical license, pleaded guilty to twenty-seven counts of health-care fraud, and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

From 2008 to 2012, the complaint reported, Purdue's top prescriber in all of Massachusetts was a North Andover physician named Walter Jacobs. "He practiced alone," Healey noted. "He often worked only three days a week. Nevertheless, in five years, he prescribed more than 347,000 pills of Purdue opioids." Two hundred thousand of those pills were Oxy 80s. Purdue ended up offering Jacobs a \$50,000 contract to give speeches. The doctor was supportive of the Sacklers' mission to keep patients on higher doses over long stretches of time. Before he lost his medical license, the complaint revealed, Jacobs had one patient on OxyContin for two years, with a prescription for twenty-four 80-milligram pills each *day*.

"Purdue took advantage of addiction to make money," Healey wrote. "For patients, it was a massacre." The people who died in Massachusetts "worked as firefighters, homemakers, carpenters, truck drivers, nurses, hairdressers, fishermen, waitresses, students, mechanics, cooks, electricians, ironworkers, social workers, accountants, artists, lab technicians, and bartenders," the complaint read. "The oldest died at age 87. The youngest started taking Purdue's opioids at 16 and died when he was 18 years old."

The Sacklers were furious about the Massachusetts filing. Up to that point, they had been ciphers in the public eye. The family might speak openly about their philanthropy, but they had never given interviews about their business, and Purdue, as a privately held company, had always been a black box. But here was the tawdry reality, laid bare. An attorney for the Raymond side of the family derided Healey's filing as "histrionic." Mary Jo White, who represented the Mortimer side, argued that the claims were "inaccurate and misleading." The Sacklers put together their own filing, which slammed the complaint for "prolixity," ridiculed it as "hundreds of pages of litigational detritus," and urged the judge to dismiss the case. The family hadn't *directed* anyone to do anything, their attorneys contended. And anyway, the court in Massachusetts had no jurisdiction over them. The

company might have taken actions that affected Massachusetts, but its business affected *every* state. The argument seemed to be that Purdue was everywhere and yet nowhere. For Massachusetts to exert jurisdiction over the Sacklers, the attorneys argued, would violate their constitutional rights to due process.

The family maintained that their own words had been taken out of context. But when they supplied additional context, it was hardly exculpatory. Taking issue with the complaint's use of the "blizzard of prescriptions" speech, family lawyers pointed out that Richard had used the image as "an allusion to his delayed arrival at that event *due to the well-known Blizzard of 1996*," italics theirs, as if that made some major difference. The lawyers also seized on an email that Healey had used to illustrate Richard's tendency to micromanage. She had quoted an exchange between Richard and a subordinate in which Richard demanded, on a Sunday, that the employee send him some specific data that day. "This is a perfectly appropriate email from a director," Richard's lawyers asserted. When the long-suffering employee ultimately wrote back to Richard, "I have done as much as I can," it was not because Richard had been badgering him but rather because the employee "had family visiting." If anything, this additional detail seemed to compound the impression that Richard was an insensitive taskmaster.

The Sacklers' motion to dismiss the case was denied. In the attorney general's office, on a high floor in a downtown Boston skyscraper, Maura Healey walked from room to room, a big grin on her face, giving hugs to Sandy Alexander, a woman named Gillian Feiner, who was the lead attorney on the case, and other staffers. Healey posted a video of the celebration on Instagram. On the heels of the Massachusetts complaint, the attorney general of New York, Letitia James, had filed her own lawsuit against Purdue, in which she, too, named individual Sackler board members as defendants. James described OxyContin as the "taproot" of the crisis and noted that the Sacklers had paid themselves "hundreds of millions of dollars each year." Her suit highlighted one intriguing factor in particular. According to James, the Sacklers had known by 2014 that the company was being investigated and could eventually face the prospect of damaging judgments. Understanding that this day of reckoning was coming, the

Sacklers had assiduously siphoned money out of Purdue, the lawsuit suggested, and transferred it offshore, beyond the reach of U.S. authorities.

This was true. In fact, as far back as 2007, a week after the guilty plea in Virginia, Jonathan Sackler had emailed Richard and David, noting that an investment banker once told him, “Your family is already rich. The one thing you don’t want to do is become poor.”

“What do you think is going on in all of these courtrooms right now?” David Sackler wrote back. “We’re rich? For how long?” It was only a matter of time, David argued, before some lawsuit manages to “get through to the family.” What they should do, he suggested, is “lever up where we can, and try to generate some additional income. We may well need it... Even if we have to keep it in cash.” So the family started systematically taking more and more money out of the company. From 1997 through the guilty plea in 2007, Purdue had distributed only \$126 million in cash to the Sacklers. Beginning in 2008, it started to distribute billions. In a 2014 email to Mortimer, Jonathan acknowledged, “We’ve taken a fantastic amount of money out of the business.” If the Sacklers took money from Purdue and moved it out of the country because they knew that eventually a lawsuit might “get through to the family,” then that might be a form of fraud, James contended, and now she wanted to try to claw back some of those funds.

At McKinsey, the high-priced consultants who had spent so many years helping the Sacklers devise new ways to flog their opioids were starting to worry. It was probably time for the firm to start thinking about “eliminating all our documents and emails,” one of the consultants, Martin Elling, wrote to another. “Will do,” his colleague Arnab Ghatak replied.

The same month James filed her suit, the Sackler Trust in Britain announced that it would be suspending further philanthropy. In a statement, Dame Theresa blamed the “press attention that these legal cases in the United States is generating.” The family name was increasingly regarded as a badge of ill repute. “Five years ago, the Sackler family was considered one of New York City’s most esteemed, generous dynasties,” the *New York Post* observed. “Now they can’t get a museum to take their money.”

Nor was it just the museum world that had come to regard the Sacklers as toxic. Achievement First, a charter school network to which Jonathan Sackler had been a major donor, announced that it had “decided not to seek

further funding from the Sackler family.” A hedge fund, Hildene Capital Management, which had invested some of the family’s wealth, said that it was no longer comfortable doing business with the Sacklers. Brett Jefferson, the fund’s manager, revealed that someone close to the firm had suffered an “opioid-related tragedy,” and said, “My conscience led me to terminate the relationship.” Even Purdue’s banker, JPMorgan Chase, cut ties with the company.

For most of the Sacklers, who had grown up feeling that their name conferred a certain prestige if not entitlement, the suddenness with which they had become social pariahs must have been unsettling. But this shock does not appear to have occasioned much soul-searching about the company and what it had done. In a private family WhatsApp conversation, the heirs of Mortimer Sackler discussed their tribulations purely in terms of the challenging PR optics. Dame Theresa complained that “trial lawyers have a media campaign against the family.” Marissa Sackler derided Nan Goldin’s protests as a “stunt.” Samantha Sackler discussed the urgent need to put forward an “alternative narrative.” Nowhere, in months of candid text messages, did a single family member express any private misgivings or raise any difficult questions about the conduct of the family.

The Mortimer and Raymond wings might clash over many things, but they shared an embittered conviction that they had done nothing wrong. “The media is eager to distort and portray anything we say or do as grotesque and evil,” Jonathan Sackler complained in an email. To Jonathan it seemed that the company had been caught up in a broader culture of “blame” in America. “The ‘blame frame’ has resulted in massive incarceration and public expenditures,” he suggested. Inspired, perhaps, by his daughter Madeleine’s films, Jonathan now saw parallels between the plight of Americans who were incarcerated and the scrutiny that his family faced over the billions of dollars they had made selling opioids. “The tort bar, in its genius, figured out how to position the pharmaceutical industry as the latest (and wonderfully deep-pocketed) ‘bad guy,’” Jonathan wrote. Why was nobody focusing on fentanyl—which was very deadly, and on the rise? he wondered. Perhaps Purdue should add “a Speakers Bureau program” to help get the word out. It was important, he said, to emphasize that the company is “*trustworthy*.”

David Sackler agreed. The fundamental problem, he thought, wasn't anything that Purdue or the family had done but rather the *narrative*. "We have not done a good job of talking about this," he would say. "That's what I regret the most." The family had a compelling story to tell, David thought. Rather than cowering defensively, they should come out swinging and tell it.

To Mortimer, it seemed that the Sacklers were engaged in a "battle." He shared Jonathan's view that part of the problem was the "tort system." But more fundamentally, he argued in an email to other family members, prescription opioids "are NOT the CAUSE of drug abuse, addiction or the so called 'opioid crisis.'" It was telling that in 2019, Mortimer Sackler was still using scare quotes to describe the epidemic. "I also don't think we should use the term 'opioid crisis' or even 'opioid addiction crisis' in our messaging," he continued. As an alternative, Mortimer suggested, they should talk about "drug abuse and addiction." Privately, the Sacklers were still clinging to their old and cherished notion that it wasn't the drug that was the problem; it was the abusers.

At one point, Mortimer wrote to Purdue's new general counsel, Marc Kesselman, along with Mary Jo White and several others, to request some statistics that he thought might be helpful in making the family's case. He wanted to know whether it was possible to assemble information about people who had overdosed—like the victims cited in the Massachusetts case—in order to figure out if they had life insurance policies. Someone had told him that such policies often pay out for "accidental drug overdoses" but not for suicides. And this had gotten Mortimer thinking. "I believe it is fair to assume that some portion of overdoses are actually suicides," he wrote.

Mortimer also made quiet appeals to powerful people in New York, looking for support. "I am meeting with Michael Bloomberg tomorrow," he informed executives at Purdue at one point, saying that one topic for discussion would be "current narrative vs the truth." The family had been trying to refocus the discussion to heroin and fentanyl; perhaps Bloomberg would have some ideas. They met in Bloomberg's offices, and the former mayor advised Mortimer on messaging, saying that the family should develop a list of ten talking points to repeat. (After the meeting, Mortimer

outsourced this project to Purdue’s communications staff, instructing them to come up with a list for his review.)

Another person to whom Mortimer made an overture in this period was George Soros. He wanted advice from the billionaire financier and philanthropist, who had become a target of wild (and often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theories that made him out to be an all-powerful global puppet master. Maybe Soros would recognize some of his own struggles in the plight of the Sacklers and offer guidance on how to navigate this storm of negative publicity. Mortimer made his case to someone in Soros’s organization, asking to schedule a conversation with the man himself. But Soros declined to take the call.



At a certain point, David and Joss decided to sell their New York apartment on East Sixty-Sixth Street and move to Florida. “I’m not a fearful person,” Joss said, invoking her mountaineering bona fides. “If K2 doesn’t scare me, Florida does not scare me.” (She had not climbed K2.) “Sacklers Fleeing NYC,” the gossip columns blared. The couple purchased a mansion near Boca Raton for \$7.4 million. The litigation against the Sacklers had become so comprehensive, by this stage, that David and Joss were moving out of New York, a jurisdiction that was suing the family, and down to Palm Beach County, which was suing them, too.

It was a measure of just how intense the opprobrium had become that a New Jersey man, who happened also to be named David Sackler, initiated a lawsuit of his own against a number of media outlets that had used a photograph of him, instead of the other David Sackler, in stories about the family. Being taken “for the wrong David Sackler has undermined his reputation,” the lawsuit contended, mentioning that this David Sackler had been reduced to adopting a pseudonym to get a table in a restaurant. Not to be left out, Purdue University, in West Lafayette, Indiana, issued a press release clarifying that it “has never been affiliated in any way with Purdue Pharma.”

The story had reached a tipping point. The late-night host Stephen Colbert did a segment on the Sacklers, joking that they had amended the

Hippocratic oath to “First, do no harm. Unless harming is incredibly profitable.” He displayed a photograph of Richard, Jonathan, Raymond, and Beverly, “seen here not giving a fuck.” John Oliver, of the satirical news program *Last Week Tonight*, also aired a segment on the family. The long-standing invisibility of the Sacklers “feels deliberate,” Oliver mused. He pointed out that Richard Sackler never gave interviews. But the litigation was providing “glimpses of the depths of Richard’s involvement.” Oliver mentioned Richard’s leaked Kentucky deposition, and he articulated a subtle point: because only the transcript had leaked, and not the video, it was difficult to do much with the deposition on the nightly news. How do you illustrate words on a page?

The show devised a diabolically creative solution. Oliver enlisted a series of prominent actors to deliver dramatic renditions of Richard’s deposition and correspondence. The actor Michael Keaton, with an indifferent scowl, reenacted the moment when Richard was sent an article saying that fifty-nine people from a single state had died from overdoses, and responded, “This is not too bad.” Bryan Cranston, who played the meth kingpin Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, delivered a rendition of Richard’s speech at the OxyContin launch at the Wigwam. Michael K. Williams, who played Omar Little in *The Wire*, offered a third interpretation, his features twisted into a bloodless grimace. And a fourth actor, Richard Kind, did a comedic send-up of all the many times Sackler replied to questions about his company and his own conduct with the words “I don’t know.” Oliver told viewers that he had set up a website, sacklergallery.com, where they could watch more of these clips. He’d chosen the web address, he said, because “they love having their name on fucking galleries.”

The family had learned, in advance, that *Last Week Tonight* was preparing a segment. Mortimer’s wife, Jacqueline, panicked. In an overture to the producers, representatives for the family suggested that Jacqueline would like to meet with John Oliver personally, to plead her case. But Oliver did not generally meet with the subjects of his program, and declined to take the Sacklers up on this offer. Jacqueline sent an irate email to others in the family. “This is my son’s favorite show,” she wrote. “He watches it every week with all of his friends. This situation is destroying our work, our friendships, our reputation and our ability to function in society. And worse,

it dooms my children. How is my son supposed to apply to high school in September?”

Like her husband and others in the family, Jacqueline felt a vivid sense of persecution, an angry conviction that she and her relatives were being made to suffer. “I’m done having our family serving as the nation’s punching bag for problems that existed long before OxyContin and will exist long afterwards,” she wrote. “I have yet to see ANYTHING illegal or even immoral that this company has done.” This vilification was a “punishment” that was “being handed out to every man, woman and child, past present and future for an entire family,” Jacqueline Sackler proclaimed. “Lives of children are being destroyed.”

Chapter 28

THE PHOENIX

ONE DAY IN AUGUST 2019, David Sackler flew to Cleveland to represent his family at a summit of the many attorneys involved in the multidistrict litigation. He had come with a proposal. David was stocky and bearish, with dark brown hair, the light eyes of his grandfather Raymond, the heavy jawline of his father, Richard, and a beard that was flecked with gray. He had become a central player in his family's efforts to address the litigation. David was somewhat more socially adept than Richard was, but no more apologetic. He was angry: angry at the prosecutors and plaintiffs' lawyers suing his family, angry at the press, angry at the museums that were rejecting Sackler gifts. The family's great generosity, he felt, had suddenly been "turned against us."

David was adamant that the Sacklers had done nothing wrong. The science had evolved, he liked to say. People's understanding of addiction had changed. This was a complex business. The pharmaceutical industry was very *complicated*. The FDA had approved everything that the Sacklers did. And anyway, all of their competitors did the same thing. David felt that the family should be more forthright about telling their own story. In fact, just recently, he had given an interview to Bethany McLean, a veteran financial journalist who wrote for *Vanity Fair*. It was the first time in six decades of Sackler ownership of Purdue that any member of the family had granted a substantial interview about the business. David vented to McLean about the "vitriolic hyperbole" and "endless castigation" that his family had been subjected to. "I have three young kids," he said. "My four-year-old came home from nursery school and asked, 'Why are my friends telling me that our family's work is killing people?'"

David fired through the standard talking points. The lawsuits were premised on the notion that the Sacklers had actually been in charge of Purdue, and that was “just so not true.” Purdue’s own McKinsey consultants might have concluded, privately, that the Sacklers were “involved in all levels of decision-making on a weekly basis.” But now David claimed that as a board member from 2012 to 2018 he had done little more than vote on “information I was given.” It wasn’t as if the family were actually *calling the shots*. “We didn’t cause the crisis,” he said flatly. In fact, the biggest misstep he was prepared to acknowledge was the Sacklers’ failure to correct the erroneous narrative that they *were* the cause. He was speaking now, he said, as part of a campaign to “begin humanizing ourselves as a family.”

But this might not have worked out quite the way David intended. McLean was a formidable reporter who, as a young journalist at *Fortune*, had written the first big article to cast doubts about Enron, then gone on to chronicle the company’s collapse. She was not the sort of journalist who was likely to just take David’s word for it. In her article, she carefully went through each of his arguments, taking it seriously, considering it, then explaining why it was wrong. The notion that less than 1 percent of patients got addicted to opioids had not, in fact, been some kind of scientific consensus, as David suggested. For him to point to the fact that the FDA signed off on Purdue’s decisions was to overlook the degree to which the FDA had been compromised by Big Pharma in general and Purdue Pharma in particular. Asked about the lawsuits against the company, David dismissed them with a wave, suggesting that the complaints boiled down to “ ‘Oh, you shouldn’t have marketed these things at all,’ ” to which he could only say, impatiently, “I guess that’s a hindsight debate one can have.”

At this point, nearly every state in the union was suing Purdue. Two dozen states had joined Massachusetts and New York in also suing the Sacklers personally. Then there were the thousands of other cases brought by cities and counties and hospitals and school districts and tribes. When California filed suit earlier in the summer, the state’s attorney general called out David’s father in particular, saying that Richard had “started the fire.” Richard had been deposed by a new set of lawyers, in Stamford earlier that year. He looked old and had lost some of his vigor. But he did not appear to have softened his views. Asked whether he should have felt any obligation,

before he put a narcotic on the market and claimed that it was less likely to be abused, to have some scientific basis for believing that might actually be true, he delivered a fragmentary soliloquy that could have been written by David Mamet: “I think, in retrospect, you could—every misfortune in life, you’re asking a question, if you knew what would happen, what would you—wouldn’t you have done something to prevent it? The answer is: of course. But we didn’t expect any such event.”

Asked about the fact that the company had conducted no studies on addiction or abuse liability before marketing OxyContin as less addictive and subject to abuse, Richard reflected, “With the fullness of time, maybe that would have been a good idea. Maybe it would have prevented some... some misfortune. But that’s speculative. I don’t know.”

The same month as Richard’s deposition, Purdue settled with one of the states, agreeing to pay Oklahoma \$270 million, most of which would go toward funding a center for addiction studies and treatment. The Sacklers likely felt that they had no choice: a trial date had been set, and the intention was for the trial to be televised, with testimony that would have been horrendously damaging for Purdue. Besides, juries are unpredictable. They had been known to hand down outlandish penalties in cases featuring sympathetic mom-and-pop plaintiffs and corporate fat-cat defendants. Nevertheless, the Sacklers made it clear in a statement that the Oklahoma deal was not a viable “financial model for future settlement discussions.”

“You’re talking two thousand cases,” Mary Jo White said. “How long will that take to go through the system?” The family did not want to fight these cases individually, or to fight them at all, for that matter. For nearly a quarter of a century, the Sacklers had thrived on their ability to keep cases *out* of court. What the clan wanted now was something White described as a “global resolution.” Purdue was scheduled to face another trial, this one in Ohio, starting in October—unless they could strike a deal first.

So David Sackler had been deputized to travel to Cleveland and make an offer on the family’s behalf. Ten or so state attorneys general had gathered for the meeting, which took place at a federal courthouse downtown. David and his legal team presented their proposal. The states had all brought their suits separately, but what the Sacklers suggested was an overall resolution that would sweep in all of the plaintiffs in all the different suits. The

concept that David and his team outlined was that the Sacklers would relinquish control of Purdue and turn the company into a public trust, and the family would donate a large sum of money to address the opioid crisis. In exchange, the Sacklers would be granted immunity from “all potential federal liability” related to OxyContin. It was a grand bargain, a single negotiated pact that would resolve all of the cases at once and deliver the Sacklers the peace of mind of knowing that they would not spend the rest of their lives in litigation. Almost as soon as the offer had been made, the terms leaked to the press. A wave of headlines announced the news: “Purdue Pharma Offers \$10–12 Billion to Settle Opioid Claims.”

This seemed like a genuinely significant figure—far more than any sum that had been bandied about in the past. It might not be enough to fully address the costs of the opioid epidemic, far from it, but it would represent the lion’s share of the Sacklers’ remaining wealth. The offer appeared, at first glance, to signal a major victory for Maura Healey in Massachusetts, and Letitia James in New York, and the lawyer Mike Moore, and all the many plaintiffs and their attorneys. But as further specifics of the Cleveland proposal emerged, the Sacklers’ offer turned out to be more complicated and considerably less spectacular. The plan was for Purdue to declare bankruptcy and then be converted into a “public benefit trust.” According to Purdue’s lawyers, the trust would include more than \$4 billion in new drugs to treat addiction and counteract overdoses, which would be provided as an in-kind gift. That would be supplemented by an additional \$3 or \$4 billion in drug sales by the version of Purdue that would emerge from bankruptcy as a public trust. So the personal contribution of the Sacklers would be not \$10 billion (much less \$12 billion) but \$3 billion. And even that money would not come out of pocket. Instead, the Sacklers suggested that their contribution be financed by selling off Mundipharma, the global pharmaceutical concern that had continued to cultivate new markets for opioids abroad. As a concession, the Sacklers indicated that they *might* be willing to kick in an additional \$1.5 billion, bringing their total contribution to \$4.5 billion. But only if they managed to sell Mundipharma for more than \$3 billion. There was also one very notable nonmonetary provision. Under the terms of the deal that David Sackler offered, his family would admit to no wrongdoing whatsoever.

The initial press coverage presented this proposal as if it signified some kind of unconditional surrender. But to Maura Healey and her attorneys, the deal seemed deeply flawed. “It’s a joke,” Healey’s lead prosecutor, Gillian Feiner, said. The proposal was premised on a number of big contingencies, Feiner pointed out. And it seemed significant that the Sacklers, having been exposed as paragons of rapacious greed, remained unprepared to contribute any money of their own beyond what could be generated from the sale of Mundipharma. (By way of comparison, between 2008 and 2016 alone the family had paid itself nearly \$4.3 billion in OxyContin proceeds.) But also, on a more symbolic level, Feiner was struck by the fact that in a legal controversy about how destructive the rampant sale of OxyContin had been, one major plank of David Sackler’s proposal was that after Purdue was set up as a charitable trust, the plaintiffs would raise money to address the opioid crisis through ongoing proceeds from Purdue—which is to say, by selling the very drug that had started the crisis in the first place. This would create a perverse incentive in which the states, having inherited the company, would suddenly find themselves in the opioid business. “That would be the ultimate victory for the Sacklers,” Feiner’s colleague Sandy Alexander observed. “If the states step into their shoes and sell the same drugs to the same patients using the same doctors, and people keep dying at the same rate, the Sacklers would present that as a very compelling exoneration for them.”

Letitia James, the attorney general of New York, did not mince words, deriding David’s offer as “an insult, plain and simple.” To Maura Healey, it seemed highly significant that the proposal involved no admission of wrongdoing. That would effectively allow the Sacklers to buy silence, just as they had always done in the past. “It’s critical that all the facts come out about what this company and its executives and directors did, that they apologize for the harm they caused, and that no one profits from breaking the law,” Healey said. At one point during the negotiations in Cleveland, she and her deputy, Joanna Lydgate, were heading to an elevator when they crossed paths with David Sackler and his entourage. He introduced himself and said, “I’m really glad you could make it.” He had an air of self-importance, Healey thought, as if he was used to commanding respect.

“Well, David,” Healey said curtly, “your family hurt a lot of people.” Then she and Lydgate entered the elevator without shaking his hand.

Some of the negotiators made a counterproposal to the Sacklers, suggesting that they pledge more of their own personal money. They wanted the family to commit to the additional \$1.5 billion up front, rather than make it contingent on a higher sale for Mundipharma. But the Sacklers wouldn’t budge. “Almost all states would agree to the deal if the Sackler family would guarantee it 100%,” said North Carolina’s AG, Josh Stein, who negotiated with the family. But the Sacklers’ position, Stein said, was “Take it or leave it.”

This recalcitrance left the negotiators on the plaintiffs’ side feeling openly disgusted. “I think they are a group of sanctimonious billionaires who lied and cheated so they could make a handsome profit,” Pennsylvania’s attorney general, Josh Shapiro, said. “I truly believe that they have blood on their hands.”

Judge Polster, who was presiding over the negotiations, indicated that he wanted at least thirty-five states on board with the settlement. Unless the Sacklers could get the parties to sign on, they would face the trial in Ohio in the fall. But the family had one powerful piece of leverage. Because Purdue had never really developed another successful product after OxyContin, and because the company had been hemorrhaging money to pay its astronomical legal bills, and because the Sacklers had been taking money *out* of the business at every opportunity, Purdue Pharma’s coffers were nearly empty. Having sold some \$35 billion worth of OxyContin over two decades, the company might now be down, according to press reports, to as little as \$500 million in cash. On August 19, Purdue sent a letter to former sales reps informing them that the firm might not be able to fund their retirement benefits.

If the states did not want to sign off on their generous offer, the Sacklers indicated, then Purdue would just declare bankruptcy without a deal in place. Doing so would have one big near-term advantage for the Sacklers: after a company files for bankruptcy, the judge handling the process will generally freeze all litigation against the company so that it can be restructured. The Sacklers did not want Purdue to go to trial in October. If their settlement proposal wouldn’t keep the company out of the courtroom,

then bankruptcy would. And if Purdue did go bankrupt, it would leave virtually every state and all the other entities that had filed suit against the company with no choice but to fight over its remaining assets in bankruptcy court. Take the money now, Mary Jo White warned, or the alternative would be to “pay attorneys’ fees for years and years and years to come.”

This was a threat wrapped in velvet. In urging the plaintiffs to sign off on the Cleveland proposal, Purdue’s lawyers told them that the total amount they might hope to recover in a bankruptcy proceeding (and then somehow divvy up) could be as little as \$1 billion. It was true that Purdue was simply not worth that much money anymore. The Sacklers had managed to extend the patent exclusivity of OxyContin again and again since 1996, far longer than anyone had ever thought possible. But the cliff was finally approaching: the patents for the reformulated OxyContin were soon set to expire. “The party’s over,” one former Purdue executive said. “The public declaration is, ‘Okay, society. You’ve won.’ But to me, it almost seems like this was the plan all along.”

On September 8, press reports indicated that talks between the two sides had broken down. The family refused to commit more money, and too many of the state prosecutors were opposed to the deal. The Sacklers had rejected two alternative offers from the states about how payments could be handled, and they declined to offer counterproposals. “As a result, the negotiations are at an impasse,” the plaintiffs’ negotiators said, “and we expect Purdue to file for bankruptcy protection imminently.”



The next day, as people watching the case waited to see if Purdue would declare bankruptcy, Joss Sackler arrived at the Bowery Hotel, in lower Manhattan, for the runway show of the spring 2020 collection of her label LBV. It was Fashion Week in New York, and Joss was excited to present her new line. She had hired an actual designer, Elizabeth Kennedy, who had previously worked at Isaac Mizrahi and other notable labels. The two women had met at one of Joss’s wine soirees, and Kennedy signed on to design her collection, saying, “Joss and I are trying to create something new and fresh.” Kennedy felt no scruples about taking Joss’s money, saying that

the label “doesn’t have anything to do with” OxyContin. Joss arrived at the Bowery in a sleeveless red frock, escorted by two private security guards. Her husband might have been embroiled in the delicate process of trying to get a quorum of thirty-five states to sign off on the Sacklers’ settlement proposal. He might have been beta testing a new public posture of somber compassion (the Sacklers felt empathy, he insisted to *Vanity Fair*, “so much empathy”). But Joss was not going to let any of this noise interfere with her moment. Invitations to the show, which were distributed widely to media and fashion types, described Joss Sackler as “the undeterred ‘phoenix.’” She had not taken part in the *Vanity Fair* interview; the family’s handlers might have feared she would say something impolitic. But Joss did manage to appear in the accompanying photograph, posing in profile; standing, statuesquely, by her man, while David glowered directly into the camera. Joss posted the photo on Instagram and wrote, “Powerful words by my husband.”

In advance of the show, *Page Six* had crowed, “Fashionistas ‘Skipping’ Joss Sackler’s New York Fashion Week Show.” But Joss and her staff (she had a staff) had been working overtime to persuade people to come. They did this by offering free car service and hair and makeup to a variety of influential young fashion personalities, some of whom had never heard of the Sackler controversy, much less Joss herself. It was not unusual, at such events, for designers to seek out famous people who could sit in the front row, generating publicity and conferring an implicit endorsement. One celebrity whom Joss was angling to bring to the show was the singer, tabloid icon, and fabled hell-raiser Courtney Love. Her staff sent an invitation to Love, saying that Joss and Elizabeth Kennedy were both “huge fans” and that Love personified the kind of “strong and undeterred” woman that LBV was made for. As an inducement, they offered Love \$100,000 and a “custom-made ‘Phoenix’ dress from LBV embroidered with 24-carat gold thread.”

Courtney Love was no stranger to this type of invitation, and \$100,000 seemed like a more than reasonable sum for sitting through a twenty-minute fashion show. But when Love discovered who exactly Joss Sackler was, she was shocked. In an email, Joss’s representatives had stressed that “the brand has no relation to Purdue...other than Joss is married to the family.” But

that did seem like a relation! And what was so strange about Joss Sackler (of all people) inviting Courtney Love (of all people) to her fashion show was that Love, famously, had a more than incidental relation to opioids herself. Kurt Cobain, her late husband and the father of her daughter, had been addicted to heroin. He killed himself in 1994. Love had struggled with addiction herself, to heroin—but also to OxyContin. When Joss invited her to the LBV show, she had been sober for barely a year. The irony was almost too much to contemplate.

Just as Nan Goldin, when she came out of recovery, had directed her righteous anger at the family whose drug had put her in there, Courtney Love now lashed out herself. “I am one of the most famous reformed junkies on the planet,” she told Joss’s nemesis, *Page Six*. “What is it about me that says to Joss Sackler, ‘I will sell out to you?’ ” She mocked Joss’s wine club (with its “philanthropic arm”) and pilloried her fashion line. “This request from Joss Sackler is shameless and offensive after everything I, many of my friends, and millions of other addicts have been through with OxyContin,” she proclaimed. “I’m sober, but I will always be an opioid addict.” In the end, Love said, the moral stain on the Sackler family could not be covered up by any amount of “24 carat gold thread.”

Love was not in attendance when the music started booming and models, perched on precarious heels, began to saunter up and down an improvised runway on the terrace of the Bowery. David Sackler wasn’t either. But many friends and supporters of Joss did show up, and when questioned by reporters about the controversy, they tended to describe Joss’s business in the language of women’s empowerment. “It’s unfair,” one attendee told the *Daily Beast*. “She’s her own woman and people should see the line before they open their mouths. All she’s seen as is a man’s wife. For her to run a business is amazing.” This was Joss’s perspective, too. She traded barbs with Courtney Love on Instagram and quoted the singer’s own lyrics back to her: “Slow your troll @courtney love. I do not work for Purdue, I never did. Aren’t these your very words ‘we are not who we fuck?’ ” When the show was over, Joss beamed triumphantly, flanked by her security guards. “This was such a success,” she said.



Six days later, Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy. One peculiarity of American bankruptcy law is that a corporation can effectively pick the judge who will preside over the case. One day the previous March—six months before the company actually filed for bankruptcy—Purdue had paid a \$30 fee to change its address for litigation documents to an anonymous office building in White Plains, New York. There is a federal courthouse in White Plains, and only one bankruptcy judge presided there, a man named Robert Drain. Before his appointment to the bench in 2002, he had worked as a partner at the corporate law firm Paul, Weiss. The company selected Drain carefully. He would now exert tremendous control over the endgame for the Sacklers and Purdue.

The first thing that Drain could be expected to do, which was customary in any bankruptcy case, was to freeze all of the lawsuits against Purdue, pending resolution of the bankruptcy proceedings. Now the company would be spared from the sequence of trials that had been about to commence in Ohio. But in a hastily organized press conference in Boston, Maura Healey urged people to think, for a moment, about how precisely this once mighty company could have found itself in bankruptcy. “The Sacklers have done a pretty good job of sucking the life out of Purdue,” she said. “Year after year, month after month, they were draining hundreds of millions of dollars.” All that was left at this point, she said, was “essentially a shell.”

Healey made no effort to conceal the indignation she felt at the thought that the Sacklers would push their company into bankruptcy now that it was no longer of any use to them, then waltz off with the billions they had taken out of it. Lawyers for the Sacklers emphasized that their proposal for a global settlement was still very much on the table. But Healey was skeptical of their assurances about all the good the family would do if the states would just accept their plan. “They’ve had ample opportunity for years to do something constructive,” she pointed out. But instead, “they continue to fight us every step of the way.” The members of the family were still “working on their brand,” she scoffed. But the sort of careful image management at which the family had long excelled was simply no longer viable. “We know who the Sacklers are,” Healey concluded.

Nevertheless, she was struggling to maintain her coalition of states opposing the family’s settlement proposal. The challenge was that while

many of the attorneys general found the offer to be insultingly low when considered alongside the Sacklers' fortune or the magnitude of their culpability, it was nevertheless a great deal of money. Many states, reeling from the epidemic and desperate for resources, were tempted to take what they could get. "It is, I think, the best deal that can be obtained," said Dave Yost, the attorney general in Ohio. Tennessee's attorney general, Herbert Slatery, agreed, pointing out that the plan "would secure billions" to address the epidemic and "result in the Sackler family divesting themselves of their business interests in the pharmaceutical industry forever."

Curiously, a partisan divide emerged among the state prosecutors. Red state AGs were more inclined to go along with the deal the Sacklers were proposing, whereas blue state prosecutors wanted to fight for more. Some speculated that this might be due to how dire the need for emergency funds was in the red states, or to different political cultures—Republicans more inclined to accommodate corporate interests, Democrats more given to redistributionist zeal. But another factor might have been that behind the scenes the Sacklers were actively whipping votes. The family had long understood the physics of political influence and the value of a well-connected fixer. When they needed to make the threat of felony charges go away back in 2006, they deployed the former federal prosecutor Rudy Giuliani. Now that they were facing a cohort of angry attorneys general, they put a new fixer on the payroll: a former U.S. senator from Alabama, Luther Strange, who had previously served as state AG. Until 2017, Strange had been the chairman of a national group called RAGA, or the Republican Attorneys General Association. In the past, Purdue had donated generously to this group, and to its Democratic counterpart, giving the two organizations a combined \$800,000 between 2014 and 2018. Remarkably, the company continued to contribute to both groups, even after declaring bankruptcy and even as virtually every state attorney general, Democrat *or* Republican, was suing them. During the summer of 2019, Luther Strange took part in a RAGA meeting in West Virginia as an emissary for the Sacklers and personally lobbied the Republican AGs in attendance to support a settlement.

To further complicate matters, the plaintiffs' lawyers, like Mike Moore, who had brought suits against Purdue on behalf of local governments and

served as key allies for those trying to hold the Sacklers to account, seemed inclined to accept the settlement as well. Plaintiffs’ lawyers work on a contingency basis, taking up to a third of any final settlement in fees, which means that they sometimes have incentives of their own to seize a multibillion-dollar settlement when it is on the table, rather than take the gamble of pushing for a larger and more just result and ending up with nothing. These attorneys also regarded the Purdue case as one piece of a larger litigation puzzle, in which they were pursuing separate suits against other drugmakers, wholesalers, and pharmacies. Some of the lawyers involved in the bankruptcy suspected that Mike Moore himself might have played a hand, behind the scenes, in conceiving the deal that the Sacklers proposed in Cleveland. It would be a compromise, in which the states would get some much-needed funds to address the crisis, the Sacklers would achieve an outcome they could live with, and the plaintiffs’ lawyers would collect hundreds of millions in fees. These suspicions proved correct: Moore acknowledged, in a subsequent interview, that working with another plaintiffs’ lawyer, Drake Martin, he had “put this deal together” for Purdue.



One major sticking point for the Democratic prosecutors was that Purdue might be crying poverty, but the Sacklers remained one of the wealthiest families in the United States. “When your illegal marketing campaign causes a national crisis, you should not get to keep most of the money,” Healey’s coalition of non-consenting states wrote in a filing, arguing that what the Sacklers were offering simply “does not match what they owe.”

This was the premise of New York’s lawsuit against the Sacklers—that the family had looted its own company—and even as the bankruptcy proceeding played out, Letitia James wanted to gather more detailed information on their finances. The Sackler fortune was dispersed in a vast global web of hundreds of shell companies and trusts and LLCs, many of them established in tax havens and jurisdictions with powerful bank secrecy laws. The structure of their financial arrangements could seem deliberately obscure, with an infinity of anonymous corporate entities, all nested like Matryoshka dolls. In August, Letitia James had subpoenaed records from

thirty-three financial institutions and investment advisers that had ties to the family. She was pursuing a legal theory of “fraudulent conveyance,” arguing that the family had deliberately hidden money in order to evade potential creditors. The subpoenas went to big institutions like Citibank, Goldman Sachs, and HSBC but also to smaller holding companies that were linked to the family and registered in offshore tax havens like the British Virgin Islands and the isle of Jersey.

The Sacklers fought the subpoenas, suggesting that they amounted to a form of “harassment.” A spokesman for Mortimer released a statement blasting the gambit as “a cynical attempt by a hostile A.G.’s office to generate defamatory headlines.” But a judge approved the subpoenas, and within weeks Letitia James had already acquired telling information. The response from a single financial institution allowed her office to track roughly \$1 billion in wire transfers by the Sacklers, including funds that Mortimer himself had funneled into Swiss bank accounts.

When Judge Drain halted all litigation against Purdue, it seemed to Maura Healey that she and Letitia James and other state prosecutors should be able to proceed with their cases against the Sacklers. After all, the *family* wasn’t filing for bankruptcy. The Sacklers had “extracted nearly all the money out of Purdue and pushed the carcass of the company into bankruptcy,” Josh Stein, the North Carolina AG, said. “Multi-billionaires are the opposite of bankrupt.” But on September 18, Purdue made a special appeal to Judge Drain. Having maintained the ruse, for decades, that the Sacklers and Purdue were separate, their lawyers now argued that the Sacklers were “inextricably twined” in any lawsuits against their company. For the moment, the Sacklers were prepared to carry through on the deal that they had proposed in Cleveland, their legal team suggested. But should Judge Drain permit the legal proceedings against their family to continue, they might be forced to reconsider and become “unwilling” to deliver even the \$3 billion.

It wasn’t just the implicit threat that rankled Maura Healey. It was the fact that the Sacklers were playing a shell game: they were throwing their lot in with Purdue when it suited them to do so and distancing themselves from the company when it didn’t. They wanted none of the responsibility that comes with owning a corporation and serving on its board of directors

but all of the protections. It would be one thing to request a shield from litigation if their own money were at issue in the bankruptcy proceedings, but they *weren't declaring bankruptcy!* Instead, the family was attempting to game the bankruptcy rules in an effort “to avoid their own individual accountability,” Healey and other AGs wrote in a brief to the court. “The Sacklers want the bankruptcy court to stop our lawsuits so they can keep the billions of dollars they pocketed from OxyContin and walk away without ever being held accountable,” Healey said. “That’s unacceptable.”



There was some precedent, in bankruptcy law, for this kind of maneuver. In 1985, a Virginia pharmaceutical corporation, the A. H. Robins Company, filed for bankruptcy. It had manufactured a contraceptive intrauterine device called the Dalkon Shield, which turned out to be extremely dangerous, causing a range of injuries and death and giving rise to thousands of lawsuits seeking hundreds of millions of dollars from the company. Like Purdue, A. H. Robins was a family-owned business, and there were charges that members of the Robins family had known about and concealed evidence relating to the danger of their product. The Robins clan was known for its philanthropy; at the University of Richmond, both the athletic center and the business school were named after members of the family. As evidence accumulated that their product was hurting people, the company maintained that the device was safe and effective “when properly used.” (Confronted by reports that the Dalkon Shield was causing uterine infections, company lawyers sought to undermine the women who experienced these effects, suggesting that the problem was not the device but rather their own “hygienic habits” and “promiscuity.”) When the Robins company declared bankruptcy, the Robins family did not. Yet the bankruptcy court agreed to stay all litigation not just against the company but against the family as well. In Massachusetts, Sandy Alexander, the attorney who worked for Maura Healey, discovered an out-of-print book about the Dalkon Shield case. He bought ten used copies and distributed them to his colleagues as an indication of the paradigm they might be forced to contend with in White Plains. The title of the book was *Bending the Law*.

As it happened, Judge Drain had dealt with this issue on at least one prior occasion himself. In a 2014 bankruptcy case, he had granted a similar release to third parties who were not actually declaring bankruptcy. It was tempting to wonder whether Drain's demonstrated openness to the concept was not part of Purdue's rationale for selecting him in the first place. In a filing, the Raymond wing of the family suggested to Drain that if he would just agree to halt all proceedings against the Sacklers, that might provide the family with some "breathing room," allowing them to finalize their deal with the states. In a court hearing, one company lawyer said, "Litigation against the Sacklers *is* litigation against Purdue."

On October 11, 2019, Judge Drain sided with the Sacklers. It was an "extraordinary" step, he acknowledged from the bench, but he thought it was appropriate. The attorneys had argued over the issue for hours, during which Drain often showed signs of impatience with the lawyers opposing the move. He granted the Sacklers a temporary reprieve, but with the possibility of extension. In a statement, Purdue celebrated the decision, suggesting that it would be "for the ultimate benefit of the American public."

Chapter 29

UN-NAMING

TWO MONTHS AFTER PURDUE Pharma declared bankruptcy, in November 2019, a team of economists released a fascinating study. “Overdose deaths involving opioids have increased dramatically since the mid-1990s, leading to the worst drug overdose epidemic in U.S. history,” they wrote. But there is “limited empirical evidence on the initial causes.” What they wanted to figure out, in an academically rigorous manner, was how the crisis had actually started. There were different theories about the catalyst. People generally agreed that a sea change in the culture of prescribing by American doctors was an important factor, but it could be difficult to pinpoint what prompted that change. In recent years, some observers had begun to suggest that the opioid crisis was actually just a symptom of a deeper set of social and economic problems in the United States, that suicide and alcohol-related deaths were also on the rise, and that all of these fatalities should be understood as part of a larger category of “deaths of despair.”

But these economists—Abby Alpert at the Wharton School, William Evans and Ethan Lieber at Notre Dame, and David Powell at Rand—were specifically interested in the role of Purdue Pharma. Many public health experts and journalists and prosecutors like Maura Healey had suggested, in an anecdotal way, that it was Purdue’s marketing of OxyContin that sparked the crisis. The economists wanted to see if the data actually bore that out.

But how could you do that? There were so many social, medical, and economic variables that could have contributed. How could you possibly isolate the impact of OxyContin? The economists were curious about the role of drug marketing, and when they obtained some internal Purdue documents, which had been unsealed in litigation, they made an interesting discovery. When it first started marketing the drug back in 1996, Purdue

identified a significant barrier to entry in a handful of U.S. states. Some states had what was known as “triplicate” programs: a policy that required doctors to fill out special triplicate prescription forms anytime they wanted to prescribe Schedule II narcotics. A copy of each form would be filed with the state, which allowed state agencies to maintain a prescription database, in order to monitor for diversion or other irregularities. These programs started decades before the opioid crisis; the first was established in California in 1939 because of concerns, even then, about diversion of opium-based pharmaceuticals. The triplicate programs were eventually phased out altogether in 2004. But at the time OxyContin was released, five states had these restrictions: California, Idaho, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

When the economists consulted Purdue’s documents, they discovered numerous references to the triplicate programs. The company had identified them as a problem. Focus groups suggested that physicians in triplicate states avoided writing opioid prescriptions because they regarded the paperwork as cumbersome and they “did not want to give the Government an excuse to monitor their activities.” Staff reported that “doctors in the triplicate states were not enthusiastic about the product.” So during the initial launch of OxyContin, Purdue chose to limit its marketing efforts in these states, instead concentrating its resources in other states with laxer regulations, where the company could expect a higher return on investment. As a consequence of this comparatively moderate marketing rollout (and of the triplicate restrictions themselves), the academics determined that the distribution of OxyContin ended up being about 50 percent lower than average in these five states during the years following the launch.

This seemed like a promising data set from which to draw some solid empirical conclusions about the impact of the drug. The states had nothing in common geographically. They comprised four of the most populous states, but also one of the least. Their economies were different. There was no common thread that connected these five states (but none of the others) which might have any explanatory value, in other words, apart from the triplicate programs and the related fact that OxyContin was much less widely available during the early years in these states than it was

everywhere else. So how did their experience of the opioid crisis compare with what happened in the rest of the country?

Prior to 1996, the triPLICATE states actually had a higher rate of overdose deaths than the rest of the nation. But what the team of economists discovered was that shortly after the launch of OxyContin, that relationship suddenly flipped. Overdose rates everywhere else started to climb much faster than in the triPLICATE states. Those five states were sheltered, enjoying “uniquely low” growth in overdose deaths, the scholars found. In fact, even after the triPLICATE programs were discontinued several years later, “their initial deterrence of OxyContin promotion and adoption had long-term effects on overdose deaths in these states.” By contrast, states with more exposure to OxyContin during the years immediately after it was introduced “experienced higher growth in overdose deaths in almost every year since 1996.”

Other studies had already drawn a causal connection between the reformulation of OxyContin in 2010 and the rise in the abuse of heroin and fentanyl. But the economists found that in the five states that had triPLICATE programs in place back when OxyContin was introduced, heroin and fentanyl deaths rose much less dramatically. In fact, even in 2019, nearly a quarter of a century after the original “blizzard of prescriptions,” overdose deaths in the triPLICATE states, from *all* opioids, were some of the lowest in the nation. These disparities could not be explained away by other factors, such as unrelated drug control policies or economic considerations, the scholars concluded. “Our results show that the introduction and marketing of OxyContin explain a substantial share of overdose deaths over the last two decades.”

It made David Sackler extremely angry to think about New York’s attorney general, Letitia James, describing the drug that his father, Richard, introduced as the “taproot” of the opioid epidemic. “You can make that argument,” he would say, “but you have to prove it.” Here, though, was something that looked a lot like proof. In their private emails, the Sacklers complained that they were being blamed for heroin and fentanyl overdoses, when all they ever did was sell a legal, FDA-regulated drug. They strategized with the company’s spin doctors about how to change the subject and refocus the conversation around fentanyl. But a separate study,

by a pair of economists from Rand and the University of Southern California, found that the 2010 reformulation, while it might have caused a decline in the abuse of OxyContin, “increased overall overdose rates.” Purdue had created a generation of people who were addicted to opioids, through the careful and relentless cultivation of demand for the drug. When the reformulation happened, that demand did not go away: it just found another source of supply. The paper established that even the boom in illicit fentanyl, like the rise in heroin before it, “was driven by demand considerations existing years prior to the entry of fentanyl.” Synthetic opioid abuse was disproportionately high in states that had high rates of OxyContin misuse. Nor did the knock-on effects of the reformulation dissipate after a few years, the authors of this study concluded. Instead, they grew over time as markets developed and innovated, leading to a public health emergency.

In its earliest known iterations, in the poetry of Hesiod, the Greek myth of Pandora grew out of a parable about technology. Prometheus defied the gods by stealing fire from Mount Olympus and giving it to humankind. Fire is a volatile gift, capable of creation and destruction, but humans learned to tame it, and it became the basis for civilization. As punishment for this insubordination, the gods sent a “beautiful evil,” Pandora. She was said to be the first woman, and she carried with her a jar (or, as it has been translated, a “box”). The jar contained all that is evil, disease and other terrors, “harsh toil” and “grievous sicknesses that are deadly to men.” Prometheus had warned the humans to be wary of any gifts from the gods. But they did not heed his warning, and Pandora opened her jar. In some versions of the story, Pandora can seem malevolent, deliberately unleashing a whirlwind of torment. In other tellings, she is naive, her greatest sin simply curiosity. As they sought to hide from a historic crisis of their own creation, the Sacklers could sometimes seem like Pandora, gazing, slack-jawed, at the momentous downstream consequences of their own decisions. They told the world, and themselves, that the jar was full of blessings, that it was a gift from the gods. Then they opened it, and they were wrong.



Early one morning, employees of Purdue Pharma showed up for work at One Stamford Forum to discover that a giant piece of sculpture had been deposited, overnight, on the sidewalk in front of the building. It was an enormous steel spoon. It weighed eight hundred pounds, and the handle had been bent over backward, evoking the “spoon and shoot” tests that Purdue had run on OxyContin prior to releasing the drug. The bowl of the spoon was stained, to symbolize burned heroin. This sculpture was the work of Domenic Esposito, an artist who had a personal connection to the issue: his brother had started on OxyContin and ended up addicted to heroin. “It’s a symbol of what’s basically the albatross of my family,” Esposito said, explaining that his mother would find this kind of spoon “every time my brother relapsed.” The owner of a local Stamford gallery had thought it would be appropriate to install the sculpture directly in front of Purdue headquarters. But somebody called the cops, and they arrested the gallery owner for “obstructing free passage.” Within a couple of hours, the relevant authorities had been summoned to remove the spoon. They had to bring a bulldozer to do it.

There was more security around the building, lately. Some days, cars were searched when they arrived. Protesters had started showing up, sometimes in ones and twos, sometimes by the dozen. Often, mothers would come, clutching blown-up photographs of their dead children. They looked like the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina. Some chanted their loved ones’ names; others just stood there silently, bearing stark witness, embodying, with an awful steadfast dignity, the idea that Nan Goldin kept repeating about how a generation of people had been wiped out.

Goldin showed up herself to protest, wearing sunglasses and holding her SHAME ON SACKLER banner. The family no longer came to work on the ninth floor. With bankruptcy proceedings under way, they had finally extricated themselves, more or less, from the inner workings of the company. But they still owned the building. And given the family’s affinity for the arts, it seemed poignantly apt that some of the protesters were artists. For a time, there was a Massachusetts man named Frank Huntley who would show up with a sculpture of a skeleton that he had fashioned out of three hundred pill bottles and a plastic skull. Huntley was a painter and wall paperer who had

been prescribed OxyContin after an injury in 1998. All those prescription bottles in the sculpture had been his. “This was me for 15 years,” Huntley said of the skeleton. “This drug controlled me every day.”

For two decades, the glass headquarters in Stamford had been surrounded by signs emblazoned with Purdue’s distinctive ringed and underlined logo. But eventually the company determined that it would probably be a prudent idea to take the signs down. Goldin derived some satisfaction from this furtive acknowledgment of Purdue’s ignominy. But she was still hell-bent on seeing the Sackler name come down, too. Many cultural and educational institutions had started a process, during this period, of rethinking their willingness to carry the names of morally questionable benefactors. In 2017, the president of Yale had announced that the university would rename a residential college that was named after John C. Calhoun, because Calhoun’s legacy as a white supremacist was in fundamental conflict with Yale’s “mission and values.” At Oxford, a Rhodes scholar from South Africa had helped to spearhead a campaign to take down a statue of Cecil Rhodes.

Yet numerous universities, among them Yale itself, continued to accept Sackler donations in 2018, even as the lawsuits and press scrutiny intensified and other institutions were distancing themselves. It was not until 2019 that Yale cut ties with the Sacklers, announcing that it would not take any more gifts from the family. But the university had no intention of shedding the Sackler name where it was associated with gifts that had been given in the past. Harvard took a similar stance. The presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren, who had taught at Harvard prior to joining the U.S. Senate, had urged the university to remove the Sackler name. But Harvard’s president, Lawrence Bacow, responded that it would be “inappropriate” to remove the name, because Arthur Sackler had endowed the Sackler Museum before OxyContin was invented. In any case, Bacow pointed out, “legal and contractual obligations” would prevent the university from taking such a step.

Goldin was not satisfied. On July 1, 2019, she showed up in Paris to launch a protest at the Louvre. The museum’s Sackler Wing had been supported by the family of Mortimer Sackler. The wing consisted of twelve rooms full of marvelous Near Eastern antiquities. As hundreds of tourists

and trinket sellers looked on, Goldin and a band of forty or so supporters swarmed the central plaza by the entrance to the Louvre. Goldin stepped into a fountain by the great glass pyramid that was the centerpiece of the courtyard and shouted, “Take down the Sackler name!” The Sacklers might have enjoyed considerable clout in France, where both Mortimer and Raymond had been recognized with the Legion of Honor. But Goldin had a credibility of her own. Her photographs hung in the Louvre. She had been named a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. (For fun, she wore the medal to the protest.) Some members of her group PAIN had also discovered that there was a special circumstance at the Louvre that might allow them to make a breakthrough. Consulting the museum’s bylaws, they learned that the Louvre reserved the right to sunset any naming agreements after twenty years. And the Sackler Wing had carried the name for more than two decades. Within two weeks of Goldin’s protest, the president of the Louvre, Jean-Luc Martinez, announced that the wing would “no longer carry the Sackler name.” The museum claimed that this decision had nothing to do with Purdue Pharma or OxyContin or Nan Goldin’s protest, and was instead just a routine housecleaning. The rooms weren’t being “*de-baptized*,” a spokeswoman insisted—just updated. But nobody was under any illusions, and overnight all the engraved signage announcing the *Aile Sackler des Antiquités Orientales* and listing the names of Mortimer’s seven surviving children—Ilene, Kathe, Mortimer, Samantha, Marissa, Sophie, Michael—came off the walls, and references to the family were scrubbed from the museum’s website. “The Sacklers wanted everything that Nan has in terms of the art world,” Goldin’s fellow activist Megan Kapler said. “And she stepped in and said, ‘No. This is my world. You don’t get to be in it.’ ”



Arthur’s widow, Jillian, had started telling people that she was reluctant to use her own last name. She resented the “blanket designation ‘the Sackler family’ ” and continued her rearguard effort to “disentangle” Arthur’s name from that of his brothers, engaging press flacks to fire off shrill letters to news outlets demanding “clarifications.” She coined a new locution, “OxySacklers,” which she hoped could distinguish the families of Raymond

and Mortimer. But after years of silence in the face of the ravages of OxyContin, it might have been too late for people like Jillian or Arthur's daughter Elizabeth to convincingly adopt the moral high ground. Jillian acknowledged that her campaign was "like spitting in the wind." Nevertheless, she insisted, had Arthur been alive, he would have intervened to stop his brothers from marketing OxyContin so aggressively. ("Does anyone believe that?" Nan Goldin asked. "How cynical is that?")

Notwithstanding the best efforts of Jillian and Elizabeth, the Smithsonian, to which Arthur had awarded his collection after his years of flirtation with the Met, on the understanding that he would get a museum with his name on it, now ended up subtly distancing itself from the family as well. Contractually, the museum could not remove the Sackler name. Instead, it announced a decision to "re-brand," renaming the Sackler and Freer galleries as the National Museum of Asian Art. Henceforth, the museum would minimize its use of the Sackler name whenever it could, rolling out a new logo and burying any reference to the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in small print. Arthur's son, Arthur Felix, paid a visit to his cousin Richard, in Connecticut, and lambasted him for sullyng the family name. Jillian wondered if her late husband's reputation would "ever recover."



Perhaps the most thorough reckoning with the Sackler legacy took place at Tufts. The relationship between the Sacklers and Tufts dated back to 1980, when Arthur, Mortimer, and Raymond made a major donation with the understanding that the School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences would be named after the family. A gift agreement at the time spelled out precisely where and in what manner the Sackler name would be displayed. Three years later, Arthur made a separate agreement to have Tufts name its medical school building after him. In 1986, the Arthur M. Sackler Center for Health Communications was established, and Arthur was celebrated at a black-tie gala. At the time, he likened the center that would carry his name to "the Alexandrian library, but of the twenty-first century." Over the decades, the family continued to give money to Tufts, donating some \$15 million altogether and sponsoring research in cancer, neuroscience, and

other fields. In 2013, Raymond was awarded an honorary PhD. The degree was conferred in a private ceremony at Purdue's offices because of Raymond's advanced age. "It would be impossible to calculate how many lives you have saved," the university's president, Anthony Monaco, told Raymond. "You are a world changer." To mark the occasion, the university included a biography of Raymond on its website that detailed his many philanthropic contributions but made no mention of Purdue whatsoever.

When Purdue pleaded guilty to the federal charges of misbranding in 2007, nobody at Tufts had raised any particular concerns. When Sam Quinones published *Dreamland* in 2015, the medical school made a quiet decision to scuttle the book from its reading list for incoming students. In fact, it was only in 2017, after the near simultaneous articles in *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*, that questions arose about the propriety of Tufts's relationship with the family. Medical students began to express discomfort at attending lectures in buildings named after the Sacklers or earning degrees from the Sackler school. Some of them started to organize, much as Nan Goldin had, establishing a group called Sack Sackler. One first-year med student, Nicholas Verdini, made an impassioned entreaty to the university's board of trustees in which he informed them that his own sister had been addicted to opioids and had died of a heroin overdose two years earlier. She was twenty-five and left behind two daughters.

Maura Healey, in her complaint against the Sacklers, singled out Tufts as an example of the malign tentacles of the family's influence. Richard had served on an advisory board at the School of Medicine from 1999 until 2017. The family had offered what was described as "a more targeted gift" to establish a new master's program in "Pain, Research, Education, and Policy," and Richard enjoyed a warm relationship with the professor, Dr. Daniel Carr, who was appointed to run the program. "Our continued collaboration is a top priority for me," Carr told Richard in 2001. When the controversy surrounding OxyContin arose, Carr assured Richard that he should blame not himself but "the perpetrators who victimize us, for their harmful misdeeds." In 2002, Carr appeared in a Purdue advertisement in *The Boston Globe*, dressed in a white coat, praising the company for "doing something" about the opioid crisis. The pain program appointed a new adjunct professor—David Haddox—and he touted his Tufts credential as a

sign of his academic independence. In lectures to Tufts students, Haddox used Purdue-branded materials. According to *The Tufts Daily*, as late as 2010 one of the topics that he lectured on was “pseudo-addiction.”

After the outcry from students, Tufts engaged a former federal prosecutor, Donald Stern, to conduct an internal review. When the review was complete, in December 2019, President Monaco and the chairman of the board sent an email to the Tufts community. “Our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others have shared with us the negative impact the Sackler name has on them each day,” they wrote. The response that they announced was a radical one: the university would remove the name, stripping it from five facilities and programs. “Our students find it objectionable to walk into a building that says Sackler on it,” Harris Berman, the dean of the School of Medicine, said, explaining that they found the name “incongruous with the mission of the school and what we’re trying to teach them.” It was not just OxyContin that was problematic, Berman continued, but Arthur’s legacy as well. “The Sackler name is a problem, whether it’s the Arthur Sackler name, or all the Sackler names,” he said.

The student activists were jubilant. “What our faculty and our deans are teaching us every day is that we take care of patients and respect patients and treat people with dignity, and walking into the office with the Sackler name on your building seems pretty hypocritical,” one medical student, Mary Bridget Lee, said. By taking such a clean-cut moral stand, she suggested, Tufts might “set a precedent for other institutions.”

Fearful, perhaps, of precisely that possibility, the Sacklers aggressively resisted the move. Jillian expressed her indignation that Arthur was “being blamed for actions taken by his brothers and other OxySacklers.” As for the OxySacklers, a family attorney, Daniel Connolly, deplored the decision by Tufts as “intellectually dishonest” and pointed out that the Sacklers had “made gifts in good faith.” Connolly threatened legal action, demanding that the move be “reversed.” The family sent Tufts a letter accusing the university of breach of contract. It was a graphic measure of the Sacklers’ vanity, and of their pathological denial, that the family was prepared to debase itself by trying to force its name back onto a university where the

student body had said, quite explicitly, that they found it morally repugnant. But the administrators at Tufts held firm.

When he heard the news, Nicholas Verdini was in the cafeteria, and he ran outside to watch as workmen removed the Sackler name. He was a little stunned. Around him, people were clapping. Verdini thought of his sister. This felt “like a big win for her.”

In places where the Sackler name was painted on walls, workmen used rollers to erase it with a fresh coat of paint. In places where raised brass lettering announced the name, they used a hammer and chisel to pry the letters off one by one, until all that was left were ghost marks, the faint, grubby outline where the name used to be.



The Sacklers might have become social pariahs, but in White Plains their handpicked bankruptcy judge, Robert Drain, was proving to be an excellent choice. A declaration of bankruptcy conjures images of failure and shame, but for the Sacklers, Drain’s courtroom had become a safe harbor. He renewed the injunction on any lawsuits against the family, then renewed it again, over objections from Letitia James that the Sacklers were receiving “the benefits of bankruptcy protection without filing for bankruptcy themselves.”

As a bankruptcy judge, Drain seemed to regard himself as a creative technocrat, a deal maker whose chief concern was efficiency. He frequently invoked the great expense of the bankruptcy process—with scores of attorneys for the company, the Sacklers, and the various creditors, all billing by the hour—and sought to streamline the proceedings, citing the needs of those who had suffered from the opioid crisis and suggesting that whatever limited value Purdue still had should go toward helping people struggling with addiction, rather than toward enriching lawyers.

With such a deliberately narrow conception of his own assignment, Drain exhibited little interest in larger questions of justice and accountability, as if these were theoretical concepts that were extraneous to the negotiation at hand. In fact, at times he evinced frustration with state prosecutors and attorneys representing victims who had lost loved ones to the crisis,

expressing impatience with their insistent demands to hold the company and the family to account. The offer by the Sacklers to settle all claims was still on the table, and in one hearing Drain suggested that the continued refusal by Maura Healey and other AGs to take them up on it was political grandstanding; the notion that they would “hold up something that is good for all” was “almost repulsive,” Drain said.

One major source of contention in the White Plains proceedings was discovery: the ability of the state prosecutors and lawyers representing Purdue’s creditors to gather information about the company and about the finances of the Sacklers. How much money did the Sacklers still have? How could anyone expect to achieve a just resolution, Letitia James wondered, without some sense of “how much has been stashed away”? There was a dark absurdity in the spectacle of Judge Drain and all of these bankruptcy lawyers arguing self-seriously about how to divvy up what was left of Purdue Pharma—which now amounted to cash and assets of roughly \$1 billion—when the Sacklers were looking on from the sidelines, apparently untouchable, and holding on to so much more. According to deposition testimony by one of Purdue’s own experts, the family had taken as much as \$13 billion out of the company.

One legal scholar, reflecting on the case, noted that bankruptcy experts can occasionally behave as if their specialized field were “the Swiss Army knife of the legal system.” Judge Drain appeared adamant that his courtroom was the ideal venue in which to resolve any and all outstanding issues relating to the role that Purdue and the Sacklers played in the opioid crisis. He spoke the same lingo as the bankruptcy lawyers arguing the case, a bloodless idiom of “efficiency,” “consensus,” “maximizing value,” achieving a “deal.” When it came to discovery, Drain told the bankruptcy lawyers to “keep an eye on” the attorneys in the case who *weren’t* bankruptcy lawyers, to make sure they understood that any information gathered from Purdue or the Sacklers should be regarded not as “discovery for purposes of a trial” but as “due diligence” for an eventual deal. Drain didn’t really believe in trials. “They are not some form of public truth serum,” he said dismissively. He preferred “negotiations that lead to agreements.”

Some of the attorneys involved were troubled by the distinctly clubby ethos of the proceedings. The Sacklers inhabited an elite milieu. They hired attorneys who attended elite law schools and now worked at elite firms, to represent them in cases where the lawyers opposing them were often products of those same elite institutions, and the judges were, too. This gave rise, in the words of one of the lawyers suing Purdue, to “a collusive atmosphere.” The bankruptcy bar is especially small and insular. Purdue’s new board chairman, a restructuring expert named Steve Miller, had known Judge Drain for years. In a 2008 memoir, he recounted a humorous anecdote about how he once took a nap in Drain’s chambers. Kenneth Feinberg, the victim compensation expert who was appointed to be one of the two mediators in the bankruptcy, had previously worked for Purdue, and been paid some \$12 million. Everyone seemed to know everyone. One night, Gillian Feiner, the lead lawyer from the Massachusetts attorney general’s office, was staying overnight in White Plains for a hearing. She got a government rate at the Ritz. A lot of lawyers involved in the case stayed there; it was a short walk from the courthouse. Feiner spoke to a couple of her fellow prosecutors from other states that were suing the company, and learned that they were planning on having dinner that evening with Mark Kesselman—the general counsel of Purdue. Feiner didn’t join them. She dined alone, at the hotel bar, instead. “Just me and my principles,” she texted a friend.

For Nan Goldin and the activists from PAIN, it was intensely frustrating to realize that this might be the venue in which the Sacklers would play their endgame. It wasn’t just that the bankruptcy process prized economic compromise over all other values; it was that bankruptcy law is so technical and antiseptic that it is difficult for nonlawyers to grasp. “We’re fighting on their terms now,” one of the PAIN activists, Harry Cullen, complained. “The court speaks in terms of numbers. Everything is *fungible*.” Early on, the group staged die-ins on the steps of the courthouse. But after the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, Drain stopped holding hearings in person, shifting to telephone conferences, which robbed the protesters of a theater in which to stage their actions. “It chops us off at the knees,” Cullen said. “How are we supposed to hold them accountable?” Goldin actively intervened in the proceedings, helping start a committee of victims to push

for greater accountability in the bankruptcy. They created a petition asking for an independent examiner to be assigned to the case, someone who could serve as a check on Judge Drain. This had been a feature in several high-profile bankruptcy cases, such as Enron and WorldCom, that included allegations of serious corporate misconduct. But Drain didn't think it was necessary in this one.

One day that summer, *The New York Times* published an op-ed by a journalist, Gerald Posner, and a bankruptcy scholar, Ralph Brubaker, which suggested that the Sacklers might “get away with it,” keeping most of their fortune and facing no meaningful retribution. When a lawyer invoked the op-ed at a hearing, Judge Drain exploded. “It doesn't matter what some numbskull Op-Ed writer puts in,” he sputtered. He urged the lawyers in attendance not to “buy or click on” publications like *The New York Times* and announced that he did not “want to hear some idiot reporter or some blogger quoted to me again in this case.”



Drain's fit of pique notwithstanding, it seemed increasingly likely, with every passing month, that the Sacklers might indeed get away with it. One question that hung over the bankruptcy proceeding was whether the Department of Justice might file charges of its own against the company—or against the family. Federal prosecutors in multiple jurisdictions had been investigating Purdue for the past several years, quietly issuing subpoenas and gathering evidence. Judge Drain had set a deadline of July 30 for any claimants who felt they should be “creditors” of Purdue in the bankruptcy to file papers with the court. More than a hundred thousand people filed individual claims, arguing that Purdue's opioids had upended their lives and that they should be entitled to some compensation. Insurance companies filed claims as well. A single insurer, United Health, submitted a stunning filing, revealing that when it commissioned an analysis of how many of its policyholders had been prescribed Purdue opioids and then subsequently diagnosed with an opioid use disorder, the result was in the “hundreds of thousands.” So much for the idea that people didn't get addicted under a doctor's care.

Just before the deadline, the Department of Justice filed a claim of its own, disclosing that multiple civil and criminal investigations had revealed that between 2010 and 2018, Purdue sent sales reps to call on prescribers the company knew “were facilitating medically unnecessary prescriptions.” Purdue also purportedly paid kickbacks to prescribers, motivating them to write more prescriptions; to an electronic medical records company, so that it would create a digital alert that prompted physicians to recommend opioids while meeting with patients; and to specialty pharmacies, to induce them to dispense prescriptions that other pharmacies refused to fill. All of this conduct, Justice officials maintained, “gives rise to criminal liability.”

What was most galling about this inventory of misdeeds was that it so resembled the general flavor of wrongdoing to which Purdue had pleaded guilty back in 2007. The details had changed, but the gist was the same: the company had been fraudulently pushing its opioids with rank indifference to the dangers they posed. The federal government itself might become a creditor of Purdue’s, the DOJ filing suggested, in the event that the company ended up getting convicted of any of these allegations, or settled the charges. Given that critics of the 2007 deal had suggested that a \$600 million fine was not enough of a deterrent—and that Purdue now appeared to be a *recidivist*, committing the same types of crimes—some observers wondered whether this time around the feds might actually charge some executives with felonies. By coincidence, in another recent case, the Justice Department had done just that: in January 2020, John Kapoor, who had served as CEO and board chairman of the pharma company Insys, had been sentenced to five and a half years in prison for his role in promoting and marketing his own dangerous opioid, a fentanyl product called Subsys. Would Craig Landau, Purdue’s CEO, be next?

He would not. As it turned out, Mary Jo White and other attorneys for the Sacklers and Purdue had been quietly negotiating with the Trump administration for months. Inside the DOJ, the line prosecutors who had assembled both the civil and the criminal cases started to experience tremendous pressure from the political leadership to wrap up their investigations of Purdue and the Sacklers prior to the 2020 presidential election in November. A decision had been made at high levels of the Trump administration that this matter would be resolved quickly and with a

soft touch. Some of the career attorneys at Justice were deeply unhappy with this move, so much so that they wrote confidential memos registering their objections, to preserve a record of what they believed to be a miscarriage of justice.

One morning two weeks before the election, Jeffrey Rosen, the deputy attorney general for the Trump administration, convened a press conference in which he announced a “global resolution” of the federal investigations into Purdue and the Sacklers. The company was pleading guilty to conspiracy to defraud the United States and to violate the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, as well as to two counts of conspiracy to violate the federal Anti-kickback Statute, Rosen announced. No executives would face individual charges. In fact, no individual executives were mentioned at all: it was as if the corporation had acted autonomously, like a driverless car. (In depositions related to Purdue’s bankruptcy which were held *after* the DOJ settlement, two former CEOs, John Stewart and Mark Timney, both declined to answer questions, invoking their Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate themselves.) Rosen touted the total value of the federal penalties against Purdue as “more than \$8 billion.” And, in keeping with what had by now become a standard pattern, the press obligingly repeated that number in the headlines.

Of course, anyone who was paying attention knew that the total value of Purdue’s cash and assets was only around \$1 billion, and nobody was suggesting that the Sacklers would be on the hook to pay Purdue’s fines. So the \$8 billion figure was misleading, much as the \$10–\$12 billion estimate of the value of the Sacklers’ settlement proposal had been misleading—an artificial number without any real practical meaning, designed chiefly to be reproduced in headlines. As for the Sacklers, Rosen announced that they had agreed to pay \$225 million to resolve a separate civil charge that they had violated the False Claims Act. According to the investigation, Richard, David, Jonathan, Kathe, and Mortimer had “knowingly caused the submission of false and fraudulent claims to federal health care benefit programs” for opioids that “were prescribed for uses that were unsafe, ineffective, and medically unnecessary.” But there would be no criminal charges. In fact, according to a deposition of David Sackler, the Department of Justice concluded its investigation without so much as interviewing any

member of the family. The authorities were so deferential toward the Sacklers that nobody had even bothered to question them.

When Rosen opened the press conference up for questions, a reporter pointed out that the \$225 million the Sacklers were being forced to pay was “a little over 2 percent of that \$10 billion they took out of the company,” and asked, “Why have you let them keep all that money?”

Rosen replied that in his view the Sacklers were paying a “very steep price.”

“Did you ever try to pursue that money?” another reporter asked.

“There is no law that says if you’ve done something wrong we should just simply strip somebody of their assets,” Rosen said defensively. “That’s not how it works.”

Why hadn’t the government pursued criminal charges against the Sacklers? a third reporter inquired. Rosen declined to answer.



“It’s like 2007 all over again,” Barry Meier reflected, following the press conference. In the Virginia case, thirteen years earlier, prosecutors had amassed huge amounts of incriminating evidence, only to have the Sacklers deploy their high-powered lawyers to appeal to the political leadership at Justice and undermine the case. Just as the 2007 case had included a prosecution memo brimming with detailed allegations, there were traces, in this case, of the righteous work of line prosecutors. The official settlement documents cited specific instances of Purdue reps calling on obviously problematic doctors, including one who was nicknamed “Candyman,” according to the filing, “because she will immediately put every patient on the highest dose.” Lawyers for the Sacklers had argued that the family didn’t take money out of the company in preparation for some future day of reckoning, claiming, “No reasonable person would have believed that Purdue would face a meaningful number of opioid-related lawsuits or judgments before 2017.” But the settlement agreement included emails between the Sacklers from 2007 in which they acknowledged the likelihood that future lawsuits might “get through to the family” and discussed their intention to take money out. The Sacklers might have agreed to pay a \$225

million penalty, but they refused to acknowledge any personal wrongdoing, even as their company pleaded guilty to felony charges.

“Here we are, so many years later when the Justice Department has a second chance to do it right—and once again they let them off the hook,” Maura Healey said in an interview on MSNBC. “There’s no one going to jail. There’s no justice. The Sacklers face no admissions of guilt,” she continued. The settlement amounted to little more than “a guilty plea against a company that is already in bankruptcy.”

In Healey’s office, Gillian Feiner and Sandy Alexander had gotten approval from Judge Drain to depose members of the Sackler family. Feiner questioned David Sackler in August, but the rest of the interviews—of Kathe, Mortimer, and Richard—were scheduled to stretch into November, past the election. Feiner and Alexander were hoping that the federal government would have no choice but to postpone any settlement so long as the Sacklers were still being deposed. After all, what if some damning new evidence came to light? But instead, at a certain point, DOJ lawyers just stopped attending the depositions. “I am not done with Purdue and the Sacklers,” Healey vowed, saying that the Sackler depositions would go on, notwithstanding the settlement. “We’re going to continue to press our state claims in court.”

She and other state AGs were still constrained, however, by Judge Drain’s decision to suspend their cases. And as Drain discussed his vision for the final resolution of the bankruptcy, he made it clear that what he really wanted to do was take that temporary bar on litigation against the Sacklers and make it permanent. When the Sacklers settled their cases in Kentucky and Oklahoma, they had stipulated that the family get a full release from all future liability. They were prepared to pay money to make a case go away, but only if they got an ironclad guarantee that it was going away for good. In the term sheet for the settlement proposal that David Sackler presented in Cleveland back in 2019, the family had indicated that they were prepared to supply the \$3 billion and give up control of Purdue, but only in exchange for a full release from civil and criminal liability. The Sacklers didn’t want to be looking over their shoulders for the rest of their lives. And Judge Drain, with his singular fixation on conserving value in the bankruptcy, appeared to be sympathetic to this consideration. At an

early hearing, in February 2020, he suggested that the only way to achieve “true peace” was to have what he called a “third-party release,” a ruling that would grant not just Purdue but also the Sackler family freedom from any future opioid-related lawsuits. This was a controversial issue, given that two dozen states were poised to resume their cases against the Sacklers just as soon as the bankruptcy concluded, and Drain indicated that he was raising the matter early, because in some parts of the country it would be illegal for a federal bankruptcy judge to enjoin state authorities from bringing their own lawsuits against a third party, like the Sacklers, who had not even declared bankruptcy in his court. The case law was evolving, Drain said.

A Purdue lawyer, Marshall Huebner, assured the judge that his firm, Davis Polk, was tracking the case law “with an electron microscope.”

“You may need to do more than track,” Drain said, slipping into a register that sounded strangely like legal advice. “You may need to file an amicus”—a friend-of-the-court brief—“to counteract some of the...” He trailed off. “Well, I’m just leaving it at that.”

Huebner, displaying a self-awareness that Drain seemed to lack, said, “I don’t know if the world wants a Purdue Pharma amicus.” He added, “But we’ll have to take that one under advisement.”

In a filing to the court in March, the states opposing the Sacklers’ settlement terms made the obvious point that such treatment at the hands of the legal system is an exclusive prerogative of the rich and “sends the wrong message to the public about the fairness of our courts.”

Yet there was precedent for this, too. In the Dalkon Shield bankruptcy case involving the dangerous contraceptive device, the family that owned the company had ended up making precisely such a deal. Having halted any litigation against the Robins family during the bankruptcy proceedings (even though the family had not declared bankruptcy), the judge presided over a settlement in which the family contributed \$10 million. He then barred any and all future lawsuits against the family and the company related to their faulty device. When women who had been injured by the Dalkon Shield came to the courthouse, asking to speak, they were forcibly removed by court marshals. After the bankruptcy concluded, the Robins company was acquired by American Home Products. The Robins family made \$385 million in the transaction. It seemed a virtual certainty now that

the Sacklers would end up paying a few billion dollars but walking away with vastly more. They would evade any further charges against them. And they would never admit wrongdoing.

In the final bankruptcy hearing of 2020, Judge Drain was conversing over the teleconference line with the attorneys in the case about the starchy particulars of some procedural motion, when a man's voice broke in. "My name's Tim Kramer," he said. "I got a few things I'd like to say."

"Are you representing someone?" Drain asked. "What is your role in the case?"

"My role is, my fiancée died," Kramer said. "I became the guardian of her daughter." Purdue and the Sacklers "owe my stepdaughter," he said, "because they made the drugs that killed my fiancée."

"Okay, so, Mr. Kramer, the particular matter that is on the calendar first today is a motion to extend the debtors' time, which they have exclusively, to file a Chapter 11 plan," Drain said. "So, I guess I can understand your confusion, particularly given that you're not a lawyer, but this motion really doesn't directly relate to or address your or your daughter-in-law's claims in this case." Kramer had been speaking on behalf of his stepdaughter, not his daughter-in-law, but no matter; he would be afforded an opportunity to have his claim against Purdue reviewed at some later date, Drain said. Whatever he might want to say now was not calendared for the current hearing.

"Oh," Kramer said, in the apologetic tone of someone who has been put in his place. "Should I hang up then? Or should I stay on the line?"

"Whatever you want, sir," Drain said. "You don't have to stay on the line." Kramer volunteered that he would mute his line and "just listen to what you guys have to say."

The hearing proceeded, but before long, there was another interjection. "Your honor? Excuse me," a woman said. She introduced herself as Kimberly Krawczyk, and said she would like to speak "in memory of my brother." Her voice constricted as she fended off a sob. She had sent the judge a letter, she said. "Would you like me to read the letter," she asked, or "just speak in his memory?"

"Well, ma'am, I..." Drain paused. For a long time, there was just silence on the line. "I have to say, ma'am..." He paused again. For more than a

year, Drain had presided over the case, and periodically, he would pay lip service to the many victims of the opioid crisis, who existed somewhere outside the courtroom, like an abstraction. But now, when they broke into the proceedings asking to be heard, and he was confronted with the actual human beings whose suffering he had so frequently and casually invoked, he seemed unsettled, and eager to retreat back into the comforting obfuscations of the law. “I hold hearings on what is scheduled before me,” Drain said. “There are literally hundreds of thousands of people who have lost dear family members because of opioids.” Another pause. “I...um...I don’t think that this is the proper forum to do this.” Krawczyk tried to interject, but Drain kept going. The hurt and suffering of families like hers was “front and center in my mind,” he assured her—and in the minds of the “lawyers and financial people,” too. But “we simply can’t turn these hearings into something that the law really doesn’t contemplate,” he concluded. “So I’m not going to let you speak further on this.” He did not blame Krawczyk for thinking that she might have had an opportunity to speak, he said. “It’s completely understandable. I’m not faulting you. You’re not a lawyer.”

“My apologies,” she said. “At some point, I would like to speak. He was my last family member, and my entire family has been affected through this epidemic, and through Purdue Pharma’s family. So I really would like to speak from the pain that it has created and me being left behind with no family.”



In the decades after they graduated from Columbia and went off to medical school, Richard Kapit and Richard Sackler would occasionally reconnect. Kapit became a psychiatrist and worked for many years at the FDA. He watched his old roommate’s rise as the impresario behind OxyContin with great interest, even awe. He still found it amazing to consider that this person with whom he had once been so close had gone on to launch a drug that transformed the pharmaceutical industry, made him a billionaire many times over, and triggered a crisis of addiction and death. The thing about Richard that had always struck Kapit was his enthusiasm. It

was so bold, so infectious, yet ultimately so reckless as well. That's how Kapit would always remember him, as "this character that gets carried away," he said. "I followed him so often. I got carried away following him. I guess the term is 'salesman,' but that doesn't really capture it." He had a hubris, a blindness to consequences, an unshakable certainty in his own convictions. If there was one attribute that Richard shared with his uncle Arthur—apart from a common name, a genius at marketing, and a sense of unquenchable ambition—it was the stubborn refusal to admit doubt, even in the face of contrary evidence, and a corresponding ability to delude himself into a blinkered faith in his own virtue.

A few weeks after Purdue Pharma declared bankruptcy, Beverly Sackler died. She was the last of the old generation, not counting Jillian and Theresa, the much younger third wives of Arthur and Mortimer. Before Raymond died, Beverly used to come to company functions in Stamford and speak with employees. They found her warm and charming. She still wore the plain gold band from their wedding in 1944. She and Raymond had so little money in those days, she would tell people, it was all they could afford.

At a certain point during the bankruptcy proceedings, Richard Sackler moved back in to his parents' home, the mansion on Field Point Circle in Greenwich, looking out on the Long Island Sound. The place was vast and lonely, mostly unchanged since the death of his parents. Jonathan and his wife, Mary, lived nearby, but Jonathan was struggling with cancer, and in the summer of 2020 he died, too. His obituaries looked markedly different from those of his father and uncles. They led with OxyContin and barely mentioned philanthropy at all.

Richard was mostly alone now. He remained close with his children, but because the bankruptcy proceedings were predicated on a formal separation between Purdue and the family that owned it, one of the great passions of his life—micromanaging the business—was suddenly no longer available to him. He was bitter, and frustrated, watching, like a benched athlete, as other pharma companies raced to pioneer a cure for COVID, unable to marshal what was left of Purdue in the effort, or even to make donations in support of such research, because at this point nobody wanted his money. He had few friends left, apart from his many paid advisers. When he did talk to

people about his struggles, he maintained that OxyContin was a safe product and insisted, all evidence to the contrary be damned, that it was “vanishingly rare” for people to become addicted to the drug when they took it in a doctor’s care. The family continued to suggest that few had done as much as they had to *combat* the opioid crisis. One of Richard’s lawyers described the 2010 reformulation of OxyContin as the “most ambitious and impactful” measure that Purdue and the Sacklers had taken in this regard. But in September 2020, the FDA released the results of a decade’s worth of studies and, citing the tendency of people who were already addicted to OxyContin to switch to heroin and other drugs, held that the reformulation could not be said to have “reduced opioid overdoses” overall. The FDA stopped short of concluding, as other studies had, that the reformulation actually *caused* the heroin crisis. But having analyzed all of the available data, the agency said that it was “unclear” whether reformulated OxyContin had any “net public health benefit” whatsoever.

The day after the Department of Justice resolution was finalized, NYU Medical School, where Richard had received his degree, announced plans to strip the Sackler name from its Institute of Graduate Biomedical Sciences “and other named programs.” Tufts was no longer an outlier in removing the name altogether, and the calculus was changing, practically in real time, at other institutions. A day after the NYU decision, the Metropolitan Museum of Art said that the name of the famous Sackler Wing, home of the Temple of Dendur and site of Nan Goldin’s first protest, was now officially “under review.” Three days after that, Harvard announced the formation of a committee on “renaming,” noting that some of the family names that adorned the buildings on its campus were associated with behaviors that “many members of our community would today find abhorrent” and indicating that changes would be coming in due course.

Nan Goldin and her allies in PAIN, who had spent so much of the past year feeling hamstrung by the bankruptcy and the COVID pandemic, experienced a surge of energy and hope. They would redouble their efforts, at the universities, at the Guggenheim, and especially at the Met. They were determined to keep fighting until they saw the name come down.



In the final weeks of 2020, a sudden prospect emerged of some form of reckoning for the Sacklers. The Committee on Oversight and Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives announced that it would hold a hearing on “The Role of Purdue Pharma and the Sackler Family in the Opioid Epidemic”—and extended an invitation to Richard, Kathe, Mortimer, and David Sackler to participate. If the Justice Department and a federal bankruptcy court were going to give the Sacklers a pass, perhaps Congress, at least, could hold them to account. This seemed to mark an opportunity, for the lawmakers, to revive the iconic moment in 1994 when the heads of the seven major tobacco companies were hauled in front of Congress and grilled about what they knew and when they knew it on the subject of the addictiveness of cigarettes.

Attorneys for the Sacklers waited a week after the invitation was issued, then sent a polite reply saying: Thank you for this opportunity; we are going to decline. Behind the scenes, members of the family’s legal team lobbied furiously to get the committee to call off the hearing, or to have representatives from the company, rather than the family, do the talking, as they had always done in the past. But Caroline Maloney, the New York congresswoman who chaired the committee, sent a letter on December 8 indicating that if the family did not voluntarily accept her invitation, she would be forced to subpoena them.

Nine days later, the hearing was convened. The proceedings would be held remotely, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and that morning, David Sackler, dressed in a dark suit and sitting in a featureless fluorescent space that looked like a borrowed office, raised his right hand and was sworn in. When the family realized that some of them would have no choice but to appear, they had negotiated, offering David and Kathe, along with Craig Landau from Purdue. Six decades earlier, when Senator Kefauver was holding his congressional hearings, Félix Martí-Ibáñez had claimed an infirmity in order to avoid testifying and Bill Frohlich had said he was inaccessible, somewhere in Germany. Now, according to one person familiar with the negotiations, attorneys for Mortimer Sackler said that he was unable to appear because he would be in “a remote part of Asia.” Even when he was running Purdue, Richard Sackler had always preferred to let other people do his talking for him. Faced with the prospect of a brutal

public inquiry—one which was likely to focus largely on his own conduct and remarks—he chose not to step up and account for himself, but to send his own son to speak on his behalf.

“I want to express my family’s deep sadness about the opioid crisis,” David began. He had shaved his beard and combed a schoolboy part in his hair, so, though he was forty now, he looked younger. “What you have heard from the press about the Sacklers is almost certainly wrong and highly distorted.”

Prior to his testimony, the committee had invited a series of people to speak about the harrowing impact of OxyContin on their lives. A mother from California, Barbara Van Rooyan, spoke about losing her son, Patrick, after he took a single OxyContin pill and stopped breathing, in 2004. “The first year, I woke each morning wishing that I, too, were dead,” she said. “Grief from the loss of a child is not a process. It is a lifelong weight upon one’s soul. A weight for which I hold Purdue and the Sacklers responsible.” Nan Goldin appeared, a copy of Barry Meier’s book positioned prominently on the shelf behind her. “My addiction destroyed my relationships with my friends and family and almost ended my career,” she said. “Now I try to speak for the half a million who no longer can.”

This was probably quite a novel experience for David—to come face to face with individuals whose lives had been ruined by his family’s drug, and be forced to listen to them. “I am deeply and profoundly sorry that OxyContin has played a role in any addiction and death,” he said. “Though I believe the full record, which has not been publicly released yet, will show that the family and the board acted legally and ethically, I take a deep moral responsibility for it because I believe our product, OxyContin, despite our best intentions and best efforts, has been associated with abuse and addiction.”

These talking points had been carefully engineered. The family would perform compassion, even sorrow—but not acknowledge wrongdoing. “I relied on Purdue’s management to keep on top of medical science and ensure the company was complying with all laws,” David said. With lawyerly syntax, he kept suggesting that OxyContin had been “associated” with addiction. But the representatives weren’t buying it. “You are using the passive voice there, when you say it has been ‘associated’ with abuse,”

Jamie Raskin, of Maryland, observed. “Which implies somehow that you and your family were not aware of exactly what was taking place.”

Clay Higgins, who prior to running for Congress had been a cop in Louisiana, pointed out that everyone “on the street” knew that OxyContin was addictive. How could the *Sacklers* not have known? Another representative, Kelly Armstrong of North Dakota, remarked that at this point any notion of plausible deniability was difficult to credit. The family could have found evidence of the burgeoning national crisis “just by looking at your own balance sheet.”

One after another, the representatives hammered David. “We don’t agree on a lot on this committee in a bipartisan way,” the ranking member, James Comer, of Kentucky, said. “But I think our opinion of Purdue Pharma and the actions of your family, I think we all agree, are sickening.”

At times, David seemed comically out of touch, not just from the details of the opioid crisis but from the quotidian realities of American life. Asked if he had ever visited Appalachia and taken the measure of OxyContin’s impact on the region, he replied that he *had* been there—not for any “fact finding” purposes, however, but on vacation, with Joss. At one point, the Illinois congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi put onto the screen a photo of the Los Angeles mansion that David and Joss had acquired in 2018. “This is your home in Bel Air, California, correct?”

“No,” David said. “I’ve never even spent a night there.”

To David, this must have seemed downright exonerating. It was a mere investment property, after all. But Krishnamoorthi was confused. Do you own the house? Or don’t you?

“The trust for my benefit owns it,” David clarified, adding, “As an investment property.”

“Oh, the *trust* owns that,” Krishnamoorthi said. Of course. The trust. “Yes, Mr. Sackler, the *trust* bought this. For \$22 million in an all cash deal.” A lot of Americans got addicted to OxyContin, Krishnamoorthi said. “I would submit, sir, that you and your family are addicted to money.”



When Kathe Sackler appeared, she looked old and drawn. Some of this may have been for show; during a recent deposition in the bankruptcy case, she had insisted on using a magnifying glass to read the documents that were placed in front of her. She began her prepared remarks with a surprising personal aside. “Nothing is more tragic than the loss of a child,” she said. “While every family tragedy is unique, I do know how deeply it hurts. I lost my brother Robert to mental illness and suicide,” she said. “I have learned from my own experience that our loved ones are not to blame for their mental illness or addiction.”

This was a surprising turn. In all the years since 1975, the family had never spoken publicly of Bobby’s death—or, for that matter, of his life. Yet now, Kathe chose to do so. One consideration for Kathe may have been that she had been informed, several weeks prior to her testimony, that the details of Bobby’s death would soon be published in this book. In any case, whether this disclosure was a bid for sympathy or a genuine expression of compassion, it fell flat. In the rest of her testimony, Kathe employed the same evasive circumlocution that David had. It “distresses” her, she said, to think that OxyContin had become “associated” with so much human suffering.

Peter Welch, of Vermont, mentioned the Mexican drug kingpin Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, who had recently been convicted in a New York federal court. “El Chapo got a life sentence, and he is going to forfeit \$12 billion,” Welch pointed out. “The Sackler family through Purdue has three felony convictions, but no one is going to jail, and it has its billions still.”

“Excuse me,” Kathe said, suddenly animated, even testy. “The *Sackler* family doesn’t have a felony conviction. Purdue *Pharma* has a felony conviction. I am an individual person.” The truth was, Kathe said, she was not very happy with the family business. “I’m angry that some people working at Purdue broke the law,” she continued, acknowledging that this had happened more than once. “I’m angry about it from 2007 and I’m angry about it now, again, in 2020.”

Maloney asked Kathe if she would apologize, not in some generic “I’m sorry you’re upset” sort of way, but genuinely apologize, “for the role *you* played in the opioid crisis.”

“I have struggled with that question,” Kathe began. “I have tried to figure out: is there anything that I could have done differently, knowing what I knew then, not what I know now?” But on reflection, she concluded, “I can’t. There is nothing that I can find that I would have done differently.”

David had talked about his desire to “humanize” his family, but one problem for the Sacklers was that, unlike a lot of human beings, they didn’t seem to learn from what they saw transpiring in the world around them. They could produce a rehearsed simulacrum of human empathy, but they seemed incapable of comprehending their own role in the story, and impervious to any genuine moral epiphany. They resented being cast as the villains in a drama, but it was their own stunted, stubborn blindness that made them so well suited to the role. They couldn’t change.

There was something undeniably ritualistic about the hearing that morning. If the community could not hold the family accountable, it would subject them to a ceremonial shaming. It likely seemed, to Kathe and David, that the whole exercise was theater: that the lawmakers were performing outrage, just as they had performed compassion. But the proceeding was also, in some fundamental way, an expression of democracy: OxyContin had visited destruction on so many communities, and now, the representatives of those communities had gathered to give voice, like some awful Greek chorus, to all of their collective indignation.

One member of the panel was Jim Cooper, a veteran congressman from Tennessee, a state that had been ravaged by the drug. He had a courtly demeanor and spoke slowly, selecting his words with a careful, professorial cadence. On the subject of the family’s implacable refusal to recognize what they had done, Cooper said, “I think Upton Sinclair once wrote that a man has difficulty understanding something if his salary depends on his not understanding.” He continued, his voice soft and deliberate, “Watching you testify makes my blood boil. I’m not sure that I’m aware of any family in America that’s more evil than yours.”



The 2020 pandemic and the attendant economic collapse only intensified the opioid crisis as social isolation and economic stress caused people to

relapse, and overdose fatality rates spiked in many parts of the country. Not long after David and Joss fled New York, Mortimer and Jacqueline quietly sold their East Seventy-Fifth Street town house, in an off-market transaction, for \$38 million. They were rumored to be moving to London, a city long favored by oligarchs with unsavory fortunes, which might offer them a more congenial base of operations.

Maura Healey made a point of speaking, on a regular basis, with families who had lost loved ones to opioids. They often felt a tremendous sense of indignation, but what they wanted, many of them told her, was not money but truth. In a filing with the bankruptcy court, the states had estimated the total cost of the crisis to be more than \$2 trillion. “What we’re trying to do is tell the story, so there’s a reckoning,” Healey said. To gather evidence and tell the story—the true story, the whole story, the story that had for so long been suppressed—had a value of its own. “We will never be able to collect enough money to account for the damage of this crisis perpetrated by members of the family,” Healey pointed out. No amount of money would be enough. But at the same time, she continued, there was no sum the Sacklers could spend to erase the history of what they had done. Nearly a century earlier, during the height of the Depression, Isaac Sackler told his three sons that if you lose a fortune, you can always earn another, but if you lose your good name, you can never recover it. Sounding very much like Isaac Sackler, Maura Healey concluded, “They can’t buy their reputations back.”

One odd feature of the DOJ resolution was that it endorsed the Sacklers’ bid to turn Purdue into a so-called public-benefit corporation, which would continue to sell opioids but distribute the proceeds to the states so they could fight the opioid crisis. None of the public commentary made note of it, but there was irony in the Sacklers proposing that Purdue be turned into a charitable trust. Back in the 1940s, on a snowy street corner in New York, Arthur, Mortimer, and Raymond had made a pact with their best friend, Bill Frohlich. They would work together so closely it would be difficult to say where one man’s interests ended and another’s began. They would share their businesses and support one another so that the whole enterprise became greater than the sum of its parts, and when the last man died, he would turn all of their assets into a charitable trust.

To Richard Leather, the attorney who formalized that agreement nearly six decades earlier, it was infuriating to watch the family hold out the promise of such an arrangement as a carrot to fend off litigation. “This agreement was not designed to make Richard Sackler rich,” Leather said. “It was designed to achieve a gift to humanity. To benefit the public.”

In 1947, when Richard Sackler was still a toddler, his father and his uncles incorporated one of their first family foundations “in memory of Isaac Sackler as a tribute by his sons to a man whose love knew no ends and whose interests and vision were limitless.” Their aim was to “advance the ideals he cherished,” the brothers wrote, and “to help alleviate man’s suffering.”

AFTERWORD

ONE AFTERNOON AS I was writing this book, in the summer of 2020, I left the house with my wife and children to run an errand. We were getting into our car when a neighbor from a few houses away approached. “I don’t want to freak you out,” she said. “But there’s a guy in an SUV up the street who has been sitting there all day, and I think he’s been watching your house.”

I live in the suburbs outside New York City, on a sleepy residential street where there’s not much reason for random cars to park. So this was unnerving. We thanked the neighbor, piled into our car, then drove up the street, directly past the SUV, and saw a heavysset man of about fifty behind the wheel. As we passed, he grew suddenly absorbed with his phone. We drove off but then made a loop and doubled back, thinking we could surprise him. He must have gotten out of his car as soon as we left, because this time when we approached, the man was standing by the rear bumper, stretching. He was wearing flip-flops. We took his photo.

This was an upsetting encounter for my sons, who are in elementary school, but we tried to make the most of it. We bought binoculars, and they stood vigil at the window to see if he would return. We never saw the man again, though he did come back on at least one other occasion: a different neighbor, who had also noticed him the first time, told us that the man had spent another day watching the house. He was driving a different car this time, a sedan. But it was definitely the same man. There was a tree that he seemed to like to park under, which afforded shade from the sun. In August, a fierce tropical storm hit New York, with winds of seventy miles an hour. We ended up losing power. After the rain stopped, I ventured outside with my boys, carefully avoiding the downed power lines. We walked up the street and saw that the shade tree had been completely uprooted by the storm. I hoped the man would come back now, see that his tree had been

violently ripped out of the ground, and wonder whether some higher power wasn't trying to tell him something. But if he did return, we didn't see him.

Of course when this visitor initially appeared, the first thing I thought of was Nan Goldin and the private investigator who had staked out her home in Brooklyn and trailed her fellow activist Megan Kapler. She had no definitive evidence that this man had been hired by the Sacklers. These things are difficult to prove. Private investigators are generally sub-subcontractors, hired by intermediaries, like law firms or crisis management specialists, in part for the purposes of deniability. Often, the investigator himself doesn't know who his ultimate client is. But it seemed like more than a coincidence that Goldin, Kapler, and I had all had the same experience. When I asked Purdue Pharma about this surveillance, the company emphatically denied having any knowledge of it. When I posed the same question to the Sacklers, a family representative made no similar denial, and instead declined to comment. At the time of these visits, I was living in quarantine, due to COVID. I wondered what an investigator could possibly hope to learn from surveilling a writer who never leaves the house. Then it occurred to me that the purpose was almost certainly not to learn anything but to intimidate.

When I started working on this project, in 2016, I came to it indirectly. For several years, I had been writing about the illicit drug trade between Mexico and the United States. In particular, I'd been trying to understand the Mexican drug cartels not just as criminal organizations but as businesses. I wrote a long article that was a sort of business school case study of a drug syndicate, exploring the ways in which the Sinaloa cartel was a dark mirror of a legal commodities enterprise. One thing I noticed, in this research, was a new emphasis, among the cartels, on heroin. That led me to OxyContin. The cartels had been reviled, rightly, for their willingness to sell an addictive product and destroy lives. But I was astonished to discover that the family that presided over the company that made OxyContin was a prominent philanthropic dynasty with what appeared to be an unimpeachable reputation. I read *Dreamland*, by Sam Quinones, then *Pain Killer*, by Barry Meier, and the investigative reporting on Purdue in the *Los Angeles Times*. I was familiar with the Sackler name. It was

synonymous, in my mind, with philanthropy. Until reading up on the opioid crisis, I had known nothing of the family's business activities.

I spent the better part of the next year researching and writing the article that was published in *The New Yorker* in 2017. As I learned the fascinating history of the original three brothers and came to understand how Purdue, under Richard Sackler's leadership, marketed OxyContin, I was struck by the echoes of Arthur Sackler's career in all that came later. The family had never spoken publicly at that point about its role in the opioid crisis. I wondered what they would say. But my efforts to secure interviews with the Sacklers were met with frosty silence.

As a journalist, most stories you write don't make a ripple. They chronicle reality, but only rarely change it. The *New Yorker* article did make a difference, in ways that I had not anticipated. I received hundreds of notes from readers who had discovered the Sackler story because they, or someone they knew, had struggled with opioids. Nan Goldin was one of the people I heard from, and I watched, from a distance, as she created a movement.

At the time, I didn't think it would be possible to write a book about the Sacklers, because the family was so secretive, and Purdue, as a privately held company, remained impenetrable. But I started to hear from people who had worked at Purdue, or known the Sacklers, and who wanted to tell their stories. And in January 2019, Maura Healey unveiled her complaint in the Massachusetts case, which was full of the family's private correspondence.



There are many good books about the opioid crisis. My intention was to tell a different kind of story, however, a saga about three generations of a family dynasty and the ways in which it changed the world, a story about ambition, philanthropy, crime and impunity, the corruption of institutions, power, and greed. As such, there are aspects of the public health crisis that this book gives scant attention to, from the science of addiction to the best strategies for treatment and abatement to the struggles of people living with an opioid use disorder. The issue of pain and appropriate pain management

is enormously complex, and while this book is highly critical of the mass marketing of opioids for moderate pain, it does not explore at any length the harder question, which is currently a matter of heated debate, about the long-term therapeutic value of opioids for severe chronic pain. I have heard from many readers who suffer from chronic pain and worry that my investigative reporting on the misdeeds of Purdue might jeopardize their access to appropriate medication, by stigmatizing opioids and the patients who rely on these drugs to live their lives. I have no desire to contribute to the very real stigmatization of people who take OxyContin and other opioids, whether they do so legally or illegally. Having said that, as I hope this book demonstrates, Purdue Pharma and the Sackler family have for decades invoked the interests of pain patients as a fig leaf for their own avarice, and I think it would be a mistake to give them a pass, on those grounds, today.

As I make clear throughout the book, OxyContin was hardly the only opioid to be fraudulently marketed or widely abused, and my choice to focus on Purdue is in no way a suggestion that other pharmaceutical companies do not deserve a great deal of blame for the crisis. The same could be said for the FDA, the doctors who wrote prescriptions, the wholesalers that distributed the opioids, and the pharmacies that filled the prescriptions. There's plenty of blame to go around. I do share the view, however, of many doctors, public officials, prosecutors, and scholars that Purdue played a special role, as a pioneer.

All three branches of the Sackler family were unenthusiastic about the prospect of this book. Arthur's widow and children declined repeated requests to speak with me, as did the Mortimer wing of the family. The Raymond wing opted for a more actively antagonistic role, hiring an attorney, Tom Clare, who has a boutique law firm, based in Virginia, that specializes in threatening journalists in an effort to "kill" stories before they are published. Clare's opening salvo, which arrived before I had even started writing, in the summer of 2019, was a fifteen-page, single-spaced letter to *The New Yorker* accusing me of "pervasive bias" against his clients and demanding a series of corrections to the article I had published nearly two years earlier. The opioid crisis is driven by "illicit fentanyl smuggled into the United States from China and Mexico," Clare insisted. *The New*

Yorker engaged a fact-checker to recheck the article, in response to Clare's critique. But this review turned up no factual errors, and the magazine did not change a word. Next, Clare wrote to me directly to say that the Sacklers were considering "potential litigation" and to formally instruct me not to destroy any "evidence" in anticipation of such a lawsuit. It was a measure of Clare's moxie that he marked all of these letters "**Confidential, Off-the-Record, Not for Publication or Attribution,**" even though anyone with even a passing knowledge of how journalism works would know that he would need my agreement for such a condition, and that unilateral pronouncements are meaningless, even in bold type.

Over the next eighteen months, Clare sent several dozen letters and emails to *The New Yorker* and to Doubleday, the publisher of this book. As I studied the way Arthur Sackler used his powerful lawyer Clark Clifford to manage the Kefauver commission, and how the family consigliere Howard Udell tried to manage *The New York Times*, and how Purdue and the Sacklers used Mary Jo White to undermine one federal investigation in 2007 and then another in 2020, I was struck by the continuities in the family's tactics. I'm married to a lawyer. Many of my close friends are lawyers. I went to law school myself. But I marveled (naively, you might say) at the mercenary willingness of a certain breed of ostensibly respectable attorney to play handmaiden to shady tycoons. At one point Joanna Lydgate, the deputy attorney general in Massachusetts, invoked an adage she first heard from a professor in law school: "Everyone is entitled to a lawyer, but it doesn't have to be you."

After NYU announced its decision to remove the Sackler name, following Purdue's guilty plea in the autumn of 2020, one of the family lawyers, Daniel Connolly, said, "As soon as Purdue documents are released they will show the company's history and that members of the Sackler family who served on the board of directors always acted ethically and lawfully." This struck me as an odd posture to take. The documents that had emerged so far looked so bad for the Sacklers; if the family had *other* documents that were exculpatory and told a different story, why wait? I wrote to Tom Clare, telling him that I would love to see those documents, in order to incorporate them into this book. He replied that because his clients

did not believe I would “engage responsibly” with such evidence, they did not want to grant me “preferred access to new materials.”

One theme that struck me as I interviewed dozens of former Purdue employees—sales reps, doctors, scientists, executives—was a fog of collective denial. There were stories that the company (and the Sacklers) told, back in the early days of OxyContin, about how it was only people who abused the drug that became addicted, and it was only a handful of errant sales reps who mis-marketed it, and the company was driven only by a selfless desire to help people suffering from pain. Those stories, like the stories that Arthur had told about the drugs he marketed, became unsustainable when you took a hard look at the facts. Yet many at Purdue appear to have gone on believing them, persisting, for decades, in a state of denial. “We were complicit. For monetary reasons,” Nicholas Primpas, who worked as a regional account manager for Purdue from 1987 to 2005, told me. “We were slow to catch on. And that might have been greed.” But many former employees, whether they loved the Sacklers or hated them, were reluctant to concede even that much.

There is a notable absence of whistleblowers in the OxyContin story. This may be due to the fact that when people did attempt to blow the whistle, Purdue did its best to crush them, as company lawyers did to Karen White, the Florida saleswoman who lost her lawsuit against Purdue in 2005. But I came to believe that it was also a function of denial. I would spend hours talking with intelligent people who had worked at the company, and they could acknowledge all sorts of infirmities in the corporate culture and make astute observations about the personalities involved, but when it came to OxyContin’s role in the opioid crisis, they would do their best to explain it away. Even in the face of voluminous evidence, of guilty pleas to felony charges, of thousands of lawsuits, of study after study, of so many dead, they retreated to the old truths, about abuse versus addiction, about heroin and fentanyl. I wondered if, for some of these people, it was just too demoralizing to take a sober measure of their own complicity, if it was simply too much for the human conscience to bear.



One day I drove out to the village of Amagansett, close to the tip of Long Island, to meet a man I'll call Jeff. We met at a restaurant, and he told me about his struggles with addiction. A decade earlier, when he was a teenager, he had started abusing opioids. They were "everywhere," he recalled. He particularly liked OxyContin for the clean high that it provided. After sucking the pill's red coating off, he would crush the rest with the edge of a cigarette lighter, then snort it. He didn't inject. "When I was growing up, I always told myself, 'I'll never stick a needle in my arm,'" he said.

In a soft, unflinching tone, Jeff recounted the next decade of his life: he kept abusing painkillers, met a woman, fell in love, and introduced her to opioids. One day, his dealer was out of pills and said, "I'll sell you a bag of heroin for twenty bucks." Jeff was reluctant, but then withdrawal set in, and he acquiesced. At first, he and his girlfriend snorted heroin. "But you build up a tolerance, just like with the pills," he said, and eventually they started injecting it. They were high when they got married. Jeff's wife gave birth to a baby boy who was born with an opioid dependency. "The doctors weaned him off with droplets of morphine," Jeff said.

After a long stretch in rehab, Jeff had gotten sober and stayed that way for more than a year. His baby was healthy, and his wife was sober, too. Looking back, Jeff said, he felt that an impulsive youthful decision to snort pills had set him on a path from which he could not deviate. "It was all about the drug," he said. "I just created a hurricane of destruction."

We paid for our lunch and walked out of the restaurant and strolled along a leafy side street that was flanked by grand houses. Amagansett is a summer colony for many wealthy New York families. During the worst years of Jeff's addiction, he had worked as a tradesman in the area. I'd asked him to show me a particular property he had serviced, and on a quiet road we stopped by the entrance to an immense estate that was mostly hidden behind dense shrubbery. It was the summerhouse of Mortimer and Jacqueline Sackler. Jeff had known, even when he was working for them, about the family business. The irony was not lost on him. The Sacklers had always seemed insulated by the fact that the destruction caused by their drug wasn't happening in their own backyard. Yet there was Jeff, literally in

their backyard. “I couldn’t tell you how many times I was on that property, sitting in a work truck, snorting a pill,” he said.

We reached an ornamental wooden gate, beyond which was a yard dominated by a stately weeping willow. As I was admiring the tree, Jeff said that for the people who maintained the grounds, it was “a pain in the ass.” Whenever the wind picks up, he explained, branches break and scatter all over the lawn. “But the place has to be flawless,” he said. “There can’t be a leaf on the ground.” So a crew would sweep through regularly, to clear away the mess.

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My first thanks go to all those who so generously gave their time to speak with me over the past two years and who trusted me to tell their stories. There are too many to thank by name, and some I cannot name at all. But you know who you are. Thank you. Thanks also to the staffs of the archives I consulted, all of which are listed in the notes. Thanks to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, for granting me access to a trove of leaked banking information, which included details about the Sacklers' accounts. Thanks to Katie Townsend and her colleagues at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, who intervened in the bankruptcy case to unseal filings containing some very revealing evidence.

This book started as an article in *The New Yorker*, and I'm deeply indebted, as ever, to my longtime editor Daniel Zalewski, who has taught me so much of what I know about how to tell a story. Thanks to E. Tammy Kim and Nicolas Niarchos, who checked the original piece, to Peter Canby, who oversaw the checking (and rechecking), and to Fabio Bertoni. Thanks also to David Remnick, for making so many hard things look so easy, and for managing to be a great boss on top of everything else, as well as to Dorothy Wickenden, Henry Finder, Pam McCarthy, Deirdre Foley-Mendelssohn, Mike Luo, David Rohde, Linnea Feldman Emison, Sean Lavery, Alexander Barasch, Ave Carrillo, Natalie Raabe, and all of my other colleagues at the magazine. Thanks to my friend Philip Montgomery, whose searing photo essay "Faces of an Epidemic" ran alongside my piece in *The New Yorker*.

I feel extraordinarily lucky to be publishing another book with Bill Thomas at Doubleday, who took a chance and signed me up to write *The Snakehead* back in 2006. Bill understood what this book should be from our first conversations about it and has been a steadfast ally and a deeply perceptive interlocutor at every step along the way. A huge thanks to Daniel

Novack, my tireless lawyer at Doubleday, who somehow manages to be neurotically punctilious and unflappably laid-back at the same time. Thanks also to the wonderful Michael Goldsmith, and to Todd Doughty, Anke Steinecke, Maria Massey, Ingrid Sterner, Lydia Buechler, Kathy Hourigan, Khari Dawkins, John Fontana, and everyone else at Doubleday. Thea Traff helped with the photos. Oliver Munday designed the beautiful cover. Kimon de Greef wrangled the endnotes on a brutal deadline. Julie Tate fact-checked the book, with incredible attention, care, and good cheer. Any errors that remain are entirely my own.

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Writing this book, I thought a lot about family—what holds a family together or tears it apart, what it means to carry a family name—and the experience left me feeling deeply fortunate to have been born into the one that I was. Thanks to my parents, Jennifer Radden and Frank Keefe, for their endless support and their enduring example, and to my in-laws, Tadeusz and Ewa. A particular thanks to my sister, Beatrice, and my brother, Tristram. Even as we live far-flung lives with our own careers and

families, I am who I am today because of the childhood we shared, and I love and admire you both, and your families, beyond measure. This book is dedicated to you.

I wrote the manuscript during COVID, on lockdown with my wife, Justyna, and our sons, Lucian and Felix. It's strange to say, but I learned something about adaptability by watching my children recalibrate, in real time, to the catastrophe unfolding around them. We were fortunate, all things considered, and the small ways in which the pandemic tested us are not worth mentioning, in light of what others experienced. But I was inspired by the resilience of my children. It gave me hope at a time when I needed it.

Justyna has informed me that this acknowledgment had "better be good," and that's a decent example, actually, of what I love about her—her unsentimental wit, her total allegiance on the big things, combined with vocal skepticism on all the little ones. To get to share a laugh and a glass of wine and a life and two children with Justyna is all I could ever hope for. It still feels like a coup.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The Sackler family did not cooperate with my efforts to research this book. None of the Sacklers who feature prominently agreed to grant interviews. Tom Clare, the attorney, responded to my repeated requests for interviews with Richard and David Sackler by writing, “until Mr. Keefe acknowledges (and corrects) the errors in his prior reporting for *The New Yorker*...we have no reason to believe Mr. Keefe will give my clients a fair shake in any interview.” Apart from generally disputing the very premise of the article, and offering their standard inventory of unpersuasive rebuttals, the Sacklers seemed most exercised about the business involving the pediatric indication for OxyContin, and were demanding that I append a correction to the article asserting, erroneously, that they had not voluntarily sought the pediatric indication but had taken the step only because the FDA compelled them to do so. Much as I would have liked to speak directly with Clare’s clients, this was not a condition that I was prepared to meet.

Instead, Clare proposed a meeting with the family’s lawyers and PR handlers, at which I would notify them in detail of what I intended to write in the book, and they could tell me more about the alleged errors in my past reporting. I was certainly prepared to hear them out, but Clare’s position seemed to shift over time, and my publisher’s offers to arrange a meeting went ignored for months. In one email to me, Clare wrote that the Sacklers had been “forced,” by my refusal to make changes to *The New Yorker* article, to deal with me “in this manner (in writing and through lawyers).”

As I was completing the book, I sent a list of detailed queries to the Raymond and Mortimer wings of the family. Clare had been adamant that his clients would need ample time to respond to any fact checking inquiries. So I gave them a month.

Just prior to the deadline, Clare arranged a briefing of Doubleday’s in-house lawyer, who was responsible for vetting the manuscript, by an

attorney for the family and PR representatives for both the Raymond and Mortimer wings. None of these spokespeople would consent to be quoted by name, but they delivered a PowerPoint presentation, in which they claimed that OxyContin only ever represented a tiny fraction of the market for opioids, that it is exceedingly rare for people who take OxyContin as prescribed by doctors to become addicted, and that the Sackler board members played no meaningful role in the management of their company.

One of my sources, who worked as a senior executive at Purdue, once told me that part of the problem for the company was its relationship with the FDA. “The FDA for many years didn’t accept that it, too, had missed things,” the executive said. When it came to Purdue’s opioids, the agency had a long and negligent history of permissiveness. But the attitude in Stamford, the executive continued, was that so long as the company had the FDA’s blessing, then its behavior must be okay. Over the years, that dynamic “gave too much comfort to Purdue.” In their presentation, the Sackler representatives returned again and again to the FDA. To rebut the charge that Michael Friedman and Paul Goldenheim lied to Congress when they said, in testimony, that there had been no substantial abuse of MS Contin, the representatives pointed to a statement in 2002 by an FDA official saying much the same thing. But there is no reason to think that the FDA would know better than the company itself to what extent the company’s drug was being abused, and it seems entirely likely that when he testified in 2002, the FDA official was relying on the earlier sworn testimony of Purdue’s own executives. Nor could the Sacklers’ handlers, or a representative for Purdue, explain the internal company emails suggesting that the drug had indeed been widely abused, and that the company had received reports of that abuse “all the time, and from everywhere.” Similarly, the family lawyer asserted in his briefing for Doubleday that OxyContin is consistently effective on a 12-hour dosing cycle— notwithstanding the abundant evidence to the contrary—because the FDA continues to sign off on the Purdue labelling that says it is.

On the day that the answers to my fact checking inquiries were due, Clare announced that the two wings of the family were working together on their responses—but that they would need more time. At this point, I was bracing for a voluminous reply, and ready to incorporate the family’s

comments and denials into the body of the book. But when Clare sent their formal response, five days later, it was just a page and a half long. Noting that I had still “not corrected errors from your first piece about the Sackler family,” the statement alleged that my fact checking queries had been “replete with erroneous assertions built on false premises about: the Sackler family’s business dealings, political affiliations, homes, studies, conduct during board meetings (including false assertions of improper use of medicine)” —this appeared to be a specific denial of the incident in which Richard Sackler was said to have popped an OxyContin pill in front of colleagues, though as the story had been related to me, it was not a board meeting —“and board memberships, involvement in medicine development, emails clearly meant in jest or involving people who had never worked at Purdue, claims about OxyContin’s potency and other errata.” In fact, the “multitude of errors” left them with “no reassurance that the book as a whole will in any way accurately present the facts,” and as such, the family had decided to boycott the fact checking process altogether, and offer no denials to the many specific allegations I had presented. I had sent over a hundred queries, relating to both wings of the family, and to the business. I’d given them plenty of time. But in the end they chose not to respond.

Nevertheless, this account is substantially built on the family’s own words. Because Purdue, and to a lesser extent the Sacklers themselves, have been involved in litigation for decades, the most significant source for this book is tens of thousands of pages of court documents: depositions, affidavits, briefs, complaints, court transcripts, and hundreds of emails, memos, and other confidential materials that have been produced in discovery. All of this material is cited in the notes. A prosecution memo or a legal complaint is by its nature an accusatory document, but rather than accept the charges of state and federal authorities at face value, I have depended instead on the evidence that they have unearthed, and used that evidence to tell my own story. In a number of places, my interpretation of the evidence differed from that of state attorneys general, just as it differed, quite considerably, from the interpretation set forth in the various defenses offered up by Purdue and the Sacklers.

When I quote emails or letters, they are referenced in a number of ways, which for clarity and transparency I want to spell out here. In some

instances, I am citing a communication that I possess in its entirety, because it has been produced in discovery or leaked to me. Other times, I quote documents that I do not possess but that are referenced in legal filings; in such cases, I cite to the original document, to the extent that it is identified, and then add, “quoted in the Massachusetts Complaint” or the like, to make clear that I am relying on a characterization in court papers and do not have the underlying document myself.

This is a work of narrative nonfiction: no details are invented or imagined; in instances in which I attribute thoughts or feelings to people, it is because they have described them to me or to someone else, or I am relying on a characterization by someone who knew them. I have employed pseudonyms in two instances: for Howard Udell’s legal secretary, whom I am calling Martha West, and for the man in the afterword whom I call Jeff. In putting the book together, I was grateful for the groundbreaking work of scholars and journalists who have explored different aspects of this story, particularly John Lear, Scott Podolsky, David Herzberg, Andrea Tone, Richard Harris, Adam Tanner, Barry Meier, Sam Quinones, David Armstrong, Christopher Glazek, Beth Macy, Chris McGreal, Bethany McLean, Gerald Posner, and the reporting team at the *Los Angeles Times*: Lisa Girion, Scott Glover, and Harriet Ryan.

I conducted interviews with more than two hundred people, many of whom have worked for the Sacklers, at Purdue or in some other capacity; have known the family socially; or have investigated them. A great many of these interviews were on the record. There were numerous sources, however, who for one reason or another would speak only on the condition that I not use their names. On-the-record sources are cited in the endnotes; in instances in which I have relied upon an anonymous source, there is no note. The book is comprehensively endnoted, so if you encounter a quotation or assertion in the text and do not find a corresponding note in the back of the book, that means it comes from an unnamed source. Dozens of sources were interviewed multiple times over a two-year period, and I vetted their recollections—cross-checking with other sources, seeking out documentary corroboration, testing people’s memories. In addition, the book has been independently fact-checked, and the checker knew the actual identity of each source and checked each quotation and assertion against

interview transcripts and in many cases conducted additional interviews with those unnamed sources for checking purposes.

In book 1, I relied heavily on a memoir that Marietta Lutze privately published in 1997. Only 225 copies were printed; I bought one online. Lutze had a strong point of view, and I sought to corroborate her account through interviews with people who knew Arthur and his family at the time. I also relied on a biography of Arthur M. Sackler, written by a devoted protégé and published in 2012 by the AMS Foundation for the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities. It casts Arthur as a hero of almost mythical proportions, but it was nevertheless very helpful. Arthur's columns in the *Medical Tribune*, which I consulted at the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, furnished additional detail and a sense of Arthur's voice. The Sackler brothers were far too secretive to have left their letters to any archive, but many of their friends did just that, so I was able to gather letters and artifacts from the donated papers of their associates and confidants. I consulted a dozen archives, which are indicated in the notes, but special mention goes to the Félix Martí-Ibáñez Papers at Yale, which were essential in understanding the Sackler brothers and Bill Frohlich and getting a feel for the texture of their life in the 1960s.

The National Archives has a vast repository of files from the Kefauver investigation—some forty boxes in total, a number of which, unless I am mistaken, I was the first researcher to consult. A huge amount of new information about Arthur and his brothers is drawn from the files of that investigation. The voluminous records associated with the battle over Arthur's estate, which I combed through at a courthouse on Long Island, included depositions with family members, minutes of family meetings, and other documents that were full of vivid details.

In writing book 2, I was lucky to connect with Richard Kapit, Richard Sackler's college roommate, and with two friends from Roslyn, one of whom shared with me the letters Sackler wrote in college. I also interviewed dozens of former Purdue employees who worked at the company in every decade since the 1960s. Court documents were critical: two depositions by Richard Sackler, totaling nearly eight hundred pages of testimony; the deposition by Kathe Sackler; a dozen depositions from other Purdue employees; and reams of internal emails and other files. Some of

these documents came out through court proceedings; others were leaked to me by people who thought that they should be made public.

One evening as I was in the late stages of writing this book, I received an envelope in my mailbox at home. It had no return address, just a thumb drive and a slip of paper with a quotation from *The Great Gatsby*: “They were careless people...they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess.” The thumb drive contained thousands of pages of depositions, law enforcement files, and internal records that had been produced in a number of lawsuits against Purdue. I had also sued the FDA, under the Freedom of Information Act, forcing the agency to produce thousands of pages of its own internal records. This was not as fruitful as I might have hoped—the agency informed me that Curtis Wright’s emails could “not be located” (!)—but nevertheless shed light on the FDA’s approval of OxyContin.

The Department of Justice prosecution memo prepared by Rick Mountcastle in the Western District of Virginia was a crucial source. My hope is that one day this document will be made public in its entirety. I would publish the whole thing myself, but there were conditions placed upon me by the person who shared it, which prevent me from doing so, at least for now. In an email to me, an attorney for Paul Goldenheim claimed that Goldenheim did not lie in his congressional testimony about OxyContin and that everything he said was “not misleading, verifiably accurate, and truthful.” I found this claim decidedly unpersuasive, for reasons I detail in the notes. (I also made extensive efforts to contact Michael Friedman, but without success.)

For book 3, I relied on many interviews with people who have worked at Purdue or known the Sacklers in some other capacity. I found, in my reporting, that there is a category of employee who might have seemed almost invisible to the family—from doormen and housekeepers to yoga instructors and administrative assistants—but who often possess a unique, and surprisingly intimate, vantage point on their employers. I was also able to obtain numerous private emails from some family members that have not been made public through litigation but were shared with me. In the bankruptcy proceeding, a forty-eight-page log of a private WhatsApp chat

among the heirs of Mortimer Sackler provided a fascinating window into the way in which some family members strategized about how to respond to my reporting in *The New Yorker* and to the wider controversy that soon engulfed them.

As a reporter, I put a lot of stock in documents—in the idea that a stack of paper can be more valuable, sometimes, than an interview. But this was the first project I've ever undertaken in which there were really *too many* documents. I felt like the prosecutors in Abingdon, Virginia, when they were putting together their case against Purdue: overwhelmed by paper. Even so, what I was able to access is a small fraction of what will eventually come out. It appears that the bankruptcy in White Plains will result in a repository of Purdue documents that could run to the tens of millions of pages. If that is the case, then this book will hardly be the last word on these people and events. But my hope is that it can provide a road map for future reporters and researchers to delve through the much larger corpus of documents that will eventually be unsealed, and inspire them to bring the whole truth of this important story to light.

NOTES

PROLOGUE: THE TAPROOT

\$1 billion in annual revenue: “Debevoise & Plimpton Posts Record Revenue, Profits,” Yahoo Finance, March 12, 2019.

Mary Jo White entered the building: Unless otherwise noted, the account of Kathe Sackler’s deposition is derived from two people who were in the room that day and from the transcript of Kathe Sackler Deposition, *In re National Prescription Opiate Litigation*, MDL No. 2804, Case No. 1:17-MD-2804, April 1, 2019 (hereafter cited as Kathe Sackler Deposition).

White sometimes joked: “Interview with Mary Jo White,” *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Dec. 12, 2005.

She represented the big dogs: Mary Jo White Executive Branch Personnel Public Financial Disclosure Report, Feb. 7, 2013.

“Do the right thing”: “Street Cop,” *New Yorker*, Nov. 3, 2013.

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[“a single family made the choices”:](#) First Amended Complaint, *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Purdue Pharma LP et al.*, C.A. No. 1884-cv-01808 (BLS2), Jan. 31, 2019 (hereafter cited as Massachusetts Complaint).

[White had other ideas:](#) “Purdue’s Sackler Family Wants Global Opioids Settlement: Sackler Lawyer Mary Jo White,” Reuters, April 23, 2019.

CHAPTER 1: A GOOD NAME

[in the summer of 1913:](#) Arthur was born on August 22. “Dr. Arthur Sackler Dies at 73,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1987.

[more squarely American-sounding Arthur:](#) Entry for Abraham M. Sackler, U.S. Census, 1920.

[There’s a photo:](#) Photograph in Marietta Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other? A Traveler in Search of a Home* (Lunenburg, Vt.: Stinehour Press, 1997), 167.

[Sophie Greenberg had emigrated from Poland:](#) Entry for Sophie Sackler, U.S. Census, 1930.

[Isaac was an immigrant himself:](#) According to a 1910 census form, Isaac arrived in 1904. His parents and several of his siblings had arrived a year earlier; one of his brothers, Mark, had come in 1897. Entry for Isaac Sackler, U.S. Census, 1910.

[Isaac was a proud man:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 166.

[descended from a line of rabbis:](#) Miguel Angel Benavides Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler* (New York: AMS Foundation, 2012), 11.

[They called it Sackler Bros.:](#) Isaac Sackler World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917–1918; “Food Board Fines Bakers and Grocers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 2, 1918.

[all three brothers shared a bed:](#) “Raymond Sackler: Obituary,” *Times* (London), July 21, 2017.

[Isaac did well enough in the grocery business:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 166.

[Flatbush was considered middle class:](#) Beth S. Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 89.

[“practically Gentiles”:](#) Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City* (New York: Harcourt, 1974), 9.

[Isaac invested in real estate:](#) Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

[He began working:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 167.

[she would never fully master written English:](#) Ibid.

[spoke Yiddish at home](#): Entries for Isaac and Sophie Sackler, U.S. Census, 1920.

[They kept kosher](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

[Sophie's parents lived with the family](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 166.

[everyone staked their dreams on him](#): *Ibid.*, 110.

[Erasmus Hall High School](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

[accelerated program for bright students](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 167.

[Erasmus was an intimidating institution](#): Janna Malamud Smith, *My Father Is a Book: A Memoir of Bernard Malamud* (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 2013), 40. Bernard Malamud was a classmate of Arthur's at Erasmus, though they only became friends in later life.

[The school had science labs](#): Herbert Jacobson, "How I Rigged the Elections at Erasmus Hall," fragment of an unpublished memoir (1976), in *Bernard Malamud Papers*, 11.7, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas.

[teachers had PhDs](#): Malamud Smith, *My Father Is a Book*, 40.

[some eight thousand students](#): Jacobson, "How I Rigged the Elections at Erasmus Hall."

[suits and red ties](#): Philip Davis, *Bernard Malamud: A Writer's Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

["Hollywood cocktail party"](#): Jacobson, "How I Rigged the Elections at Erasmus Hall."

[Arthur loved it](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

[one club or another being convened](#): Jacobson, "How I Rigged the Elections at Erasmus Hall."

["the big dream"](#): "An Open Letter to Bernard Malamud," *Medical Tribune*, Nov. 14, 1973.

[Sophie would prod him](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

[selling advertising for school publications](#): *Ibid.*, 12; "The Name of Arthur M. Sackler," *Tufts Criterion* (Winter 1986).

[liked to bet on himself](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

[their advertising manager](#): *Ibid.*

“program cards”: Ibid.

rulers branded with the company name: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 168; “Name of Arthur M. Sackler.”

to help support his family: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

to his brother Morty: Ibid., 168.

“Let the kid enjoy himself”: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 14.

generated a nice commission: “Raymond Sackler: Obituary,” *Times* (London), July 21, 2017.

had contributed funds to Erasmus: *The Chronicles: A History of Erasmus Hall High School from 1906 to 1937* (Brooklyn: Erasmus Hall High School, 1937), 17.

a stained-glass window: Ibid., 49.

the ghost of Virgil: Jacobson, “How I Rigged the Elections at Erasmus Hall.”

his father’s fortunes began to slip: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

He delivered flowers: “Erasmus Hall Jobs Bureau Now Helps Parents Find Work,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 10, 1932; Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

he never took a holiday: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

marvel at the artworks: Ibid., 13.

peer through brightly lit windows: “Art Collector Honored Guest at Philbrook Opening,” *Tulsa World*, Dec. 8, 1975; Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

He loved the sensation: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 12.

Isaac Sackler’s misfortune intensified: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 167.

The employment agency at Erasmus: “Erasmus Hall Jobs Bureau Now Helps Parents Find Work.”

“a good name”: “Name of Arthur M. Sackler.”

take their temperature: “The Temple of Sackler,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1987.

wanted them to be doctors: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

“My parents brainwashed me”: “Name of Arthur M. Sackler.”

[a noble profession](#): “Raymond Sackler: Obituary,” *Times* (London), July 21, 2017.

[new scientific discoveries](#): John C. Burnham, “American Medicine’s Golden Age: What Happened to It?,” *Science*, March 19, 1982.

[enrolled as a premed student](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 13.

[often falling apart](#): “Name of Arthur M. Sackler.”

[studied hard](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

[art classes at Cooper Union](#): “Name of Arthur M. Sackler.”

[“arms the student with an outlook”](#): Arthur M. Sackler, editor’s note, *Medical Violet*, New York University College of Medicine, 1937.

[soda jerk in a candy store](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 13.

[coached his brothers](#): Ibid.

[“kid brothers”](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 168.

[a cruise around Lower Manhattan](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 15.

[store for his parents](#): Ibid., 14.

[medical school at NYU](#): The May 1936 edition of the *Medical Bulletin* lists Arthur as editor at the top of the masthead. *Medical Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (May 1936).

[the picture is clearly staged](#): The photo accompanies an editor’s note by Arthur in the *Medical Violet*, the school yearbook, in 1937.

[“reveal its secrets”](#): This phrase is from Arthur’s inaugural column in the *Medical Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1972.

[“A physician can do anything”](#): “Of Dreams and Archaeology, of Methylmercury Poisoning,” *Medical Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1973.

[“medicine is a hierarchy”](#): The description of this episode is drawn from a column that Arthur wrote about it. “We Are Our Brother’s Keeper,” *Medical Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1975.

[selling apples on the street](#): “Raymond Sackler: Obituary,” *Times* (London), July 21, 2017; Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 167.

CHAPTER 2: THE ASYLUM

[Marietta was twenty-six:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 65.

[would need to do two internships:](#) Ibid., 95–97.

[she was trailed by catcalls:](#) Ibid., 98.

[a pair of young interns from Brooklyn:](#) Ibid., 99.

[had lighter hair:](#) FBI file for Raymond Raphael Sackler, June 23, 1945, Federal Bureau of Investigation file 100-NY-73194-1, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

[perceived imbalance prompted sharp restrictions:](#) Leon Sokoloff, “The Rise and Decline of the Jewish Quota in Medical School Admissions,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 68, no. 4 (Nov. 1992).

[marked with an H, for “Hebrew”:](#) “In a Time of Quotas, a Quiet Pose in Defiance,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2009.

[he boarded a ship:](#) “Biography of Mortimer Sackler,” University of Glasgow website. The detail about steerage is from “Dr. Mortimer Sackler,” *Telegraph*, April 28, 2010.

[grew to love the warmth:](#) “Raymond Sackler,” Obituary, *Herald* (Glasgow), July 28, 2017.

[finding places at Middlesex University:](#) Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 16.

[“Raymond was a peacemaker”:](#) Interview with Richard Leather.

[swap places at the hospital:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 100.

[throw a little party:](#) The fact that the party was at the hospital is from *ibid.*, 206.

[crooning:](#) Ibid., 99.

[His name was Arthur Sackler:](#) Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 168.

[Arthur liked to joke:](#) Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 11.

[asking her on a date:](#) Ibid., 99.

[she declined:](#) Ibid., 100.

[Marietta called Arthur Sackler:](#) Ibid.

[a sprawling asylum:](#) “The Lost World of Creedmoor Hospital,” *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 2009.

terribly overcrowded: Susan Sheehan, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 9. By the late 1940s, there were just under six thousand patients. Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1947. The overcrowding is addressed in the Annual Report of Creedmoor State Hospital, 1950.

Some patients were simply comatose: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 124.

patients roaming the grounds: The detail about straitjackets is from Sheehan, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*, 9.

arrived at Creedmoor in 1944: “New Hope for the Insane,” *Pageant*, Oct. 1951. The hospital was Lincoln Hospital. Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 15.

worked thirty-six-hour shifts: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 15.

white-haired Dutch psychoanalyst: “New Hope for the Insane.” See also “From Waltzing Mice to MBD,” *Medical Tribune*, July 6, 1977; and “A Sentimental Journey,” *Medical Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1978.

“Freud’s favorite disciple”: “Breaking Ground at the Site Where American Psychoanalysis and the Space Age Were Launched,” *Medical Tribune*, July 13, 1983.

Arthur called him “Van O”: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 16.

“mentor, friend, and father”: H. P. J. Stroeken, “A Dutch Psychoanalyst in New York (1936–1950),” *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 20, no. 3 (2011).

“a rather derelict career”: The contemporary was the Canadian psychiatrist Heinz Lehmann. Quoted in Andrea Tone, *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America’s Turbulent Affair with Tranquilizers* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 89.

Psychiatrists made less money: Ibid.

Arthur found a job: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 16.

For a salary of \$8,000: FBI Memo on the Schering Corporation, June 23, 1942, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 65-HQ-4851, v. 3 Serial 73, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

he started a new residency: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 16.

[the novelist Virginia Woolf](#): Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill,” *Criterion*, Jan. 1926.

[segregate such sorry cases](#): Anne Harrington, *Mind Fixers: Psychiatry’s Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness* (New York: Norton, 2019), 48–50.

[an expensive and bespoke solution](#): Robert Whitaker, *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 84, 147.

[female patients outnumbered male patients](#): Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1952.

[assigned to R Building](#): “New Hope for the Insane”; Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

[assaulted him with a metal spoon](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

[“the limbo of the living dead”](#): Testimony of Arthur M. Sackler, Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, March 15, 1950 (hereafter cited as AMS 1950 Testimony).

[Arthur reflected at the time](#): *Ibid.*

[Van O believed](#): *Ibid.*

[consign them to a kind of death](#): Testimony of Johan H. W. van Ophuijsen, Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, March 15, 1950.

[growing at a faster rate](#): AMS 1950 Testimony.

[remove a patient’s teeth](#): Harrington, *Mind Fixers*, 48–49.

[kill more than a hundred of them](#): Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 80–82.

[The treatment had been invented](#): Harrington, *Mind Fixers*, 65–68; Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 96–97; Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: Wiley, 1997), 219.

[Others felt profoundly shaken](#): Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 99.

[relief to many patients](#): Shorter, *History of Psychiatry*, 207–8.

[mitigate the symptoms](#): *Ibid.*, 221.

[The therapy was first used](#): Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1947; Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1948.

“a great jolt drubbed me”: Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (New York: Harper, 2006), 143.

The singer Lou Reed: Anthony DeCurtis, *Lou Reed: A Life* (New York: Little, Brown, 2017), 32.

a widely used treatment: Shorter, *History of Psychiatry*, 208.

every patient building was outfitted: Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1952.

They were disgusted: “New Hope for the Insane.”

“Nothing to it”: Shorter, *History of Psychiatry*, 228.

they had black eyes: Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 132.

for depression: Ibid. Lobotomy was introduced to Creedmoor in 1952. Sheehan, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*, 9.

could not fully account for mental illness: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

Arthur set to work: “New Hope for the Insane.”

a doctor named Harry LaBurt: LaBurt became director at Creedmoor in 1943 and held the position until 1969. “Harry A. LaBurt, 91, Ex-chief of Creedmoor,” *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1989.

was always locked: Sheehan, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*, 13.

“a six thousand bed jail”: Donald F. Klein, interview in *An Oral History of Neuropsychopharmacology: The First Fifty Years, Peer Interviews*, ed. Thomas A. Ban and Barry Blackwell (Brentwood, Tenn.: ACNP, 2011), 9:205.

one of Creedmoor’s annual reports: Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1953.

did not have a good relationship: Interview with Rachel Klein.

in derangements of brain chemistry: AMS 1950 Testimony.

Marietta found Arthur waiting: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 100.

Marietta recounted her experiences: Ibid.

little idea of the horrors: Ibid., 72–73.

became hostile: Ibid., 97.

the marriage dissolved: Ibid., 79–81.

worked for a German-owned company: FBI Report on the Schering Company, with Arthur Sackler's name listed in the leadership, July 18, 1941, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 65-HQ-4851 v. 1 Serial 21.

penchant for secrecy: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 100.

to express his ardor: Ibid., 101.

His sheer focus felt overwhelming: Ibid., 100.

releasing histamine into the bloodstream: "New Hope for the Insane."

The Sacklers started conducting experiments: "Recoveries Double in Mental Cases Using Histamine," *Globe and Mail*, May 12, 1949.

nearly a third of them improved: "New Treatment with Hormones Aids Psychotics," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 15, 1950.

did respond to histamine: "New Hope for the Insane."

"the chemical causes of insanity": Ibid.

"The doctors think they have found": "Biochemical for Emotional Ills," *Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger*, June 12, 1949.

double the number of patients: "If You Live to Be a Hundred," *Maclean's*, Dec. 1, 1951.

"the chemical activity theory": "A Shot You Take to Help You 'Take It,' " *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1950.

neighborhood boys made good: "Three Brothers, Doctors All, Join in Winning Award," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 21, 1950.

reinforced when Isaac Sackler died: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 25.

he'd had a heart attack: The account of Isaac's death is drawn from *ibid.*, 18, and "To Live and Die with Dignity," *Medical Tribune*, March 10, 1976.

"by grants made in the memory": See, for instance, "A Three-Year Follow-Up Study of Nonconvulsive Histamine Biochemotherapy, Electric Convulsive Posthistamine Therapy, and Electric Convulsive Therapy Controls," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 27 (Jan. 1953).

accepting a prize: "Three New York Brothers Honored for Medical Research," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 13, 1950; "New Treatment with Hormones Aids Psychotics."

"prevent insanity": "New Hope for the Insane."

Arthur had been married: Deposition of Else Sackler, *Matter of Sackler*, Surrogates Court, Nassau County, N.Y. (hereafter cited as EJS Deposition). The copy of this deposition that I retrieved from the courthouse was undated.

was an émigré: Petition for Naturalization of Jans Jorgensen (Else's father), U.S. District Court, Los Angeles, No. 123391 (1945).

They had been introduced: Emma Zakin Affidavit, Dec. 5, 1990, *Matter of Sackler*, Surrogates Court, Nassau County, N.Y.

Arthur kept it a secret: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 15.

They moved into a furnished unit: EJS Deposition.

took her to an Italian restaurant: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 101.

He wrote love letters: Arthur Sackler to Marietta Lutze, quoted in *ibid.*, 106–7.

inherited the family drug company: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 103–5.

“forced a decision”: *Ibid.*, 107.

CHAPTER 3: MED MAN

an unusual advertisement: *Medicine Ave.: The Story of Medical Advertising in America* (Huntington, N.Y.: Medical Advertising Hall of Fame, 1999), 23.

For nearly a century: Joseph G. Lombardino, “A Brief History of Pfizer Central Research,” *Bulletin of the History of Chemistry* 25, no. 1 (2000).

Until World War II: David Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America: From Milton to Prozac* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 22.

When the war broke out: Federal Trade Commission, *Economic Report on Antibiotics Manufacture* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 6.

the business model: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 22.

not particularly lucrative: Scott H. Podolsky, *The Antibiotic Era: Reform, Resistance, and the Pursuit of a Rational Therapeutics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 19.

sell at a higher price: Ibid.

the era of the “miracle drug”: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

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The president of Pfizer: Tom Mahoney, *The Merchants of Life: An Account of the American Pharmaceutical Industry* (New York: Harper, 1959), 237–38.

a new antibiotic called Terramycin: Podolsky, *Antibiotic Era*, 23.

might really take off: Mahoney, *Merchants of Life*, 243.

boutique agency in New York: Podolsky, *Antibiotic Era*, 25.

“You give me the money”: “Becker, Corbett, Kallir: An Industry Comes to Life,” *Medical Marketing and Media*, Jan. 1997.

William Douglas McAdams: “W. D. M’Adams, 68, Advertising Man,” *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1954.

cod liver oil: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 29–30.

marketed directly to doctors: “McAdams Forms Division to Focus on Latest Drugs,” *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1991.

focus exclusively on the pharmaceutical sector: “Advertising: Generic Drugs and Agencies,” *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1985; Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 29–30.

he hired Arthur Sackler: Arthur Sackler prepared statement and biography, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, Jan. 30, 1962.

for half his life: “The Name of Arthur M. Sackler,” *Tufts Criterion* (Winter 1986).

did the same with McAdams: Arthur Sackler to Félix Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 27, 1954, Félix Martí-Ibáñez Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as FMI Papers).

“largely a closed club”: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

pass for a gentile: In his 2020 book, *Pharma*, Gerald Posner quotes Arthur’s attorney Michael Sonnenreich telling Arthur, “If there is a pogrom, I don’t care what you tell them you are, you are going to be in the same cattle car as I am. Stop the games...You could marry all the Christian girls you want, it ain’t going to work. They are still going to put you on the train.” Gerald Posner, *Pharma: Greed, Lies, and the Poisoning of America* (New York: Avid Reader, 2020), 287.

sensitive to anti-Semitism: “The Temple of Sackler,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1987.

on nights and weekends: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 18.

most prescription drugs had been generic: *Medicine Ave.*, 16.

“I would rather place myself”: Arthur M. Sackler, *One Man and Medicine: Selected Weekly Columns (1972–1983) by the International Publisher of “Medical Tribune”* (New York: Medical Tribune, 1983), 29.

“Sackler’s ads had a very serious”: Interview with Kallir.

One Terramycin ad: Adam Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data: How Companies Make Billions Selling Our Medical Records* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 23–24.

president of the company: Arthur Sackler prepared statement and biography, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, Jan. 30, 1962.

“the lion’s den”: Arthur Sackler to Félix Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 27, 1954, FMI Papers. The 11 Bartlett Street address is from the letterhead of John McKeen, included in the files of the investigation into monopoly drug pricing conducted by the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, which are now housed at the National Archives and Records Administration. (This archive will hereafter be cited as Kefauver Files.)

“an unparalleled idea man”: The contemporary was William G. Castagnoli. “Remembrance of Kings Past,” *Medical Marketing and Media*, July 1996.

coined by advertisers: According to Scott Podolsky, “The term ‘broad-spectrum’ itself appears to have entered the literature with Pfizer’s initial advertisement for Terramycin by name in July 1950. Previously, the University of Washington’s William Kirby, at the General Scientific Meetings of the American Medical Association in June 1950, had spoken of the ‘broad spectrum of activity of the newer antibiotics.’” See Scott H. Podolsky, “Antibiotics and the History of the Controlled Clinical Trial, 1950–1970,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 65, no. 3 (2010).

But until Arthur Sackler used it: *Medicine Ave.*, 22. This might have been an instance in which necessity was the mother of invention, as Arthur *couldn’t* have mentioned the name of the drug at this stage, because he had not yet received formal approval from the American Medical Association to do so. See Podolsky, *Antibiotic Era*, 206n70; and Federal Trade Commission, *Economic Report on Antibiotics Manufacture*, 141.

one press account at the time: “Pfizer Put an Old Name on a New Label,” *Business Week*, Oct. 13, 1951; Podolsky, *Antibiotic Era*, 25.

they would have two thousand: Podolsky, *Antibiotic Era*, 25.

“Arthur invented the wheel”: “Advertising: Generic Drugs and Agencies,” *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1985.

“The doctor is feted and courted”: John Pekkanen, *The American Connection: Profiteering and Politicking in the “Ethical” Drug Industry*

(Chicago: Follett, 1973), 89.

Roche: Ibid.

golf tournaments: Ibid., 91.

“more and more physicians are specifying”: “News of the Advertising and Marketing Fields,” *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1954.

“Is the public likely to benefit”: Charles D. May, “Selling Drugs by ‘Educating’ Physicians,” *Journal of Medical Education* 36, no. 1 (Jan. 1961).

one unpublished polemic: Unpublished essay by Arthur Sackler, “Freedom of Inquiry, Freedom of Thought, Freedom of Expression: ‘A Standard to Which the Wise and the Just Can Repair’: Observations on Medicines, Medicine, and the Pharmaceutical Industry,” FMI Papers.

“turn back the hands”: Ibid. See also Jeremy A. Greene and Scott H. Podolsky, “Keeping the Modern in Medicine: Pharmaceutical Promotion and Physician Education in Postwar America,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83 (2009).

bought the agency from McAdams: “Advertising: Generic Drugs and Agencies.”

“old and tired”: Harry Zelenko, email.

Medical Advertising Hall of Fame: *Medicine Ave.*, 18.

Creedmoor Institute for Psychobiologic Studies: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 112. Arthur junior was born on February 9, 1950, the same day that the new center was formally dedicated.

H Building: Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1951.

sixty-two rooms: AMS 1950 Testimony.

devoted to: “Psychobiologic Institute Is Dedicated,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1950).

operate behind the scenes: Ibid.

Four hundred people: “UN President Dedicates New Unit at Creedmoor,” *Long Island Star-Journal*, Feb. 10, 1950.

president of the United Nations General Assembly: Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1950.

Even Harry LaBurt: “Psychobiologic Institute Is Dedicated.”

“a golden era in psychiatry”: “UN President Dedicates New Unit at Creedmoor.”

Marietta Lutze was in labor: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 112.

A privately published account: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 25. The book was published by the AMS Foundation for the Arts, Sciences and Humanities, which is overseen by Arthur’s third wife, Jillian Sackler. This is a characterization that Else’s children would almost certainly disagree with.

Arthur would not settle: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 115.

an old Dutch farmhouse: Ibid., 116. A number of accounts suggest that the house was actually built in the 1920s, using timbers, doors, and other elements of an eighteenth-century farmhouse in Flushing that had been damaged in a fire. See “Rare in Nassau: A Large Tract with Right Zoning,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1997; Michael J. Leahy, ed., *If You’re Thinking of Living In...* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 255.

surrounded by boxwood trees: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 115.

disapproved of the marriage: Ibid., 108.

“fled the Nazis in Germany”: This line is used in Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 25. While Lopez is the author of the book, it is a privately published, largely hagiographic account by a protégé of Arthur’s who describes the project as having been culled from Arthur’s own remarks and writings.

“I was seen as the intruder”: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 108.

birth that day to a baby boy: Ibid., 113.

elected to give up work: Ibid., 109.

wait for him to come home: Ibid., 117.

took on more projects than ever: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 23.

laboratory for therapeutic research: Ibid., 20.

fill that gap: AMS 1950 Testimony.

He would tell people: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 23.

thought of her new husband as Atlas: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 110.

He thrived on power: Ibid., 125.

a sophisticated mid-Atlantic diction: John Kallir, who met him in the 1950s, told me, “I certainly was not aware of a Brooklyn accent. He had a smooth,

soft voice.” I was also able to hear Arthur’s voice in a 1984 episode of the television program *Smithsonian World*, titled “Filling in the Blanks.” Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 08-081, box 10.

[appeared before a Senate subcommittee](#): AMS 1950 Testimony.

[Word had spread in advertising circles](#): “Becker, Corbett, Kallir: How It Began,” *Medical Marketing and Media*, Nov. 1996.

[“Sackler had a soft spot”](#): Interview with Wolff.

[flirted with communism](#): Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 15; Sam Quinones, *Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 28.

[member of the Communist Party](#): FBI File No. 100-HQ-340415, obtained from the National Archives through the Freedom of Information Act.

[“McAdams had many politically dubious people”](#): Interview with Kallir.

[cartoonist Charles Addams](#): Ibid.

[Andy Warhol](#): Interview with Wolff.

[McAdams used one of his cat pictures](#): “Becker, Corbett, Kallir: An Industry Comes to Life.”

[“controversial, unsettling, and difficult”](#): “Remembrance of Kings Past.”

[no compunction about micromanaging](#): Harry Zelenko, email.

[Arthur would refuse, citing](#): Interview with John Kallir. When John Kallir left McAdams, Arthur sued him for breach of contract, in a case that was ultimately settled out of court. I was able to corroborate Kallir’s impressions. Another former employee of Arthur’s, Hara Estroff Marano, told me a remarkably similar story about Arthur’s hiring of communists. “All the blacklisted writers,” she said. “Sackler hired them—and then exploited them.”

[job offer from Eli Lilly](#): Interview with Kallir.

[“We weren’t paid terribly well”](#): Interview with Wolff.

[“It sort of helped his image”](#): Ibid.

[“Artie could be quite charming”](#): Zelenko, email.

[one obvious rival](#): Ibid. Harry Zelenko, an associate art director who started working at the firm when McAdams himself was still running it, told me

that Haberman “expected to run the agency” but that Arthur “pushed this woman out.” Interview with Zelenko.

[Haberman wrote a novel](#): Helen Haberman, *How About Tomorrow Morning?* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945), 11, 13.

[“Artie outsmarted her”](#): Zelenko, email.

[“He wasn’t a backslapper”](#): Interview with Keusch.

[Frohlich was a debonair German](#): “L. W. Frohlich, the Gay Jewish Immigrant Whose Company Sells Your Medical Secrets,” *Forward*, Jan. 12, 2017.

[Frohlich boasted](#): Frohlich to John Talbott, July 28, 1959, Kefauver Files.

[“We are living in the midst”](#): Frohlich, “Physician and the Pharmaceutical Industry in the United States.”

[had once worked for Sackler](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 23; *Medicine Ave.*, 18.

[“He started out being an art director”](#): EJS Deposition.

[opened his own agency](#): *Medicine Ave.*, 22. There is some disagreement over whether he opened the firm in 1943 or 1944.

[fixture at the opera](#): Interview with Kallir.

[at his beach house](#): “L. W. Frohlich, the Gay Jewish Immigrant Whose Company Sells Your Medical Secrets.”

[controlled and disciplined](#): Interview with Kallir.

[“a competitive zeal”](#): Frohlich, “Physician and the Pharmaceutical Industry in the United States.”

[Sackler acknowledged this competitive reality](#): Arthur Sackler testimony, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, Jan. 30, 1962.

[described the rivalry](#): “Critics Fail to Inhibit Ethical Drug Ad Growth,” *Advertising Age*, Feb. 1, 1960.

[“Frohlich and McAdams dominated”](#): Interview with Kallir.

[investigated Frohlich during the war](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 26.

[Frohlich was Jewish](#): “L. W. Frohlich, the Gay Jewish Immigrant Whose Company Sells Your Medical Secrets.”

[friends and associates did not know](#): Ibid.

[scrupulously closeted life](#): Ibid.

[“The momentum of the business”](#): Arthur Sackler to Félix Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 27, 1954, FMI Papers.

[able to reintroduce matches](#): Sheehan, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*, 10.

[“patients out of mental hospitals”](#): Thorazine advertisement, *Mental Hospitals* 7, no. 4 (1956).

[declined for the first time](#): Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 80.

[deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill](#): Harrington, *Mind Fixers*, 103. Harrington offers a more complex account of the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, arguing that it would be an oversimplification to attribute this development exclusively, or even chiefly, to medication. She cites other factors, such as new regulations, costs, and alternative community-based forms of treatment. See *ibid.*, 113.

[“Helping schizophrenics would be”](#): Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 80–81.

[The Times later maintained](#): “1957| When Pfizer and the Times Worked Closely,” *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 2015.

[gave half of the stock](#): EJS Deposition.

[“It was very, very important”](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 24.

[lifelong friends](#): Interview with Richard Leather.

[always denied it](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 25. Also see “An Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.

[Arthur was the controlling force](#): Posner, *Pharma*, 618n10.

[the “musketeers”](#): Interview with Richard Leather.

[late into the night](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 117.

[According to Richard Leather](#): Interview with Leather.

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[all married, with kids](#): “2 Doctors to Be Privates,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1953.

[researching the effects of burns](#): Annual Report, Creedmoor State Hospital, 1952.

[“communist cell”](#): Interview with Kallir.

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[fired from Creedmoor](#): “2 Doctors Dismissed over Oath,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 8, 1953; “2 Doctors to Be Privates.”

[speak of the harm](#): Louis Lasagna remembrance of Arthur Sackler, *Studio International* 200, supplement 1 (1987).

[A New York Times article](#): “2 Doctors to Be Privates.”

[“Arthur was a wonderful buffer”](#): Interview with Leather.

[bought the company for \\$50,000](#): In a deposition nearly seventy years later, Richard Sackler was asked, “Do you know how much the family paid to acquire Purdue?” “I actually do,” he replied: “\$50,000.” Deposition of Richard Sackler, *In re National Prescription Opiate Litigation*, MDL No. 2804, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, March 8, 2019 (hereafter cited as RDS 2019 Deposition).

[Purdue Frederick](#): “Norwalk Firm Finds Niche Among Pharmaceutical Giants,” *Hartford Courant*, July 23, 1992.

CHAPTER 4: PENICILLIN FOR THE BLUES

a chemist named Leo Sternbach: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 120.

a “major” tranquilizer: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 60.

a less powerful medication: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 131.

tranquilizer called Miltown: Ibid., 124.

it became a blockbuster: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 20, 1980.

party drug in Hollywood: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 78.

other companies now set out: Ibid., 124.

Make something different enough: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

his father had been a chemist: Ibid.

Hoffmann-LaRoche did not: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 145.

“endangered species”: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

he had a breakthrough: Ibid.

Roche compound No. 0609: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 40.

carefully recording in his notebook: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

they turned to Arthur Sackler: Interview with John Kallir.

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an astonishing range of afflictions: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 71.

FDA regulations forbade: Jeremy Greene and David Herzberg, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Marketing Prescription Drugs to Consumers in the Twentieth Century,” *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 5 (May 2010).

Life magazine carried a story: “New Way to Calm a Cat,” *Life*, April 18, 1960.

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\$2 million marketing Librium: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 136.

critique published in a medical newsletter: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 75–76.

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an almost clairvoyant grasp: Gerson went on to run McAdams. “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” *Medical Marketing and Media*, April 1998.

“The Age of Anxiety”: This was one of a series of advertisements for Librium and Valium that ran in heavy rotation in the *Medical Tribune* (and numerous other medical publications) during the 1960s. Old copies of the *Medical Tribune* are difficult to find, but the College of Physicians in Philadelphia has the fullest run I could locate, and I consulted these in person.

One study found: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 51.

it really took off: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 75.

1.5 million new prescriptions: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 137–38.

fifteen million Americans: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 75.

They called it Valium: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

“Arthur was in pretty heavy”: Interview with Wolff.

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use it in sports medicine: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 79.

“When do we not use this drug?”: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 40. The original citation is H. Angus Bowes, “The Role of Diazepam (Valium) in Emotional Illness,” *Psychosomatics* 6, no. 5 (1965).

“One of the great attributes”: “Looking Back, Looking Forward.”

“35, single and psychoneurotic”: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 157. This is a Valium ad that ran in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* 22 (1970).

An early ad for Librium: “Valium and the New Normal,” *New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2012. Librium ad that ran in the *Journal of the American College Health Association* 17, no. 5 (June 1969).

as the historian Andrea Tone observed: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 156.

the drug could alleviate fears: Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 80.

tens of millions of tablets: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 153.

most prescribed drug in America: Ibid.

in the top five: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 40.

reached sixty million: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

one of the most profitable companies: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 154.

escalating series of bonuses: It has occasionally been suggested that Arthur received a commission on each pill sold, but according to an interview that Barry Meier conducted with Arthur's lawyer Michael Sonnenreich, this was not the case. Sonnenreich maintains that Arthur received an escalating series of bonuses rather than a royalty. Barry Meier, *Pain Killer: An Empire of Deceit and the Origin of America's Opioid Epidemic* (New York: Random House, 2018), 199.

"penicillin for the blues": Pekkanen, *American Connection*, 60.

Arthur was present for the birth: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 126–27.

carried a big briefcase: Miriam Kent Affidavit, *Matter of Sackler*, May 29, 1992.

"The Medical Tribune was his baby": Interview with Keusch.

reached millions of doctors: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 23.

elaborate multipage spreads: I reviewed nearly two decades of issues of the *Medical Tribune* at the College of Physicians in Philadelphia. Large ads for both Librium and Valium appear in almost every issue.

his tendency to remain obscure: "An Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy," *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.

"Dr. Sackler and I remained close": Affidavit in Support of Else Sackler's Motion for Partial Summary Judgment on Claim for Payment on Promissory Note, File No. 249220, *Matter of Sackler*, New York State Surrogate's Court, 1990.

the firm's only shareholders: "Both Dr. Sackler and I were officers and directors of McAdams and, for many years, its only shareholders. In 1978, Dr. Sackler transferred two of his shares of stock to our daughters, thereby equalizing our respective holdings to 44 shares each." Ibid.

time with Else: Else Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 18, 1959, Columbia University Central Files, box 507. (This archive will hereafter be cited as CUCF.)

not just friends but confidants: Interview with Michael Rich and a confidential interview with a close friend of the family.

“We talked on a daily basis”: EJS Deposition.

“a very private person”: “The Sackler Collection, Cont’d,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 1982.

could open up to her: Zakin Affidavit.

Marietta felt quite alone: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 123, 120.

a predictable rhythm: *Ibid.*, 117.

She got a little dog: *Ibid.*, 122.

a kindly gardener: *Ibid.*, 115.

“Play with me, Daddy”: Interview with Michael Rich.

wouldn’t be home at all: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 117.

brunch with his other family: EJS Deposition.

seemed to be living a double life: Interview with Kallir.

Roche had informed doctors: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 146.

never conducted a single study: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 109.

unpleasant withdrawal symptoms: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 141–42.

When Hollister informed Roche: *Ibid.*, 142.

Roche was anything but chastened: *Ibid.*, 146.

offered a different interpretation: *Ibid.*

just have addictive personalities: Herzberg, *Happy Pills in America*, 110–12.

“There are some people who just get addicted”: “A Psychiatrist Discusses What’s Good About Tranquilizers,” *Vogue*, April 1, 1976.

syndicated ask-the-doctor column: “The Constant Griper,” *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, March 14, 1957.

treated as controlled substances: “Tranquilizer War.” Also see “U.S. Acts to Curb 2 Tranquilizers,” *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1973.

devastating for his bottom line: Lopez, *Arthur M. Sackler*, 13; Posner, *Pharma*, 262–63.

FDA adviser would speculate: “Tranquilizer War.”

twenty million Americans: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

even though it was prescribed: Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 142.

“a nightmare of dependence and addiction”: “Abuse of Prescription Drugs: A Hidden but Serious Problem for Women,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1978; Hearing on the Use and Misuse of Benzodiazepines, Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, U.S. Senate, Sept. 10, 1979.

Roche stood accused: “Americans Are Spending Almost Half a Billion Dollars a Year on a Drug to Relieve Their Anxiety—a Fact That Is in Itself Considerable Cause for Anxiety,” *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1976.

The Rolling Stones: “Mother’s Little Helper,” Rolling Stones, 1966.

“Valium changed the way”: “Looking Back, Looking Forward.”

“that drug worked”: Quinones, *Dreamland*, 30.

Arthur often railed: See, for instance, “On a Deadly Hazard,” *Medical Tribune*, Jan. 10, 1979.

addictive personalities of the patients: “The Other Sackler,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 27, 2019.

\$1 for each of the patents: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

\$10,000 bonus for each drug: Sternbach was not bitter. He said he was not “a victim of capitalistic exploitation. If anything, I am an example of capitalistic enlightenment...I was grateful to the company for bringing us over from Europe, for providing my family with a certain security.” Tone, *Age of Anxiety*, 138.

no expensive hobbies: *Ibid.*, 138–39.

He felt no moral responsibility: “Adventurous Chemist and His Pill.”

CHAPTER 5: CHINA FEVER

visit to the cabinetmaker's shop: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 149.

distinctive rosewood table: Ibid., 150. According to Sackler's own account, he began collecting art after graduating from medical school in the 1940s. Initially, "he focused on pre- and early renaissance and French Impressionist and post-Impressionist Paintings. At this time he also actively supported contemporary American painters. Then in the 1950's he started collecting Chinese art." Biography of Arthur Sackler, provided by Jillian Sackler to Harry Henderson, Oct. 1, 1986, Harry Henderson Papers, Penn State University.

His name was Bill Drummond: "East Meets West in LI Ranch House," *Newsday*, July 17, 1963.

forced to relocate: The brother was Robert Drummond. "Ex-Oak Parker Heads Chinese Furniture Shop," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1957.

American spy in China: "The Smithsonian's Mystery Building," *Washington Post*, Aug. 30, 1987.

imposed an embargo: "East Meets West in LI Ranch House."

"proud of his 'eye'": Draft of a tribute to Arthur Sackler by Harry Henderson, Henderson Papers.

decided, on an impulse, to buy them: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 150.

awaken something inside him: Ibid.

"It was at that time": Draft of a tribute to Sackler by Henderson.

had always appreciated art: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 154.

half his fortune on art: Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (New York: Random House, 1999), xii.

a large "corpus of material": Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 154.

stack of scholarly literature: Ibid., 153.

seeking out the Chinese galleries: Ibid., 160.

pronounce all of the Chinese names: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

New Jersey doctor named Paul Singer: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 151.

a self-taught expert: “Trove of Asian Art Is Left to the Smithsonian,” *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1999.

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“it was like an electric charge”: “Temple of Sackler.”

arousal and release: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 152.

saw this in her husband: *Ibid.*, 153.

their rarest treasures: *Ibid.*, 151.

Dai Fubao: *Ibid.*, 153.

the Ch’u Manuscript: Li Ling, *The Chu Silk Manuscripts from Zidanku, Changsha (Hunan Province)*, vol. 1, *Discovery and Transmission* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2020), 167.

refused to take no for an answer: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 160.

Arthur paid it: Ling, *Chu Silk Manuscripts from Zidanku*, 1:167.

natural sense of secrecy: “Art Collector Honored Guest at Philbrook Opening,” *Tulsa World*, Dec. 8, 1975.

“They were handshake deals”: Minutes of an executors’ meeting from July 22, 1987, cited in Affidavit of Gillian T. Sackler, Index No. 249220, *Matter of Sackler*, June 13, 1990.

registered under a false name: “Temple of Sackler.”

Arthur had money: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 93.

purchase the whole inventory: “Temple of Sackler.”

“whole collections seemingly with a glance”: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 94.

a zealous negotiator: Ibid.

“of maximizing each deal”: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 164.

New boxes would arrive: Ibid., 155.

getting a Yorkshire terrier: Ibid., 164.

“put him on the world stage”: Ibid., 156–57.

greatest collections of Chinese art: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 93–94.

“the possibility of immortality”: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 156–57.

“the Sackler Gift”: Grayson Kirk to Arthur Sackler, Jan. 8, 1960, CUCF.

“the Sackler Fund”: Arthur Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 10, 1959, CUCF.

the Frick Collection: “700 See Treasures of Frick Gallery,” *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1935.

“no personal publicity”: Arthur Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 10, 1959.

“Dr. Sackler is quite particular”: Robert Harron to Davidson Taylor, Feb. 26, 1964, CUCF.

as part of “the Sackler Collection”: Arthur Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 10, 1959.

he hated that expression: “Art Collector Honored Guest at Philbrook Opening.”

“members of my family”: Arthur Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 10, 1959.

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came not from Arthur: Raymond Sackler to William O’Donoghue, Dec. 14, 1959; Marietta Lutze Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 17, 1959; Else Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 18, 1959, CUCF.

within four days of one another: “Arthur M. Sackler,” Memorandum, Dec. 1, 1961, CUCF.

represented by the same accountant: Goldburd’s name comes up repeatedly in the correspondence at Columbia. He was a longtime accountant for all

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he was anxious: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 158.

help decorate their home: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 158.

Arthur wrote an introduction: Exhibition program for *The Ceramic Arts and Sculpture of China: From Prehistoric Times Through the Tenth Century A.D.*, CUCF.

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“I hope you can make an inquiry”: Stanley Salmen to Arthur Sackler, Aug. 23, 1960, CUCF.

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“all photographs of Sackler objects”: Arthur Sackler to Stanley Salmen, Dec. 17, 1965, CUCF.

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He collected relentlessly: Ibid., 148.

keep up with his own collecting: Ibid., 162.

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CHAPTER 6: THE OCTOPUS

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[Welch had received a telegram](#): Telegram from Dwight D. Eisenhower, in *Antibiotics Annual, 1956–1957* (New York: Medical Encyclopedia, 1957).

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[fashioned himself a Renaissance man](#): “Physician Is Top Expert,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 5, 1960; “Dr. Félix Martí-Ibáñez Is Dead; Psychiatrist and Publisher, 60.”

[columns in popular magazines](#): “The Romance of Health,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1963.

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[abandoning her career](#): Ibid., 123–24.

[Marietta oversaw the relocation](#): Ibid., 138.

[combining the two](#): Ibid., 137–38.

[an urban safari](#): Ibid., 138.

[tending to their mother, Sophie](#): Ibid., 118.

[initiated into the faith](#): Ibid., 142–43.

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[“the first real link”:](#) Lear to Blair, May 24, 1960, Kefauver Files.

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CHAPTER 7: THE DENDUR DERBY

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[decorated with carved depictions](#): Dieter Arnold and Adela Oppenheim, “The Temple of Dendur: Architecture and Ritual,” available on the Metropolitan Museum’s website.

[converted into a Christian church](#): “642 Stones Will Soon Regain Form as an Egyptian Temple,” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1974.

[Luther Bradish visited the temple](#): “The Boomerang Graffito (or Bad, Bad, Luther B!),” NPR, June 7, 2013.

[Félix Bonfils](#): “642 Stones Will Soon Regain Form as an Egyptian Temple.”

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[The Met would be free](#): A state law in 1893 governing support for the Met maintained that the museum “shall be kept open and accessible to the public free of all charge.” “The Met Files a Formal Proposal to Charge Admission to Out-of-State Visitors,” *New York Times*, May 5, 2017.

[“Think of it, ye millionaires”](#): Winifred Eva Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913), 200.

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“a painting is worth the price”: “Attendance Soars at Museums Here,” *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1961.

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He announced a goal: “Museum Sets 1964 as Building Date,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1961.

turned for help to Arthur Sackler: “James Rorimer of Metropolitan, Duncan Phillips, Collector, Die”; Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

“They were proud that they had escaped”: Interview with Leather.

Thirty of them: “James Rorimer of Metropolitan, Duncan Phillips, Collector, Die.”

pledging \$150,000: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

gaming the tax code: Ibid.

would actually make money: Ibid.; Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 344.

museum needed cash: Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 344.

“That’s four thousand years old”: “James Rorimer of Metropolitan, Duncan Phillips, Collector, Die.”

Arthur liked Rorimer: “The Met’s Sackler Enclave: Public Boon or Private Preserve?,” *ARTnews*, Sept. 1978.

“We’d talk for hours”: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

private “enclave” in the museum: “The Temple of Sackler,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1987.

Rorimer signed off: Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 344.

arrangement was kept secret: “Temple of Sackler.”

Arthur would suggest: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

another enclave at a different institution: Frederick Dookstader to Arthur Sackler, May 31, 1996, Smithsonian/Museum of the American Indian Files.

had a heart attack: “James Rorimer of Metropolitan, Duncan Phillips, Collector, Die.”

Hoving was a publicity hound: “A Happening Called Hoving,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 10, 1966.

a rubble of 642 sandstone bricks: “Metropolitan Due to Get Temple of Dendur.”

“We have not been campaigning”: “Feud over a Temple Boils into a Tempest,” *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1966.

Twenty cities put together bids: “A Panel of 5 Will Choose Site in U.S. for Temple of Dendur,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1967.

what about Cairo, Illinois?: “Suggested for Art Museum,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1967.

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“I’ll light the temple up”: “Charity Fund-Raisers Know the Value of Art,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1967.

resistance from conservationists: “Museum Wing Will Cost \$15 Million,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1973.

one day it dawned on him: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 240–42.

Nobody could say that he had: *Ibid.*, 95.

difficult to track down: In his correspondence with Félix Martí-Ibáñez, Arthur is forever apologizing for not writing more or being in better touch. This is also echoed in the recollections of Marietta Lutze.

But within thirty minutes: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 241.

“I’ll do it,” Arthur said: *Ibid.*, 240–42.

“their office hours”: Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 345.

construction got under way: “Drills Sing in Park as Museum Flexes Wings,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1974.

“thanks largely to a recent gift”: “642 Stones Will Soon Regain Form as an Egyptian Temple.”

forced to raise more funds: Gross, *Rogues' Gallery*, 345.

chipping in \$1.4 million: “Drills Sing in Park as Museum Flexes Wings.”

for eleven years: “642 Stones Will Soon Regain Form as an Egyptian Temple.”

“an apothecary shop”: “Temple of Sackler.”

“He was touchy, eccentric”: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 95.

officials at the Met chafed: “An Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.

when it came to the old-line burghers: “Temple of Sackler.”

“I gave the Met exactly”: Ibid.

“an anti-Semitic place”: Ibid.

ran out of old rich WASPs: Gross, *Rogues' Gallery*, 345–46.

“the Sackler wing is a generous gift”: “Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy.”

described Arthur as “slippery”: Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 94.

“Throw him out”: This line appears in the typescript manuscript for *Making the Mummies Dance*, which is held in the Hoving Papers at Princeton, but not in the book.

unveiled the Sackler Wing: “King’s Treasures Open at Museum,” *Asbury Park Press*, Dec. 12, 1978.

the names Arthur, Mortimer, and Raymond: “Treasures of Tut Glitter in Daylight,” *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1978.

“the goddess of modern dance”: “King’s Treasures Open at Museum”; “Weekend Notes,” *Newsday*, Oct. 4, 1985; “Dance: Miss Graham ‘Frescoes,’ ” *New York Times*, April 23, 1980.

performed in the temple: “King’s Treasures Open at Museum.”

He had become friends with Arthur: “The Mayor’s ‘Stroke Diary,’ ” *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1987.

“And what greater way to mark it”: “Exhibit of King Tut Expected to Draw 1.3 Million Visitors,” AP, Sept. 19, 1978.

cocktails and a dance band: “Martha Graham Opens New Dance Work,” AP, Dec. 11, 1978.

Even as the brothers celebrated: “Sackler Brothers,” Memorandum from John Blair to Paul Rand Dixon, March 16, 1960, Kefauver Files.

CHAPTER 8: ESTRANGEMENT

an impressive woman: “Muriel L. Sackler,” Obituary, *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 2009; “Miriam [sic] Sackler,” Petition for Naturalization No. 413227, Southern District of New York, 1942. According to this document, Muriel’s birth name might have been Miriam; the name is not a typo—she writes “Miriam” in longhand on the signature line.

Gertraud Wimmer: “Two Looks, Two Lives,” *Savvy*, Sept. 1981.

started a relationship: Gertraud “Geri” Wimmer was thirty-five years old in September 1981, so she was born around 1946. Ibid.

“the bellissima Geri”: Martí-Ibáñez to Mortimer Sackler, July 30, 1969, FMI Papers.

Sophie resented this: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 164.

she died, of cancer, in 1965: Ibid., 143.

“The Cote D’Azur this year is not as mobbed”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 13, 1966, FMI Papers.

oversaw the purchase: “Dr. Mortimer Sackler,” Obituary, *Telegraph*, April 27, 2010.

“Calm down. Take a tranquilizer”: Interview with Panagiotis “Taki” Theodoracopoulos; “Mortimer Sackler and Me,” *Spectator*, April 4, 2019.

screenwriter Paul Gallico: “Paul Gallico, Sportswriter and Author, Is Dead at 78,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1976; Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 6, 1968, FMI Papers; Paul Gallico interview from 1973, in Publishers Weekly, *The Author Speaks: Selected “PW” Interviews, 1967–1976* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1977), 54–57.

developed the Mediterranean tendency: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 13, 1966, FMI Papers.

“The sun is with us daily”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, July 24, 1968, FMI Papers.

“I was expecting Bobby”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 13, 1966, FMI Papers.

“Geri and I are expecting”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, July 24, 1968.

a daughter, Samantha: Martí-Ibáñez to Mortimer Sackler, July 30, 1969, FMI Papers.

they were married: Ibid.; Mortimer D. Sackler Affidavit, *Mortimer Sackler v. Gertraud Sackler*, Supreme Court of the State of New York, July 31, 1984 (hereafter cited as MDS Affidavit).

purchased a beautiful villa: Maureen Emerson, *Riviera Dreaming: Love and War on the Côte d'Azur* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 19, 120, 139.

“The house is far from finished”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, July 2, 1969, FMI Papers.

purchased an enormous town house: Interview with Elizabeth Bernard, who was Mortimer’s housekeeper; Martí-Ibáñez to Mortimer Sackler, Dec. 11, 1972, FMI Papers; dinner invitation from Geri and Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Dec. 13 [year not specified], FMI Papers. The invitation lists the address as 10 East Sixty-Fourth Street.

maintained a grand apartment: MDS Affidavit.

also bought a home: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Oct. 4, 1963, FMI Papers.

he had become a “swinger”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, June 6, 1967, FMI Papers.

“a full and vigorous life”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, March 1967, FMI Papers.

“While books and the written word”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, April 15, 1966, FMI Papers.

Geri gave birth to a second child: Birth announcement for Mortimer D. Alfons Sackler, May 9, 1971, FMI Papers.

“the new family”: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, April 15, 1966.

renounced his American citizenship: MDS Affidavit.

for tax reasons: Barry Meier, *Pain Killer: A “Wonder” Drug’s Trail of Addiction and Death* (Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale, 2003), 217. There are two editions of *Pain Killer*, which I will differentiate in the notes by year, the original (2003) and revised (2018).

never seen Mortimer so happy: Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, May 11, 1972, FMI Papers.

[someday becoming a doctor](#): Martí-Ibáñez to Mortimer Sackler, June 8, 1971, FMI Papers.

[father and son grew tempestuous](#): Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, July 2, 1969.

[“My sense is that Arthur”](#): Interview with Rich.

[He still intervened](#): Interview with Richard Leather.

[very much intermingled](#): Interview with John Kallir. I consulted two decades of *Medical Tribune* issues, and advertisements for Senokot, Betadine, and other Purdue Frederick products appear in virtually every issue.

[embarrass his brothers](#): Interview with John Kallir.

[“Ray was quiet”](#): Ibid.

[raised two sons](#): Interview with Richard Kapit; Martí-Ibáñez to Mortimer Sackler, June 8, 1971, FMI Papers.

[“I have never been so ‘out of contact’ ”](#): Arthur Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 11, 1958, FMI Papers.

[close touch with Raymond](#): Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, April 4, 1966, FMI Papers.

[“let Morty be our guide”](#): Raymond Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Oct. 5, 1963, FMI Papers.

[Purdue Frederick budget meetings](#): Raymond and Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Sept. 10, 1971, FMI Papers.

[black-tie dinners](#): Dinner invitation from Geri and Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Dec. 13 [year not specified], FMI Papers; birthday invitation, Dec. 7 [year unspecified], FMI Papers.

[“Arthur, Mortimer and Raymond”](#): Arthur, Mortimer, and Raymond Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, June 19, 1969, FMI Papers.

[Martí-Ibáñez praised Mortimer](#): Mortimer Sackler to Paul Ghalioungui, Jan. 3, 1967, FMI Papers.

[“It seemed to me that her strong”](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 143.

[“I tried to interest my son”](#): “Of Dreams and Archaeology, of Methylmercury Poisoning,” *Medical Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1973.

[Marietta began to fear](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 145.

[enormously proud](#): Interview with Rich.

[Marietta increasingly resented](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 164.

[he and Else would frequent museums](#): Zakin Affidavit.

[holidays with Else](#): Reply Affidavit of Else Sackler, *Matter of Sackler*, March 1, 1991.

[by Monet](#): The painting was *Les Peupliers*, painted in 1891. The Sackler family sold it at Christie's in 2000 for \$22 million.

[“to find a Monet for Else”](#): Zakin Affidavit.

[named Jillian Tully](#): The third wife of Arthur Sackler has spelled her first name a number of ways—Gillian, Jill, and Jillian. For the sake of ease and clarity, I will refer to her only as Jillian, except in instances in which the name is spelled differently in primary documents.

[“I met Dr. Sackler in 1967”](#): “The Other Sackler,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 27, 2019.

[Arthur told Jillian](#): Affidavit of Gillian T. Sackler, *Matter of Sackler*, Index No. 249220, Surrogate's Court of the State of New York, Nassau County, June 13, 1990 (hereafter cited as GTS Affidavit).

[moved to New York](#): “Other Sackler.”

[she officially changed her name](#): GTS Affidavit.

[split into two](#): “Other Sackler.”

[“This was not a family”](#): Interview with Rich.

[Arthur allowed Frohlich to be](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 30.

[\\$40 million in revenue](#): *Ibid.*, 28.

[“most beautiful villa”](#): Mortimer Sackler to Martí-Ibáñez, Aug. 29, 1969, FMI Papers.

[then pass out](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 28.

[immediately took charge](#): Interview with Richard Leather.

[diagnosed with a brain tumor](#): Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 28.

[secret agreement](#): *Ibid.*, 29.

[known as a tontine](#): Interview with Richard Leather; Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 29.

[four-way musketeers agreement](#): Interview with Richard Leather.

two written agreements: Ibid.

obscuring their brother's involvement: Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 29.

\$37 million: Ibid.

"Four people founded IMS": RDS 2019 Deposition.

"I knew very little": Tanner, *Our Bodies, Our Data*, 29.

"gave away his rights to IMS": Minutes of an Estate Meeting, Aug. 7, 1987.

"They moved the company out": Minutes of an Estate Meeting, July 29, 1987.

"Dad came up with the idea": Minutes of an Estate Meeting, Aug. 7, 1987.

"the beginning of the whole rift": Minutes of an Estate Meeting, July 29, 1987; Minutes of an Estate Meeting, Aug. 7, 1987.

"You are entering life": Martí-Ibañez to Robert Sackler, Oct. 14, 1964, FMI Papers.

He maintained an apartment: Interview with Elizabeth Bernard. Much later, Bernard filed an unsuccessful lawsuit against Purdue over employee benefits that she claimed she had been denied. But having worked for the family for nearly three decades, she had nothing but warm and vivid memories when it came to Mortimer D. Sackler and I found her to be entirely credible.

"Robert was very distraught": Interview with Welber.

"I have friends. Relatives": Kathe Sackler Deposition.

PCP was rejected for human use: "Teen-Age Use of 'Angel Dust' Stirs Concern," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1977.

"he freaked out": Interview with Bernard.

"She was complaining": The account of Bobby's suicide is based on an interview with Ceferino Perez, who was an eyewitness. Elizabeth Bernard, who was called by the family to come and clean up Muriel's apartment afterward, corroborated most of the details of Perez's recollection, with one exception: Bernard does not remember the window being broken. She thinks that Bobby might have opened the window and jumped out. Of the two of them, Perez seems to possess the clearer memory of the suicide, which he witnessed himself, so I have rendered the scene from his point of view.

CHAPTER 9: GHOST MARKS

His collecting must be driven: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 165.

Arthur was traveling more: Ibid., 176.

he were in a race with time: Ibid., 171.

enrolled in psychotherapy: Ibid., 174.

Arthur opposed this decision: Ibid., 174–75.

retrain as a psychotherapist: Ibid., 175.

come to feel like “conquest”: Ibid., 171.

Arthur lost interest: Ibid., 178.

she pleaded with him: The precise timing of this revelation is difficult to pin down: in her memoir, Marietta does not give a year but describes this conversation as happening prior to Arthur’s sixtieth birthday party, which took place in 1973, but after she and Arthur bought the apartment at UN Plaza, which they did in 1970. In an affidavit, Jillian Sackler writes that she and Arthur first met in 1967, and at that point Arthur was already, in his telling, “estranged” from Marietta. According to two people who knew Marietta during this period, she might have been in denial over the obvious signs that her marriage was ending. In the end, however, she and Arthur remained formally married until December 1981.

“I love somebody else”: Ibid., 178.

Marietta drove in from Long: Ibid., 180.

more “open” arrangement: Ibid., 179.

maintain the outward appearance: Ibid.

Marietta delivered the speech: Ibid., 181.

at the Goya show: “Royalty & Raves at a Sparkling World Premiere,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 17, 1986.

feting a visiting French marquise: “Series of Bubbly Parties Salutes a New Champagne,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 23, 1982.

Medical Tribune column: “Tenor Talks of Loving the Public and His Favorite Opera Composers,” *Medical Tribune*, Nov. 1, 1978; “Pavarotti Talks of Sex and Sunshine,” *Medical Tribune*, Nov. 15, 1978; “The Quiet Scholar: King of Sweden,” *Medical Tribune*, Nov. 1, 1972.

[“What passes for news”](#): The quotation is from Sidney Wolfe. “A Financial Man and the Fogg,” *Boston Globe*, Feb. 16, 1982.

[art collector Edward Warburg](#): “The Temple of Sackler,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1987.

[“Good heavens”](#): “Art Collector Honored Guest at Philbrook Opening,” *Tulsa World*, Dec. 8, 1975.

[“I am one of the few men”](#): Ibid.

[He loved air travel](#): “The Chariots of the Gods—and the 747,” *Medical Tribune*, Oct. 3, 1973.

[requested a seat in the back](#): “Remembrance of Kings Past,” *Medical Marketing and Media*, July 1996.

[piece of jade](#): “Sadat Urges U.S. to Back Liberation of the Third World,” AP, Aug. 8, 1981; “Koch and City Lionize Sadat,” *Newsday*, Aug. 8, 1981.

[“I knew a lot of geniuses”](#): Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), 363.

[Arthur became friends](#): “A Halo and a Vision,” *Medical Tribune*, July 25, 1973; “The Colors of Love—I,” *Medical Tribune*, April 12, 1978; “The Colors of Love—II,” *Medical Tribune*, April 26, 1978; “An Open Letter to Bernard Malamud,” *Medical Tribune*, Nov. 14, 1973.

[Reflecting on the friendship](#): Interview with Janna Malamud Smith.

[practically a rite of passage](#): See, for instance, “FDA Chief Defends Position on Package Inserts,” *Medical Tribune*, Feb. 11, 1976.

[death notice to the Times](#): “Sackler—Robert, M.,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1975.

[cut off the ends of their neckties](#): Interview with Elizabeth Bernard.

[memorial scholarship fund](#): In a paid death notice for Mortimer D. Sackler in 2010, Tel Aviv University noted, “The Robert M. Sackler Memorial Scholarship Fund will continue to transform lives far into the future.” Interestingly, however, there is no public information associated with this fund: it is a “memorial” scholarship without any description of the individual being memorialized.

[shoebox of old photographs](#): Interview with Judith Schachter.

[Mortimer Sackler had been in France](#): Interview with Elizabeth Bernard.

[account in the tabloids](#): MDS Affidavit; “Suzy Says,” *New York Daily News*, Sept. 13, 1977.

[younger than Mortimer’s daughters](#): She was born in 1949, so thirty-one or thereabouts when they married in 1980. “Drugs Mogul with Vast Philanthropic Legacy,” *Financial Times*, April 23, 2010.

[white stucco mansion](#): The address is 67 Chester Square. See “Meet the Chester Square Candys,” *Telegraph*, March 8, 2016.

[fall/winter couture show](#): “Valentino’s Art Presented at Met Museum,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 24, 1982.

[three hundred guests were invited](#): “A Party at the Museum...,” *New York Daily News*, Sept. 22, 1982.

[Muhammad Ali performed magic tricks](#): “‘Waiting for Valentino’ in New York,” *Desert Sun* (Palm Springs), Sept. 27, 1982; “Valentino’s Art Presented at Met Museum.”

[adorned with white flowers](#): “‘Waiting for Valentino’ in New York.”

[Arthur Sackler was disgusted](#): Notes by Thomas Hoving on Arthur Sackler in the Thomas Hoving Papers, Princeton University Library (hereafter cited as Hoving Notes).

[did not get along](#): Ibid.

[‘It was kind of like that last scene’](#): Interview with Rich.

[existence of the secret arrangement](#): “The Met’s Sackler Enclave: Public Boon or Private Preserve?,” *ARTnews*, Sept. 1978.

[‘He offered me several gifts’](#): “Temple of Sackler.”

[ARTnews published a story](#): “Met’s Sackler Enclave”; interview with Charles Brody.

[submit to a deposition](#): “The Sackler Collection, Cont’d,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 1982.

[Administrators at the Met](#): Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 346.

[Arthur had been very open](#): “Arthur Sackler’s Inner Resources,” *Washington Post*, June 7, 1987.

[candid about his ambitions](#): “Financial Man and the Fog.”

[seeking to punish him](#): Hoving Notes.

[Why couldn’t he take that seat?](#): Ibid.

denied him any credit: “An Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.

invitation to spend an afternoon: Arthur Sackler to Pauling, June 21, 1980, Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Papers, Oregon State University. (This archive will hereafter be cited as Pauling Papers.)

It was a business deal: Posner, *Pharma*, 280.

“Arthur’s new toy”: Jillian Sackler to Pauling, June 21, 1983, Pauling Papers.

“didn’t have time for Arthur”: Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery*, 347.

aired his grievances: Hoving Notes.

“Dear Doctor Sackler”: Ripley to Arthur Sackler, March 10, 1980, Smithsonian Institution Archives. (This collection will be cited hereafter as Smithsonian Files.)

“a major gift to the nation”: Arthur Sackler to Ripley, April 4, 1980, Smithsonian Files.

“a mixed blessing”: Memorandum for the Record, by James McK. Symington, April 8, 1980, Smithsonian Files.

“Your very generous offer”: Ripley to Arthur Sackler, Sept. 18, 1980, Smithsonian Files.

his “unshakeable” position: Memorandum for the Record, by Ripley, Oct. 6, 1981, Smithsonian Files.

Arthur prevailed: Arthur Sackler/Smithsonian Institution Contract, Fifth Preliminary Draft, April 1982, Smithsonian Files.

roughly \$75 million: Ripley letter (this copy does not have a recipient but went to multiple people), Aug. 10, 1982, Smithsonian Files.

museum would open to the public: Smithsonian Institution, news release, April 1986, Smithsonian Files.

“Disappointed? The disinherited always”: “Sackler Collection, Cont’d.”

squad of curators: “Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy.”

It seemed to Marietta: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 181.

in a letter: *Ibid.*, 181–82. This is an instance in which Marietta’s telling of the story may not be entirely reliable, because, according to a family friend, she *did* come away from the marriage with a lot of valuable paintings. She

ended up with a Braque, a Picasso, a Kandinsky, and others. “*She* may not have asked for them,” the friend said. “But her lawyers did.”

driving her mad: Ibid., 182.

grabbed the sleeping pills: Ibid.

The pills tasted bitter: Ibid., 185.

“How could you do this to me?”: Ibid.

the divorce was finalized: The divorce became final on December 28, 1981. Jillian and Arthur were married the next day. GTS Affidavit.

Marietta got the apartment: Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 202.

CHAPTER 10: TO THWART THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

the same stage: Sanders Theatre webpage, Office of the Arts, Harvard University.

“President Bok”: “A New Millennium Begins,” Dedicatory Address, Harvard University, Oct. 18, 1985.

opening of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum: Program for “Lectures Celebrating the Dedication of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum,” Oct. 18, 1985; Invitation to the Dedication of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Oct. 18, 1985, Louis Lasagna Papers, University of Rochester.

canceled the project: “The Miracle on Quincy Street,” *Harvard Crimson*, Oct. 17, 1985.

\$10 million: “The Man Who Made It Real,” *Harvard Crimson*, Oct. 17, 1985.

Itzhak Perlman: “Arty Party,” *Harvard Crimson*, Oct. 17, 1985.

The Boston Globe: “Architecture,” *Boston Globe*, Sept. 8, 1985.

“all species were at the mercy”: “New Millennium Begins.”

press release: Smithsonian Institution, news release, April 1986, Smithsonian Files; Program for the Grand Opening of the Arthur M. Sackler Center for Health Communications at Tufts University, Feb. 20, 21, 1986.

“spent the greatest part”: Arthur Sackler to colleagues at McAdams, Dec. 28, 1967.

no mention of McAdams: Smithsonian Institution, news release, April 1986.

Security was tight: Thomas Lawton to Milo Beach, May 12, 1993, Smithsonian Files.

“a very privileged moment”: “Digging Museums,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 1983.

The plan: Thomas Lawton to Milo Beach, May 12, 1993.

“\$175 million plus”: “Convictions of a Collector,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 21, 1986; “Forbes 400,” *Forbes*, Oct. 1986. (If you look closely at the cover

of the magazine, the name “Arthur Mitchell Sackler” is right there, in a cursive font, alongside the others.)

[list of “firsts”](#): “During Medical Tribune’s Life Span,” *Medical Tribune*, May 7, 1980.

[three-day “Festschrift”](#): Jillian Sackler to Harry Henderson, Oct. 1, 1986, Henderson Papers.

[“list of achievements”](#): Jillian Sackler to Harry Henderson, Oct. 18, 1986, Henderson Papers.

[“His agenda would have required”](#): Louis Lasagna, *Studio International* 200, supplement 1 (1987).

[“is my greatest enemy”](#): “Of Time and Life, Part I,” *Medical Tribune*, April 2, 1975.

[a punishing schedule](#): “Art Collector Sows Largesse and Controversy,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1983.

[to keep up](#): “The Other Sackler,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 27, 2019.

[Arthur fell ill](#): EJS Deposition. It was the fall of 1986. Thomas Lawton to Tom Freudenheim, Dec. 12, 1986, Smithsonian Files.

[giant cake](#): An entry on the website worldofsugarart.com features photos of the cake. Scott Clark Woolley, email.

[rejected the plans](#): “Party Palace,” *New York*, Jan. 9, 1989.

[changing her last name](#): Interview with Michael Rich.

[lunch together](#): Lutze, *Who Can Know the Other?*, 207.

[“to take over responsibility”](#): Arthur Sackler to Gillian Sackler, memorandum, April 15, 1987.

[planning an exhibition](#): The exhibit ran from May 1 through June 28, 1987. “Jewels of the Ancients,” *RA: The Magazine for the Friends of the Royal Academy*, no. 14 (Spring 1987).

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[“pleased to find myself almost”](#): Ibid.

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[Marietta could not believe it](#): Ibid.; “Dr. Arthur Sackler Dies at 73,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1987.

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[Ed Koch](#): Program for Memorial Service for Arthur M. Sackler, June 17, 1987, Henderson Papers.

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CHAPTER 11: APOLLO

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Richard was in the geometry club: Roslyn High School 1960 Yearbook.

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Margie was smart and worldly: Obituary of Dr. Marjorie Ellen Yospin Newman, Legacy.com.

“The rigor is stupefying”: Richard Sackler to a Roslyn friend, Oct. 26, 1963.

complained about the work: Richard Sackler to a Roslyn friend, May 5, 1964.

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“His enthusiasm was infectious”: Richard Kapit, email.

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CHAPTER 12: HEIR APPARENT

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[University of Pennsylvania](#): “Penn Speaker Hails U.S. Achievements,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 23, 1972; “Beth M. Bressman,” *Item of Millburn and Short Hills* (Millburn, N.J.), Nov. 6, 1969.

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[still owned three ways](#): Kathe Sackler Deposition.

[“I had a lot of ideas”](#): RDS 2019 Deposition.

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CHAPTER 13: MATTER OF SACKLER

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nonsensical rationale: Verified Answer of Carol Master, Else Sackler, Arthur F. Sackler, and Elizabeth Sackler in *Matter of Sackler*, File No. 249220. The version of this document that I retrieved in the Mineola files is undated. "Before and during her marriage to Dr. Sackler, Gillian seldom accompanied Dr. Sackler during his visits with his children and grandchildren. Dr. Sackler explained to Else and Arthur separately that

because he did not wish to have any more children, he thought it would be insensitive for him to involve Gillian with his children and grandchildren.”

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Elizabeth went to the final competition: Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 376–77; “The Girl Who Won the Title,” *Brattleboro (Vt.) Reformer*, Aug. 31, 1968.

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“My father loved his passions”: “The Temple of Sackler,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1987.

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But Elizabeth objected: The Smithsonian attempted to split the difference, using the short version (“The Singer Collection”) on an introductory panel and the longer version (“The Dr. Paul Singer Collection of Chinese Art of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery”) as a credit line for each individual object. Milo Beach to Elizabeth Sackler, Sept. 21, 1999. Elizabeth was not satisfied. “Because the content of the panel is misleading, erroneous, and insulting as well as a breach of the Settlement Agreement I am dismayed that two relatively significant events, a reception and a dinner, have already

taken place at the Sackler Gallery since the installation of the Singer material and horrified by the news that the Visiting Committee will arrive to be greeted by it,” she wrote. Elizabeth Sackler to Milo Beach, Sept. 30, 1999. Smithsonian Files.

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CHAPTER 14: THE TICKING CLOCK

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CHAPTER 15: GOD OF DREAMS

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CHAPTER 16: H-BOMB

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CHAPTER 18: ANN HEDONIA

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“The whole thing is a sham”: 2001 email exchange between Richard Sackler and an acquaintance, quoted in Connecticut Complaint.

“At some point, I became addicted”: West Deposition.

West eventually sued Purdue: Complaint in a lawsuit filed by West against Purdue.

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CHAPTER 19: THE PABLO ESCOBAR OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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[“it is imperative”](#): Michael Friedman to Richard Sackler, Feb. 16, 2001.

[in separate testimony](#): Goldenheim 2002 Testimony. In response to a request for comment, an attorney for Paul Goldenheim claimed that “None of the communications concerning incidents of diversion and abuse that you cite detract even slightly from the truthfulness of Paul Goldenheim’s testimony concerning the level of abuse of MS Contin and that the abnormal and unexpected increase in diversion and abuse of Oxycontin was not known until early 2000.” But he offered no explanation for the abundant evidence that Purdue was aware well prior to 2000 of widespread and significant problems with OxyContin, and with reports of extensive MS

Contin abuse which came, in the words of Mark Alfonso, “all the time, and from everywhere.” Noting that the Justice Department had investigated Goldenheim, the lawyer claimed that they “did not find that the testimony was false or misleading.” In fact, the prosecution memo prepared by Justice concluded exactly that, stating that Goldenheim and Friedman testified “falsely and fraudulently” on these two points. Michael Friedman has never spoken publicly about these events since his guilty plea in 2007. My extensive efforts to contact him were unsuccessful.

[report describing the abuse](#): Prosecution Memo.

[“the most common source”](#): Kaiko to Mortimer Sackler et al., email, March 3, 1997, cited in Prosecution Memo.

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[“While we have the highest regard”](#): Udell to Blumenthal, Aug. 10, 2001.

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CHAPTER 20: TAKE THE FALL

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CHAPTER 21: TURKS

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AFTERWORD

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