



THE MYSTERIOUS LIFE AND
SCANDALOUS DEATH OF HEIRESS
HUGUETTE CLARK

The
PHANTOM
of FIFTH
AVENUE

MERYL GORDON

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
MRS. ASTOR REGRETS: THE HIDDEN BETRAYALS
OF A FAMILY BEYOND REPROACH

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[**Begin Reading**](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Photos](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

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*To Walter
For Everything*

*To my parents
Spirited, Indomitable, Ever Curious*





William Andrews Clark spent \$7 million building his 121-room mansion, the largest private home in Manhattan. It was torn down in 1926, eleven years after it was completed. (*Collection of the New York Historical Society, George P. Hall & Son Photograph Collection, negative #58976*)

Character List

THE PATRIARCH

William Andrews Clark: (1839–1925) Montana copper mogul, U.S. senator, voracious art collector, one of the richest men in America, worth at minimum the equivalent of \$3.3 billion in contemporary dollars.

First Marriage

Katherine Stauffer: First wife, childhood friend from Pennsylvania. Married in 1869, bore seven children, died in 1893 of typhoid after visiting the World's Fair in Chicago.

Children of Katherine and William Andrews Clark who survived to adulthood:

Mary Clark Culver Kling de Brabant: (1870–1939) Eldest daughter, married three times, based in Manhattan, known for lavish parties and romantic entanglements.

Charles Clark: (1871–1933) Spendthrift California horse-racing enthusiast, often sued by creditors, worked for father, said to be father's bagman in bribing Montana legislature, married three times.

Katherine Clark Morris: (1875–1974) Married to a Manhattan physician, a descendant of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, presided over 3,000-acre farm estate.

William Andrews Clark Jr.: (1877–1934) Founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, widowed twice, employed by his father, racy reputation, left fortune to seventeen-year-old boy.

Second Marriage

Anna La Chapelle: (1878–1963) Became William Andrews Clark's ward as a fifteen-year-old in Butte, trained to play the harp in Paris. Marriage to the senator belatedly claimed to have occurred in 1901 but license never produced. French-Canadian parents, mother ran a boardinghouse, father convicted of practicing medicine without a license.

Children from Anna's marriage to William Andrews Clark:

Andrée Clark: Born in France in 1902. Girl Scout, played piano, attended Spence School. Died on Maine vacation in 1919 of meningitis.

Huguette Clark: Born in France in 1906, died 2011. Talented artist (painter, photographer, miniaturist), played the violin, attended Spence School, exhibited her work at the Corcoran Gallery, passionate doll collector, became a recluse in later years.

Anna La Chapelle's siblings

Amelia La Chapelle: (1881–1969) Married three times, no children. Frequently traveled with Anna and the senator, very close to Huguette.

Arthur La Chapelle: (1883–1946) Based in California. His daughter, Anna La Chapelle, was supported by Huguette, her first cousin. Sued Huguette to break a trust.

THE FRIENDS AND SUITORS

Tadé Styka: (1889–1954) Polish artist, child prodigy in Paris. His portrait of Teddy Roosevelt hangs in the White House. Painted eleven portraits of Senator Clark. Huguette Clark's painting instructor for thirty years, frequent escort during the 1930s, closest man in her life.

Doris (Ford) Styka: Fashion model who walked into Tadé's studio during Huguette's painting lesson and stole his heart. Married the artist in 1942.

Wanda Styka: Their daughter. Huguette's goddaughter, museum archivist.

William M. Gower: (1905–1976) Huguette's only husband. Married in August 1928, separated in April 1929, divorced in 1930.

Received \$1 million to marry Huguette. Moved to France with second wife, Constance Baxter Tevis McKee Toulmin. Later reestablished affectionate connection with Huguette.

Etienne de Villermont: (1904–1982) French marquis and childhood family friend of the Clarks. In 1938, Walter Winchell announced the marquis’s engagement to Huguette. Etienne married a Frenchwoman instead but conducted a decades-long flirtation with Huguette, who wrote him checks.

Edward FitzGerald: Duke of Leinster. Bankrupt Irish duke, briefly courted Huguette for her money.

Edward “Major” Bowes: (1874–1946) Radio pioneer, host of NBC’s *Original Amateur Hour*, popular culture sensation in the 1930s, famous for his gong. Widower, began dating Anna Clark in 1935.

Dr. William Gordon Lyle: Family physician to the Clarks. Wife Leontine was a Spence classmate of Huguette. Their children: Gordon Lyle Jr. and Leontine “Tina” Lyle Harrower (goddaughter of Anna Clark).

Suzanne Pierre: French, widow of Dr. Jules Pierre, also a Clark family physician. Huguette’s best friend dating from the mid-1970s, saved Huguette’s life. Died in 2011.

Agnes Clark Albert: Daughter of Huguette’s half brother Charles Clark. Family member who had the closest relationship by far with Huguette and Anna Clark. Died in 2002.

HUGUETTE’S RETAINERS

Donald Wallace: Lawyer, worked for Huguette from 1976 to 1997. Exasperated by her failure to update her will. Died in 2002.

Wallace Bock: Attorney who inherited Huguette as a client from Donald Wallace, worked for her from 1997 until her 2011 death. Wrote her controversial final will, named an executor.

Irving Kamsler: Accountant, worked for Huguette from 1979 to 2011, visited often and held her medical proxy, executor of her will. Pled guilty to online sex offenses in 2008.

Christopher Sattler: Huguette’s assistant from 1991 to 2011. Worked on her artistic photography projects, maintained her three apartments at 907 Fifth Avenue.

THE NURSES

Hadassah Peri: Filipino immigrant married to an Israeli cabdriver, Peri was Huguette’s principal nurse from 1991 to 2011. Received \$31 million in gifts from Huguette including extensive real estate, antique jewelry, and a Stradivarius.

Geraldine Coffey: Irish immigrant, private night nurse, worked for Huguette from 1991 to 2011.

Marie Pompei: Hospital staff nurse, one of the first people to treat Huguette, became her close friend.

THE HOSPITAL PERSONNEL

Dr. Robert Newman: Chief executive officer of Beth Israel Hospital, where Huguette lived for two decades. Repeatedly solicited gifts from Huguette, even had his mother visit the heiress in an effort to secure donations.

Dr. Jack Rudick: Surgeon who treated Huguette for skin cancer, later received \$2.1 million in gifts from Huguette.

Dr. Henry Singman: Chief personal physician to Huguette. He made the 1991 house call that led to her admission to the hospital. Received more than \$1 million in gifts from Huguette.

THE LEGAL FIGHT

Clark family members who launched original guardianship lawsuit

Karine McCall: Granddaughter of Charles Clark.

Ian Devine: Great-grandson of Mary Clark.

Carla Hall: Great-granddaughter of Katherine Clark.

The lawyers in the estate fight

Harvey Corn: Represented Hadassah Peri.

John Dadakis: Represented Wallace Bock and Huguette Clark estate.

John Graziano: Represented Wanda Styka.

Jason Lilien and Carl Distefano: New York State Attorney General’s office.

John Morken: Represented Clark relatives.

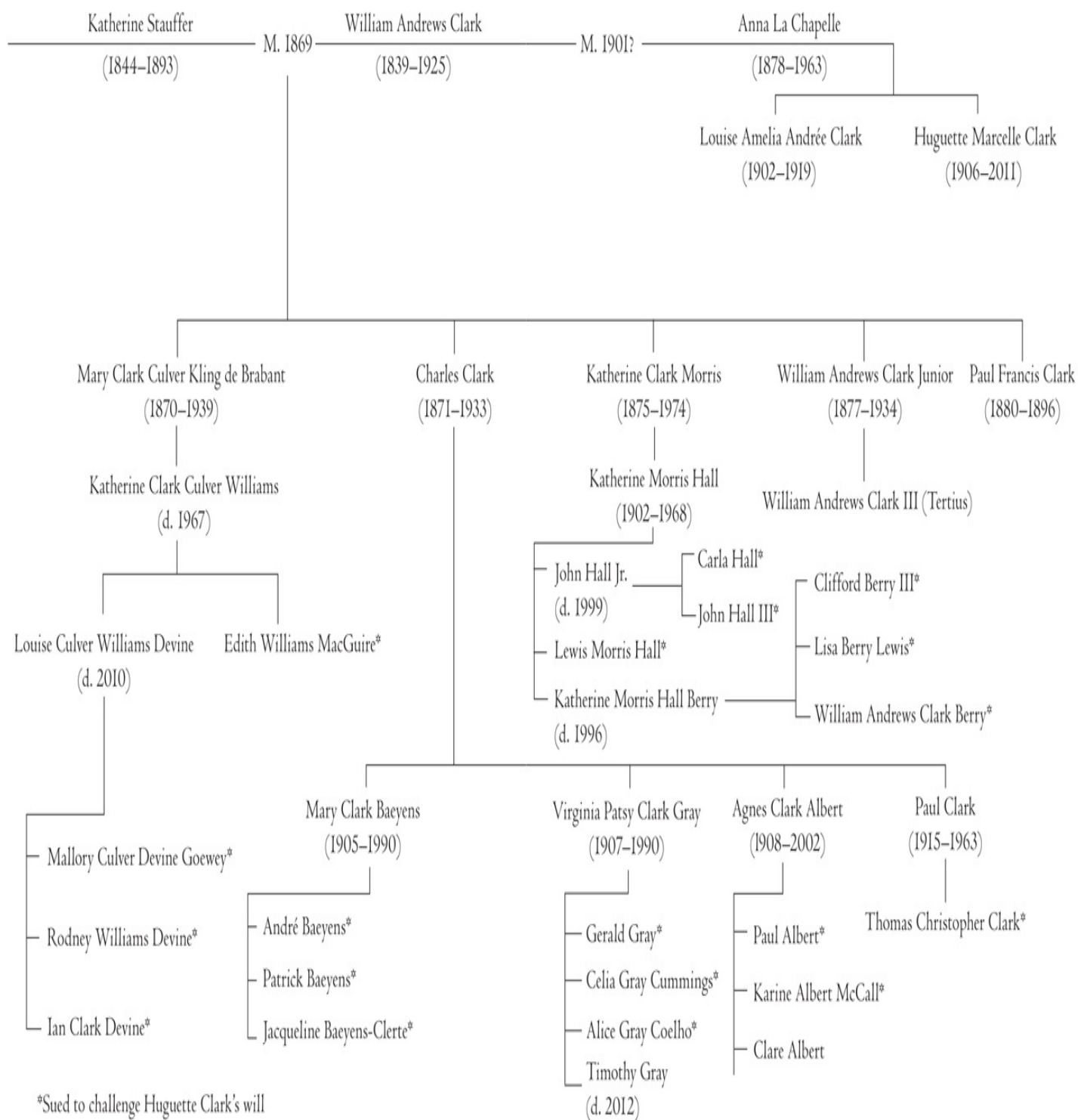
Peter Schram: Appointed by the court to represent public administrator’s office.

The judges

Kristin Glen: Tart-tongued Surrogate’s Court justice.

Nora Anderson: Assigned Clark probate case in 2013 after Glen retired.

The Descendants of Senator William Andrews Clark



*Sued to challenge Huguette Clark's will

Chapter One

The Clark Family Reunion at the Corcoran

Located just two blocks from the White House, the Corcoran Gallery of Art feels as if it is off the beaten path in Washington, drawing just a fraction of the city's tourist throngs. The white marble 1897 Beaux Arts colossus usually closes promptly at 5 p.m. on Fridays. But on the rainy night of October 24, 2008, the lights were ablaze well into the evening. With a two-story atrium sporting forty Doric columns and a sweeping staircase to a grand balcony, the perennially cash-strapped private museum is often rented out for weddings and parties. However, tonight's more than seventy-five guests, who had flown in from Paris, London, Florida, Texas, California, and New York, had a personal connection to the museum and its paintings by Corot, Gainsborough, and Delacroix.

In his invitation, Corcoran director Paul Greenhalgh had described the two days of events as “a gathering of the Clark Family.” Not just any family named Clark, but a reunion of the descendants and relatives of William Andrews Clark, who in 1907 was described as the second richest man in America, after John D. Rockefeller, with a personal fortune worth more than \$3 billion in today's dollars. The copper mogul and Montana senator had been born in 1839 and died in 1925. A Corcoran benefactor, Clark's name is prominently featured in gold leaf on the museum's interior wall and credited in small type beside the many sculptures and paintings that he donated to the permanent collection.

The idea for the Clark family get-together had been jointly hatched by Greenhalgh, a British decorative arts scholar with a mop of brown hair, and Katherine Hall Friedman, known professionally as Carla Hall, a great-great-granddaughter of William Andrews Clark, whose father and grandmother had served on the Corcoran board. Ever since he had joined the Corcoran two years earlier, Greenhalgh, the former head of research at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, had been wooing potential donors, and he was eager to establish a stronger relationship to the Clarks. As Greenhalgh recalls, “It was clear a lot of the family had never been to the museum before.”

The relatives of William Andrews Clark were a far-flung family and many had never met prior to the reunion. Some siblings were estranged and had not seen or spoken to one another in decades. In an e-mail that Carla Hall sent a month before the reunion, she seemed hopeful that the event would change the family dynamics: “We are all eager to get to know one another and learn more about the Clark family, with a specific focus on the life of WA Clark and his legacy that is reflected in the Corcoran's exquisite collection.”

This night would prove to be a turning point in the tangled history of the Clarks, although not in a way that the organizers could have imagined. Four years later, the party guests would be quizzed by teams of lawyers about their memories of the evening and who said what to whom. In the whispered

asides at the Corcoran party, one could hear the battle lines of a future family feud taking shape. The Clarks in attendance that night included descendants of three branches of the family tree and a representative from the fourth. The senator had sired seven children during his first marriage, and then as a widower married a much younger woman and produced two daughters. As a result, there was a thirty-six-year age gap between his oldest and youngest children: his grandchildren and young daughters were nearly the same age.

Three children from his first marriage—the scandal-prone Manhattan divorcée Mary (known as May), the booze- and racetrack-loving California bon vivant Charles, and the prim and proper Katherine—had produced seven children, and many of their descendants were in attendance this evening.

Strolling past the snarling bronze lions guarding the Corcoran's entrance, Karine Albert McCall, a petite and slender sixty-eight-year-old blonde, arrived with her husband, Donald McCall, a retired cellist. The grandchild of Charles Clark and his banking heiress wife, Celia, Karine had grown up in luxury at her grandmother's San Francisco Tudor castle, "House-on-Hill," a 35,000-square-foot estate on six acres with a fifty-five-foot-long music room, twelve bedrooms, and lush gardens.

An artist who painted colorful abstracts, the mother of three children, Karine had spent most of the previous forty years living in Europe, but she and her husband had just moved from London to Washington, D.C. She had recently discovered worrisome information about an elderly Clark relative and had been obsessing about what, if anything, to do. She had confided in her first cousin Jacqueline Baeyens-Clerte, who had flown in from her home in Paris to attend the reunion and give Karine moral support. Tonight Karine had a mission: finding allies to discuss her concerns. Karine had never met many of her Clark relatives. As she and Donald and Jacqueline circulated through the cocktail hour at the Corcoran, introducing themselves and making small talk, there was a subtext to the conversations. As Karine recalls, "We were trying to figure out, who can we trust?"

Karine's newfound worries centered on her great-aunt, a woman she had known all her life as "Tante Huguette." The frail and monied Manhattan centenarian had a haunting hold on the imaginations of several generations of Clark relatives.

Huguette Marcelle Clark, the sole surviving child of William Andrews Clark, was now 102 years old and resided in Beth Israel Hospital in New York. No family member had seen her in forty years. Born in 1906 in Paris to Clark's second wife, Anna, Huguette (pronounced you-GET) had been instantly famous for her wealth and constantly chased by photographers as a pretty child and desirable debutante, reluctantly starring in the society pages. Divorced in 1930 after a brief marriage, she never wed again or had children and cut herself off from the social whirl, deliberately cultivating an air of mystery. The gossip columnists of her era, Walter Winchell and Cholly Knickerbocker, had periodically run whatever-happened-to items about Huguette.

Several third-generation Clark relatives like Karine, now in their sixties and seventies, had met Huguette during their childhoods, but to the younger generation she was a cipher, an eccentric curiosity. The family members speculated about her life, and several had repeatedly asked to meet her to no avail, which only made them even more curious. She haunted the imaginations of three generations of Clark relatives, an elusive, reclusive figure. "Talking with the family, none of them knew her," says Corcoran director Greenhalgh. "I'm sure they were desperate to get an audience but none of them did." The professional photographer who had been hired to capture the reunion, Martha FitzSimon, had been briefed about Huguette in advance, recalling, "Carla told me that nobody had been able to talk to her for years."

The last time any family member could remember actually seeing Huguette was at the funeral of

Carla Hall's grandmother in March 1968 at St. Thomas Church in Manhattan. "After the funeral, we all were together for a short while, greeting each other and expressing condolences," recalls Erika Hall, Carla's mother and the widow of Huguette's great-nephew John Hall. "Huguette was there also and did the same thing, very sweet, and disappeared rather soon."

Disappeared was an apt word to describe Huguette's behavior. She maintained sporadic phone contact for many years with a few Clark relatives, speaking in a soft voice with a hint of a French accent. When Erika Hall and her husband sent flowers once or twice a year, Huguette would call to say a brief thank-you. But even these kinds of communications had tapered off in recent years. Huguette had repeatedly declined to give out her phone number and had always taken a standoffish don't-call-me-I'll-call-you approach to her relatives. Most did not know that she was in the hospital and assumed she still resided at her sprawling complex of three apartments at 907 Fifth Avenue, with forty-two rooms.

Her two gatekeepers were Irving Kamsler, an accountant who had worked for her since 1979, and attorney Wallace Bock, a real estate tax specialist who had inherited Huguette as a client when her veteran lawyer became ill in 1997. At age seventy-six, Bock still handled Huguette's legal affairs and served as an intermediary between Huguette and her relatives. An Orthodox Jew, Bock had been invited to the Corcoran event as Huguette's representative, but the Friday-Saturday schedule conflicted with the Sabbath. He sent his colleague Kamsler to attend in his stead.

Huguette was, in fact, closer to the deferential sixty-one-year-old Kamsler, who visited her frequently and coordinated her medical care with her private nurses and doctors at Beth Israel Hospital. Bock and Kamsler viewed themselves as Huguette's protectors: they paid her bills, handled her taxes, supervised her staff, and even ran errands. "I found them very easy to deal with," says Greenhalgh of Kamsler and Bock. "My impression is what Huguette did is get faithful people who would stand by her and she would stand by them."

Paid generous monthly retainers (Bock received \$15,000 per month; Kamsler got \$5,000 per month plus a standard yearly \$50,000 bonus), the men made themselves constantly available to their most important client. As Cynthia Garcia, a paralegal at Bock's firm from 1999 to 2002, recalls, "If Mr. Bock was in the men's room when she called, I had to put her on hold and run to the men's room and knock on the door. If he was smoking his pipe by the air shaft, I'd get him. I knew where he ate lunch, a kosher luncheonette. If she called, I'd run out to get him. She would call ten times a day." But Huguette Clark was older now and her hearing was fading; the calls had become much less frequent.

The Corcoran Gallery had been the recipient of William Andrews Clark's vast art collection, including nearly two hundred paintings, Rodin marble nudes, Oriental rugs, Egyptian antiquities, and majolica. His collection featured Corot landscapes and Degas ballet paintings, a Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington, and works by Chardin and Cazin. The Salon Doré, an ornate 1770s gilded room that Clark had imported from Paris to install in his turn-of-the-century robber-baron Fifth Avenue mansion, gleamed as the result of a recent restoration.

As William Andrews Clark's distant relations peered admiringly at the art, one implicit thought floated through the air: if only these valuable works of art had stayed in the family. Imagine the cachet of a Corot in one's very own living room. Or better yet, consider the millions of dollars that these artworks would fetch now at auction. A Sickel-Leaf Persian carpet that had once belonged to Clark was subsequently sold by the museum for \$33.7 million.

William Andrews Clark, who made his fortune in mining and banking in Montana, expanded into

building railroads. Clark showered his children with gifts, bragging in nouveau riche fashion about his generosity. On May 29, 1900, the *New York Times* recited the senator's wedding presents to his daughter Katherine, including \$100,000 worth of jewelry—a diamond-and-ruby bodice ornament and diamond-and-emerald tiara—plus \$4 million in securities and real estate. Just in case that sum did not convey his enduring fatherly love, the story noted that Clark had previously given his daughter \$10 million.

Upon his death, the senator bequeathed an estimated \$15 million each (inflation-adjusted, the equivalent of \$200 million today) to his surviving children: two adult sons and two adult daughters from his first marriage, and the teenage Huguette. But fortunes have a way of dwindling as the money passes through several generations, especially in a family like the Clarks, with multiple marriages and divorces. Some of tonight's guests were trust funders, but others lived off their salaries. As the Corcoran's Greenhalgh recalls, "My impression was that a significant portion of the people at the reunion were not wealthy people. I think there was a range."

On the Corcoran's second floor, the tables were decorated with red-and-gold tablecloths and set with gold-rimmed glasses and gold-rimmed dinnerware. With just a half hour left before the seated dinner was to begin, Carla Hall, wearing a fitted navy cocktail dress with short sleeves, could be seen rearranging place cards. And she did not look happy about it.

A five-foot-ten, imposing fifty-six-year-old blonde with a take-charge personality, Carla had embraced her Clark heritage with pride. She ran a corporate branding business out of her Upper West Side brownstone in Manhattan, creating annual reports and marketing materials for clients such as the Ford Foundation and Morgan Stanley. Carla's great-grandmother, Katherine Clark Morris, had been the only one of William Andrews Clark's children to make a socially fortuitous marriage, to a descendant of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Lewis Morris.

Carla had been working on the arrangements for the Corcoran party for months with Ian Devine, another fourth-generation Clark descendant. A preppy-looking fifty-five-year-old consultant, Devine advised financial firms on how to market their services to wealthy families. His great-grandmother, Mary Clark Culver Kling de Brabant, had been the bad girl of her generation. Married three times, Mary, the oldest child of William Andrews Clark, was a darling of the gossip columns of her era for her acrimonious divorces and exotic galas.

Carla and Ian had only discovered by serendipity that they were related. In 2001, a business associate arranged for the duo to meet at Carla's home office to discuss a potential work project. Ian's brother had recently given him a family tree and certain names sounded familiar: his great-grandmother Mary and Carla's great-grandmother Katherine had been sisters. As Ian recalls, "At the end of our business meeting, I asked if her parents were John and Erika. She said yes, and we took it from there." Both of their families owned portraits of William Andrews Clark by Polish painter Tade Styka (pronounced TAH-day STEE-ka), an artist popular in Washington and Hollywood, who had been commissioned by the senator to create an excessive eleven paintings.

Carla Hall had never met or spoken to her "Tante Huguette," but she had frequently been in touch by phone in recent years with Huguette's lawyer, Wallace Bock. Acting in 2006 as a self-appointed family liaison to the Corcoran, Carla had asked Bock to pass along a request to Huguette to donate archival Clark family material (letters, photos, documents) to the museum. Huguette declined to do so. Curious about William Andrews Clark's historic estate, Bellosguardo, in Santa Barbara, still owned by Huguette but vacant, Carla had requested and received permission, via Wallace Bock, to visit in 2007. She sent Huguette a thank-you note afterward but did not receive a reply.

As soon as Carla began planning the Corcoran party, she consulted Bock and then sent Huguette an

invitation to the event with a request for a donation to underwrite expenses. It was cheeky to write to a distant relative and ask for money, but everyone in the family assumed, correctly, that Huguette could easily afford it. Huguette contributed \$10,000 but, as expected, declined to attend. As her accountant, Irving Kamsler, recalls telling her, “If you want to go, we can absolutely arrange it, get you there in a luxury limousine.” He adds, “But she had no desire to meet her family.” Her absence was a disappointment. Beverly Bonner McCord, a descendant of one of the senator’s sisters, says, “We would have loved to have met Huguette, even for just a few minutes.”

The centenarian represented a living link to the most glittering era of family history. Huguette and her mother, Anna Clark, attended the opening of the Clark wing at the Corcoran in 1928—President Calvin Coolidge cut the silken cord—and she had an emotional attachment to the artworks. She had played with her older sister, Andrée, in the Salon Doré back when it was part of her father’s Fifth Avenue house. The paintings and sculptures at the Corcoran had been the backdrop to her daily life. She had accompanied her father to museums in Europe and Manhattan. Art was a way that this shy girl could connect with her formidable father. Inspired to become an artist herself, she had taken private lessons for many years with Tadé Styka. The Corcoran had even mounted a show of Huguette Clark’s artwork in 1929, which received favorable attention. With intricate brushwork, she created a striking self-portrait and romantic depictions of flowers.

Proud of her father’s legacy as an art collector, she had been a loyal supporter of the Corcoran for many decades. “I talked to Huguette a number of times, she was very sweet,” recalls David Levy, former Corcoran Gallery director. “She loved things that were French and she loved the Salon Doré. We were restoring that and she contributed.” But he also thought her behavior was strange, to say the least. “She had some huge aversion to anyone seeing her. She would send me group photos, historic stuff, a group of people standing in front of a building. She would take a black magic marker and cross out her face. It was pretty weird. She never explained it and I never asked.” Freed now from the diplomatic requirements of being a museum head, Levy adds, “She was a nutcase. If you have a nutcase giving you between \$25,000 and \$100,000 per year, you’ve got to let it ride.”

Huguette’s long-standing relationship with the Corcoran unraveled when Levy championed a new addition to the museum designed by Frank Gehry, which would have sliced into the Clark wing and destroyed the rotunda. She cut her contributions. When the board canceled the Gehry addition, Levy quit as director. Greenhalgh, his successor, had worked to smooth the waters, although he was never able to speak to Huguette Clark directly. “I went to see Wallace Bock, and he was extremely cold at first, because Huguette’s experience with the museum had been bad for many years,” Greenhalgh recalls. “We reassured Wallace Bock that the Clark wing and Clark collections were extremely important to the museum.”

The strategy worked. When Greenhalgh wrote to Huguette in 2007 to tell her about the museum’s precarious financial condition—it was running a \$2 million yearly deficit—she responded by pledging \$1 million, to be paid in four installments. The new director was understandably eager to keep her, and her advisers, feeling warmly toward the museum.

Carla Hall had been happily chatting with guests that evening and accepting congratulations when she was abruptly interrupted by the Corcoran director’s assistant with an urgent request to change the seating arrangements at the head table. The table needed new additions for the emissaries from Tante Huguette: her accountant, Irving Kamsler, and his wife, Judith.

Short and overweight, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and striped navy tie, Kamsler and his red-

headed wife, Judi, did seem like interlopers as they mingled with the Clark descendants. A graduate of Baruch College, Kamsler and his second wife lived in a modest condominium in Riverdale, and until recently he had been president of his Bronx temple. After working at several different accounting firms, he was now a sole practitioner and Huguette Clark was his most important client. As her representative, he enjoyed the reflected glory at the party, recalling that the family members were eager for news: “Everyone was interested, people were asking me questions, what was Mrs. Clark like? How is she? I didn’t say very much.”

Even in absentia, Huguette Clark was present at the party. A Clark family photo display included pictures of Huguette and her sister Andrée, pretty young girls with long hair, dressed up for an outing. But Kamsler had become perturbed upon seeing a Clark family tree that did not mention either Huguette or her mother, Anna. He did not realize that the tree had been created as a seating chart for those actually in attendance that night.

Upset by what he perceived as a lack of respect for Huguette, Kamsler tracked down Greenhalgh’s executive assistant and angrily complained. As Kamsler recalls, “I said I’m not going to make a scene, but they are asking her to come and underwrite the cost and they’re ignoring her in this thing.” His rant sparked the last-minute seating change: the Corcoran staffer had taken it upon herself to ask Carla Hall to move Kamsler and his wife from Siberia in the hope of appeasing them.

Carla was visibly upset by the request to upgrade the Kamslers. “I had to reorchestrate all the table arrangements and accommodate the elder members of the family that had traveled far and wide,” Carla recalled with irritation. “I was shaken by that, and I didn’t understand.”

Once the family members were seated, as the mistress of ceremonies, Carla stood up and took to the microphone to welcome her relatives, noting that this was the first time the extended family had come together in a century. She told the group that she hoped the reunion would “begin a new era of Clark cousin connections.” Toward the end of her prepared remarks, Carla expressed her gratitude to Tante Huguette for her “tremendous generosity toward making this weekend reunion possible.” Carla had placed note cards on each table, and suggested that people write to Huguette, with the promise that the comments would be sent along. But her remarks irked Irving Kamsler, or as he put it, “Carla did make a point to thank Mrs. Clark, and in my opinion, I thought it was an afterthought.”

At the end of the evening, as waiters cleared the tables and the crowd began to disperse, Carla went up to the accountant and his wife and asked, “How did you enjoy the evening?” She was startled by Kamsler’s response. “He grimaced, which I didn’t quite expect, and then I said, ‘How would you think my great-aunt would have liked and enjoyed the evening?’ He became very belligerent and used words that felt very harsh to me... He said, ‘She would have been disgusted at this event, that it was disrespectful of her.’ Then he huffed off. My next conversation was with Ian, because he and his wife, Kerri, were coming toward me and I was quite shaken up.”

Ian Devine overheard a commotion and raced over to Carla to see what was going on. After hearing her account, he was furious about what he perceived as “this out-of-place attack” and “verbal assault on Carla.”

Paul Greenhalgh witnessed the confrontation. “Definitely, Irving was put out,” he says. “My memory was that on the various boards and posters put around, Huguette was not thanked for supporting the evening, and he was upset.” Word quickly spread that Kamsler had criticized the festivities.

The contretemps ended the evening on a jarring note. The next morning, the guests gathered at the museum again, starting with a brunch. Irving and Judi Kamsler received a decidedly chilly reaction from the family. “They treated us like lepers,” he recalled.

After touring the Clark collection, the guests wound up at a luncheon, with featured speaker Stanley Pitts, an amateur historian. Pitts, an airline safety administrator based in Alaska, had written his master's thesis on William Andrews Clark at the University of Northern Texas. Back in 1899, Clark had been charged with bribing Montana legislators to win his Senate seat; Pitts's thesis was an attempt to clear the senator's name. Clark's descendants were well aware of the controversies swirling around their patriarch and sought Pitts out to tell him their tales. "They'd been told that he was a rascal and tight-fisted," Pitts says, recalling that one Clark relative confessed, " 'My great-aunt would not let us speak his name in the house, they were so ashamed. We thought he was a criminal.' "

Even though Pitts had a dramatic story to tell, the senator's great-granddaughter Karine McCall had trouble paying attention during his remarks. Karine, who had come to the family reunion on a mission, needed to make a quick decision. Who could she trust in this roomful of relatives? The hyperorganized Carla Hall appeared to be plugged into the family history. Karine passed her a note, inviting Carla over to her town house in Georgetown later that afternoon. She had urgent matters to discuss.

Chapter Two

The Quest for “Tante Huguette”

On this rainy Saturday afternoon, Carla Hall arrived at Karine’s Georgetown house with Ian Devine in tow. Karine’s houseguest and cousin, Jacqueline Baeyens-Clerte, a French baron’s daughter, joined them as well. The white 1820s four-story town house on P Street NW in Georgetown, located on a prime corner lot, had been meticulously restored, with marble fireplaces on each floor and a small, sunny backyard. Karine and Donald McCall had purchased the showplace just weeks before the family reunion at the Corcoran and were still unpacking the final boxes.

They had decorated in eclectic fashion with African masks, colorful Oriental rugs, Russian icons mixed with antique furniture, and paintings that Karine had inherited from her mother, Agnes Clark Albert. A San Francisco philanthropist and granddaughter of William Andrews Clark, Agnes had attended the Spence School in Manhattan with Huguette back in the early 1920s.

The events that had triggered Karine’s newfound curiosity about her great-aunt Huguette began with a rekindled romance. In 1967, Karine, a divorced single mother, had married Donald, a musician nine years her senior. The couple amicably divorced in 1987 and settled in separate countries (Karine in England, Donald in Italy) but had recently gotten back together and remarried. Earlier this year, as they tried to decide where to live together as a couple, a bit of information emerged that inadvertently related to Huguette.

After Karine ushered her relatives into her new living room, she explained that her trip down the rabbit hole began with the enactment of a new British tax on foreigners that she and Donald feared might be ruinous to their finances. As they considered their options, an adviser inquired: Would Karine inherit money in the future? “I don’t know,” she replied, but then began to wonder about the odds.

The first name that came to Karine’s mind was an aging and wealthy family member who just might be generous: Tante Huguette. It was plausible. Karine’s mother had been friendly with Huguette, and Karine recalled visits to her relatives’ Fifth Avenue apartments and Santa Barbara estate. “Huguette was always sitting next to her mother [Anna], but she never said anything,” Karine remembers. “Anna was so much fun, she was an original. She did what she wanted. She had married for money, and she spent it too.” Huguette and Karine’s mother, Agnes Albert, spoke regularly even though they lived on opposite sides of the country. As Karine recalls, “My mother used to phone Tante Huguette every month.”

But a few years before Agnes died in 2002, she told her daughter Karine that she was concerned about Huguette. “My mother was not well,” Karine recalled. “She called me into her room and said

she wanted to speak to me about something important. She said, 'I tried to call Huguette to say hello, and instead spoke to her lawyer. He told me not to phone any longer, if Huguette wanted to talk to me, she would call. But that's not the way it's always been.' ”

After Agnes Albert died, Karine's older brother, Paul Albert, sent Tante Huguette a note informing her of the death. Huguette replied with a heartfelt handwritten condolence note:

September 22nd, 2002

Dear Paul,

Your kind letter regarding your dear Mother deeply touched me.

Your Mother was a very remarkable person and had such great talent as a musician. I admired her greatly and was very fond of her.

You had reason to be very proud of her.

With my very deepest sympathies, dear Paul, and much love, Tante Huguette.

With no children of her own, it was possible that Huguette might leave a bequest to Agnes's children. Karine asked her lawyer to get in touch with Wallace Bock to inquire about whether she was in Huguette's will, for tax planning purposes. Word came back that Karine and her siblings were not among the future recipients of Huguette Clark's generosity.

Recalling her mother's request to look out for Huguette and seized with a nagging sense of guilt, Karine did a Google search on Huguette's closest known associates, Bock and accountant Irving Kamsler. She was astonished to discover that Kamsler was a convicted felon: "What I found out was his arrest for pedophilia."

On September 6, 2007, Kamsler had been arrested and charged with exchanging sexually explicit e-mails with a fifteen-year-old girl in an AOL chat room. As the *Riverdale Press* story noted, the "girl" was an undercover cop; this was a sex sting. Kamsler used an e-mail address that was not even remotely incognito for an accountant trolling for underage girls: IRV1040@aol.com.

Freed on \$20,000 bond, Kamsler was forced to resign from the presidency of his temple, Congregation Shaarei Shalom. A law enforcement officer who investigated the case recalls, "He was really nasty and domineering, very explicit about what he would do to these girls." Yet the official also noted that Kamsler "wanted a 'girlfriend' experience. He wanted a more refined girl who would dress up a little bit and meet him in a hotel." Newspaper photos show Kamsler's wife, Judi, at his side for the court hearings.

Just three weeks before the Corcoran party, Kamsler pled guilty on October 2 to attempting to disseminate indecent material to a minor. (Sentenced several months later, he received a \$5,000 fine and five years probation, and was required to register as a sex offender. He received a dispensation from the judge to continue to practice as an accountant.) Karine had been horrified by the prospect of sitting near Kamsler at the Clark reunion. Now she asked Carla and Ian: did they think Tante Huguette's finances should be handled by a convicted felon?

"Carla and I were pretty much speechless," Ian recalls. "I'm a pretty jaded guy, but this was horrifying."

But this was not the first time that he and Carla had wondered whether anything was amiss with Huguette's financial affairs. Five years earlier, Ian had seen an article in the *New York Times* announcing that Sotheby's was auctioning off a Renoir, *Dans Les Roses (Madame Leon Clapisson)*, a

portrait of an aristocratic Parisian in a garden. The owner was listed as Mrs. Huguette M. Clark. Ian alerted Carla, and they went to Sotheby's together for a closer look. It was a bonding experience, cementing their mutual Clark roots and trying to satisfy their mutual curiosity about their relative.

"It took us by surprise that this painting was up for sale," Carla said. "Why is this huge painting, very valuable painting, being sold? What's going on? A woman who is of a substantial asset base, the daughter of Senator Clark, why is it being sold now?" (The Renoir was purchased for \$23.5 million by casino owner Steve Wynn.) Carla fired off a letter to Dare Hartwell, a Corcoran curator, writing, "We were as shocked as anyone by the sale and she must have been truly horrified to see her name in print."

Carla had also had a disconcerting back-and-forth with David Levy, the Corcoran's former director, who mentioned that Huguette's contributions to the museum had dropped substantially. He had heard that she had given a large sum of money instead to an Israeli project to help out Wallace Bock's daughter. (Carla would later learn that at Bock's behest, Huguette, who was Catholic, had donated \$1.85 million to build a security system in Efrat, Israel.) David Levy wrote Carla an e-mail: "In truth, I've had some disturbing thoughts about the whole matter and in particular, Mrs. Clark's relationship to Wallace Bock, the current lawyer, who may have his own agenda (which would be a big legal no-no.)"

Carla reported this development to her mother and to her uncle Lewis Hall, but both urged caution. "I brought this to the family's attention and the answer was... if Mrs. Clark wanted to give to Israel, it's her free will to give to Israel and it's none of our business," Carla recalls. "They advised me not to speak to anybody and to respect Mrs. Clark's privacy."

But this new information—that Huguette's accountant was a convicted sex offender—was impossible to ignore. Sitting in Karine's living room, the family members strategized over how to proceed. They had no proof of any wrongdoing, but their questions were multiplying by the second. Was she in good health and of sound mind, or was someone else making financial decisions on her behalf? Was she well cared for? As the meeting broke up, they agreed to do more research and make a plan.

Although Ian Devine's great-grandmother Mary and Huguette had been half sisters, he had never met the oldest living Clark. He sent her two cards in the 1970s that went unanswered. Now Ian went home and searched online for information about Kamsler. What turned up was odd. A friend of the accountant had posted purported advice from Kamsler about the repercussions of an upcoming tax law change. As Ian recalls, the quotes "seemed to indicate that Irving Kamsler was in favor of getting clients to agree to be kept on life support, kept alive by any means possible, until 2010, when estate taxes dropped to zero because of a quirk in the law." These kinds of comments were actually common in accounting circles at the time because of the oddities of the 2001 Bush tax cut. (The family of Yankees owner George Steinbrenner saved an estimated \$600 million in federal taxes because he died in 2010, rather than a year earlier or later.) Karine had found the same online reference to Kamsler's supposed thoughts about estate taxes. The trio worried that Huguette might be in physical danger.

Unaware that the Clark relatives were marshaling their forces against him, Irving Kamsler went to Beth Israel Hospital to tell Huguette about the reunion. At 102, she remained mentally sharp, although she suffered from severe hearing loss. She was capable of having a conversation if people stood near her good left ear; familiar voices were easier for her to understand. Kamsler portrayed himself as acting as her champion at the event, challenging her family members on her behalf. Brutally honest,

he told Huguette that in his opinion, her relatives were ingrates: “I was upset on your behalf that the family diagram and tree didn’t have your name on it.” For Huguette, this brought back painful memories of being treated dismissively by her half siblings in the 1930s and ’40s. Kamsler did tell her that many relatives had expressed interest in her, but the accountant insisted that he had been circumspect. As he recalls, “She was glad that I had gone to represent her but upset that I had gotten into a tiff with Carla.”

Carla Hall called Wallace Bock to complain that Kamsler had been rude at the reunion, saying that she was “upset and concerned.” Bock recalls, “I tried to gloss it over and smooth it out.” Carla asked Bock to arrange a call between Huguette and her mother, Erika—the women had not spoken in several years—and he turned her down. Carla then talked things over with her mother, who decided to make the case herself. On November 24, Erika Hall phoned Wallace Bock to reiterate her request to speak to Huguette and received an equally frosty response. “He was very noncommittal and closed the door,” says Erika Hall. “That was the feeling, you had the door shut in to your face.”

Bock insists that he was only following Huguette’s instructions. “Mrs. Clark wasn’t talking to anyone on the telephone. She wouldn’t talk to any strangers,” he said. “One of the problems was her hearing. People had to shout at her, and she didn’t enjoy the conversations anymore.”

Erika was so angry that she wrote to Corcoran director Paul Greenhalgh, complaining about Bock and describing Kamsler’s criminal conviction. “As you may have heard, several of us are very disturbed and worried about the condition and financial situation of Huguette Clark,” she wrote. “After meeting the Kamslers, this became very apparent... We are exploring what legal rights we have and if there could be ‘elder abuse.’ ”

But the museum officials already knew about the accountant’s legal troubles. “Irving came to us personally and confessed he had this conviction,” Greenhalgh says. His reaction was that Kamsler had used poor judgment in one part of his life, but there was no evidence that he had done anything wrong in a professional context. Greenhalgh decided this should be seen as an isolated incident, explaining in an interview with me, “As far as I was concerned, it had nothing to do with the family and it was done, over and finished.”

Feeling increasingly frustrated, Carla and Ian decided to take direct action and actually go visit Huguette Clark. One relative mentioned that Huguette had supposedly been at Doctors Hospital in the 1990s, which had been taken over by Beth Israel. A telephone operator at Beth Israel confirmed to Ian that they did have a patient with the right name. He insists that they wanted “to make sure that our aunt was not being kept alive by artificial means in some inhumane fashion.”

Before heading to the hospital, Carla asked for advice from one of the few family members who had been in touch with Huguette. California Realtor Paul Clark Newell Jr., a descendant of William Andrews Clark’s younger sister Ella, had been working for a decade on an unpublished biography of Senator Clark. He had interviewed Huguette, although they had last spoken four years earlier in 2004. The go-between who arranged his calls was Suzanne Pierre, the widow of Huguette’s physician and the heiress’s best friend.

At Carla’s behest, Newell called Suzanne Pierre, who told him that Huguette was “well taken care of” and was “always in a good mood.” Newell then sent Carla a lengthy e-mail, describing the conversation and cautioning Carla to keep her distance.

She said also that Huguette doesn’t get out much anymore—which seems to suggest that she may leave the hospital from time to time... Who knows? Perhaps she’s passed you unrecognized

while shopping at Macy's? My conclusion is that Huguette is simply an unusual person... for reasons which we may never fully understand she has chosen to further insulate herself from nearly everyone...

Newell summarized what he had learned about Huguette's family history on her mother's side—that she had no living relatives—and wrote that Huguette's attorney, Wallace Bock, had been consistently “pleasant” to him. Newell recalled that Huguette had been alert and lucid during their last conversation. But the Realtor noted that he was not privy to information about her finances.

None of this addresses your concern as to whether she is getting the best financial counsel and that her assets are being managed ethically and responsibly. But absent compelling indications to the contrary, I don't see how you can probe this issue... Further, there is the question as to who has the necessary “standing” to file a complaint or seek an investigation, and on what grounds???.

I feel that calling at the hospital is not a good idea, that your chances of a friendly reception there are from slim to none and that such “good will” as you may now enjoy vis-à-vis Huguette might be irreparably damaged by making an unwelcome approach... Fond regards, Paul

The bright blue sign over the entryway at Beth Israel Medical Center looks garish against the backdrop of the sweeping white concrete columns of the silolike structure, which sits on the busy corner of First Avenue and Sixteenth Street. Inside the bustling ten-floor, 1,100-bed hospital, one serene third-floor area has been set aside to cater to well-to-do patients. The suites offer views overlooking Stuyvesant Square, concierge service, flat-screen televisions, fluffy bathrobes, unrestricted visiting hours, and in-room sleep sofas for family members. “The unit is more reminiscent of a luxury hotel than a hospital,” notes the facility's promotional material. Nonetheless, this teaching hospital, located in a noisy commercial neighborhood, lacks the cachet of its Upper East Side competitors.

Founded in 1890 as a clinic for poor Jewish immigrants working in the sweatshops of the Lower East Side and living in tenements, Beth Israel was for many decades a charity hospital. From that inauspicious beginning, the hospital has morphed into a busy urban modern medical facility with such gritty units as a methadone clinic for drug addicts. This is not the kind of place where William Andrews Clark could have imagined one of his descendants spending the night, even in an emergency. If by some accident of fate an heiress to one of the great American fortunes was admitted to Beth Israel, the obvious place for her would be the VIP floor, where a chef creates gourmet meals and suites begin at \$450 per night on top of regular hospital costs.

On Friday, December 5, 2008, Ian and Carla arrived at the hospital and headed toward the upscale third-floor wing. But Huguette Clark was not there. Instead, William Clark's youngest child was right around the corner in the Karpas Pavilion, down a dreary corridor to Room 3K01, next to a utility closet. Huguette's room had an old-fashioned radiator with peeling paint and a window overlooking the industrial air-conditioning unit.

Ian and Carla knocked on the door. The private nurse on duty, Christie Ysit, a Filipino immigrant, came out to greet them. Christie was chatty and told them that Huguette was sleeping but was doing well for her age. The nurse reported that Huguette still had a good appetite and was able to get up and

walk around the room, albeit with assistance. Looking for an excuse to enter, Carla seized on a friendly mention of religion. “I asked if I could go in and give her a blessing,” Carla said. “Ian and I entered the room. She was sleeping peacefully.” They stayed for scarcely a minute, standing at the foot of Huguette’s bed. Ysyt suggested that if they wanted more information, they might want to return the following day to talk to Huguette Clark’s primary nurse, Hadassah Peri.

A Filipino immigrant married to an Israeli cabdriver, Hadassah Peri was so devoted to her patient that she sometimes put in twelve-hour days taking care of Huguette. Her own children complained that the nurse was never home. Her maiden name had been Gicela Oloroso, but after moving to New York and marrying Daniel Peri, she had converted to Judaism and changed her name. Hadassah’s native language was Tagalog, and although she had lived in the United States since 1972, she still spoke in fractured English, with lapses in grammar and awkward sentence structure.

At Beth Israel, the doctors were aware that the patient and her chief nurse were unusually close. “Mrs. Peri was very caring, and she couldn’t do enough for Mrs. Clark,” says Dr. Jack Rudick, a surgeon, adding that the heiress “related to her as her very best friend.” Every night when Hadassah returned to her home in the unfashionable Brooklyn neighborhood of Manhattan Beach, within minutes after she walked in the door she would get a phone call from her patient. Huguette wanted to make sure the nurse got home safely. Sometimes Hadassah would get another call later in the evening. Huguette wanted to say, “Good night.”

When Carla and Ian arrived for their second visit to the hospital twenty-four hours later, they were hoping to see Huguette and brought a bouquet of flowers. This time, when they knocked on Huguette’s door, Hadassah Peri came out to speak to them in the hallway. The pint-sized nurse was furious. She told them that Huguette Clark was “very upset” that they had turned up uninvited on Sunday and barged into her room. Carla and Ian could not see into the hospital room but heard Huguette in the background, calling out for Hadassah in a shrill, high-pitched voice. The nurse demanded that they leave the hospital immediately.

For scions of a WASP family who had attended elite schools—Ian was a product of the Palm Beach Day School, Deerfield Academy, and the University of Pennsylvania; Carla had attended the Ethel Walker boarding school followed by Middlebury College—it was quite a turnabout to be ordered out by a paid-by-the-hour immigrant employee. “We were worried,” says Ian. Carla was startled by the nurse’s behavior, saying, “Hadassah Peri was very belligerent.” These two well-connected New Yorkers had been joking between themselves about feeling like Nancy Drew or the Hardy Boys as they tried to learn more about Huguette, but this confrontation made them feel like they had stepped into something noir.

As soon as the uninvited duo left, Hadassah picked up the phone and called Irving Kamsler, who immediately got in touch with Wallace Bock. By the time Carla returned to her Upper West Side office, a threatening e-mail awaited her from Bock, warning her and Ian that if they tried to visit Huguette Clark again, they would be removed by force. “Your attempt to invade her privacy, which she guards so carefully and is guarded so scrupulously by those of us on whom she relies on a daily basis, was not appreciated,” he wrote. “In fact, she was quite disturbed about it.”

Carla asked to meet with Bock, to explain why they had gone to the hospital. “We had never met but we had been conversing for years and with this e-mail and the situation, we thought it best to sit down face-to-face,” she says. The next day, she and Ian went to Bock’s office on Lexington Avenue. Rather than the gleaming premises of a high-end Manhattan law firm, the place exuded a frayed-around-the-edges quality, with worn carpeting and furniture.

A rotund Brooklyn native whose father had worked in the garment business (“He was a schmatta

dealer,” Bock says), the lawyer had served in the Army during the Korean War and attended Columbia Law School on the GI Bill. Bock’s original specialty was an obscure area of real estate law. He had shared office space with Huguette’s longtime attorney Donald Wallace, who suffered a serious heart attack in 1997. As a result, Bock took over Huguette Clark’s legal affairs, making himself so indispensable that she did not seek other counsel.

For Wallace Bock, dealing with the Clark descendants was yet another part of his mandate to shelter his client from outsiders. Huguette Clark had repeatedly told him that she did not want direct contact with these relatives. During a back-and-forth of letters with Clark family members in 2007 about repairs to the William Andrews Clark mausoleum, Bock came away with the strong impression that they were not genuinely interested in Huguette. “I don’t think anyone really inquired other than saying, ‘I didn’t think she was still alive,’ ” he says. Bock has a personality that runs hot and cold: he can be grandfatherly with a wry sense of humor or acerbic and adversarial.

Given the angry tone of Bock’s e-mail to Carla, she was surprised to discover that in their face-to-face meeting the lawyer was initially quite friendly and open in discussing Huguette’s life, her finances, and her friendships. “We found out about Madame Pierre, that Huguette wrote many checks much to his chagrin,” Carla recalls. “We found out what her days were like.”

But his tone changed when the duo handed the lawyer a newspaper account of Kamsler’s criminal conviction. “He turned many shades whiter,” says Carla. “We said, ‘Step into the shoes of her father—would you be proud to have a convicted felon representing your daughter?’ ” Bock appeared to them to be unconcerned, saying it was just a sting. “He made the decision to cover on the spot for Kamsler,” says Ian. “I knew in my bones that there was something rotten going on.”

The lawyer admits that he was taken aback by Carla and Ian’s insistence that he fire the accountant. “I was upset they were raising it,” Bock said. He takes pains to add that he was unhappy about the accountant’s conviction but did not want to take punitive action. “There was no question that Kamsler was in the wrong, but to what extent was he in the wrong? He claims he was just playing around on the computer and had no intention of going through with it,” Bock explains. “As far as I was concerned, he was a good accountant and concerned about Mrs. Clark. It didn’t interfere with his functioning as her accountant.”

At the end of the meeting, Carla penned a note of apology to Huguette, saying that they did not intend to invade her privacy and just wanted to make sure she was well taken care of. She asked Bock to deliver it.

The lawyer was aware that Huguette Clark relied on Irving Kamsler and their relationship went beyond the client-accountant hierarchy. For the first twenty years that Kamsler handled her taxes, she refused to even speak to him and conducted all business by mail. But she had finally relented and now saw and spoke to Kamsler on a regular basis. He was such an integral part of her life that she had given him control of her day-to-day well-being. “I believe that she trusted me implicitly,” Kamsler says, “because over the course of time she named me as the medical proxy to make health-care decisions for her or to carry out the ones that she expressed.”

Now that the Clark family members were aroused, they were determined not to back down. They saw themselves as Huguette’s saviors—whether or not she needed or wanted to be saved. The circle of those family members involved kept getting larger, well beyond the original group who met at Karine McCall’s house in Washington. The initial conspirators brought in their siblings, and the group would eventually expand to include nineteen descendants of William Andrews Clark.

Karine McCall’s older brother Paul Albert, a retired California lawyer, had skipped the family reunion but he now joined the e-mail chain, writing to Ian Devine. “I agree with what you said that

Huguette wants nothing in her life to change... She has chosen to be a recluse her entire life and to cut herself off from the family.”

A month after the hospital incident, Carla wrote to Wallace Bock, demanding that he draft a notice to Huguette Clark that described Irving Kamsler’s conviction. She wanted an “unbiased witness” to present the document to Huguette, and request her signature to confirm that she still wanted to employ Kamsler. The lawyer acceded to Carla’s request, although the witness who handled the next stage—Kamsler himself—was not exactly unbiased.

Irving Kamsler hand-delivered a letter, dated February 9, 2009, to Huguette Clark.

Dear Mrs. Clark,

I recently visited with you and explained my legal situation concerning my pleading guilty to one single felony charge involving the use of my computer to attempt to communicate with minors, who in fact were not minors but undercover agents.

Although I do not believe I had committed any crime, I accepted this plea in order to put this incident behind me and enable me not to have to put my family or myself through the risks and agony of a trial, as well as the high financial costs involved.

The judge believed that this in no way should affect my ability to serve my clients and continue as a professional. He therefore granted me a Certificate of Relief from Civil Disabilities.

You have indicated that you want me to serve as your accountant and representative and as one of your Executors and Trustees and in any other capacity you desire.

Please indicate your agreement by signing below.

With shaky handwriting, Huguette signed: H. M. Clark, 3-5-2009.

Executor? What an interesting title. A position that would undoubtedly involve huge fees to probate a multimillion-dollar estate. This letter, once circulated to the Clark clan, set off new alarm bells about the future of Huguette’s fortune and the integrity of her accountant and lawyer.

As the relatives’ suspicions intensified, they pressed the Corcoran to get involved. Corcoran director Paul Greenhalgh talked things over with the museum’s chairman, and the two of them agreed to stay out of this familial dispute. They sent Wallace Bock a note saying that the museum would not take sides. “Our view was that if Huguette Clark wished to retain Irving Kamsler, we would do business with him,” explains Greenhalgh. “In terms of the family, I’m sure that Carla is a lovely person and they were quite anxious that the family heritage was done properly. But clearly there was a lot of money there, and those two men were the gatekeepers.”

Since Huguette had passed the century mark and was believed to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars, the museum officials also suspected that this was the opening shot of what could become a full-fledged war. Why get involved and do anything that might upset Huguette Clark? The Corcoran hoped to be a beneficiary of her estate, too. Of course, for now, she was still among the living.