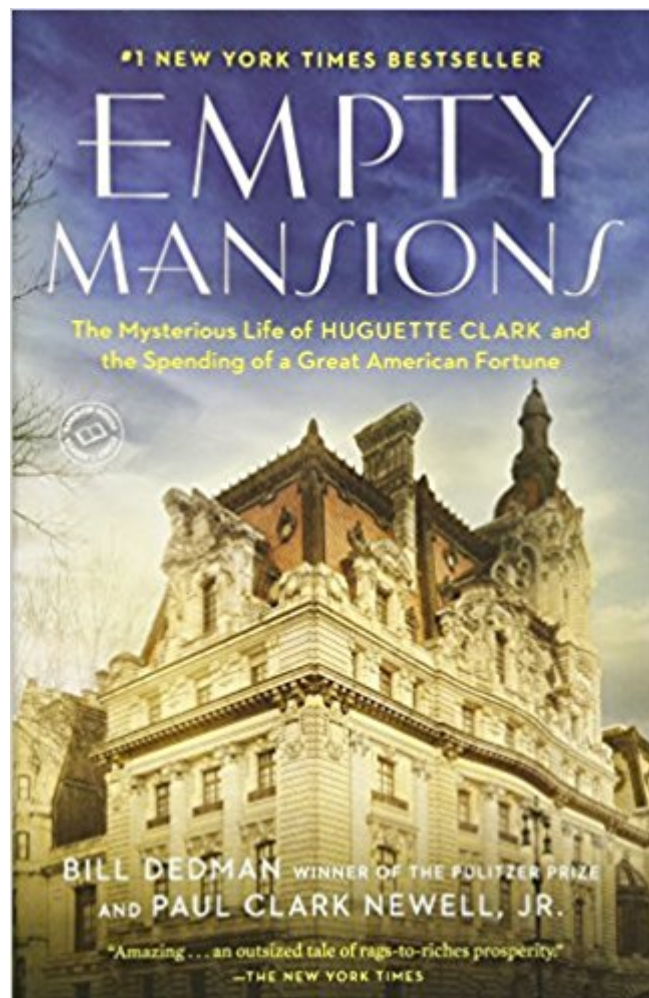




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# Empty Mansions: The Mysterious Life Of Huguette Clark And The Spending Of A Great American Fortune



## Synopsis

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER • UPDATED TEXT WITH RESULTS OF THE CLARK ESTATE SETTLEMENT • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *Janet Maslin, The New York Times* • Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more.

When Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Bill Dedman noticed in 2009 a grand home for sale, unoccupied for nearly sixty years, he stumbled through a surprising portal into American history. *Empty Mansions* is a rich mystery of wealth and loss, connecting the Gilded Age opulence of the nineteenth century with a twenty-first-century battle over a \$300 million inheritance. At its heart is a reclusive heiress named Huguette Clark, a woman so secretive that, at the time of her death at age 104, no new photograph of her had been seen in decades. Though she owned palatial homes in California, New York, and Connecticut, why had she lived for twenty years in a simple hospital room, despite being in excellent health? Why were her valuables being sold off? Was she in control of her fortune, or controlled by those managing her money? Dedman has collaborated with Huguette Clark's cousin, Paul Clark Newell, Jr., one of the few relatives to have frequent conversations with her. Dedman and Newell tell a fairy tale in reverse: the bright, talented daughter, born into a family of extreme wealth and privilege, who secrets herself away from the outside world. Huguette was the daughter of self-made copper industrialist W. A. Clark, nearly as rich as Rockefeller in his day, a controversial senator, railroad builder, and founder of Las Vegas. She grew up in the largest house in New York City, a remarkable dwelling with 121 rooms for a family of four. She owned paintings by Degas and Renoir, a world-renowned Stradivarius violin, a vast collection of antique dolls. But wanting more than treasures, she devoted her wealth to buying gifts for friends and strangers alike, to quietly pursuing her own work as an artist, and to guarding the privacy she valued above all else. The Clark family story spans nearly all of American history in three generations, from a log cabin in Pennsylvania to mining camps in the Montana gold rush, from backdoor politics in Washington to a distress call from an elegant Fifth Avenue apartment. The same Huguette who was touched by the terror attacks of 9/11 held a ticket nine decades earlier for a first-class stateroom on the second voyage of the Titanic. *Empty Mansions* reveals a complex portrait of the mysterious Huguette and her intimate circle. We meet her extravagant father, her publicity-shy mother, her star-crossed sister, her French boyfriend, her nurse who received more than \$30 million in gifts, and the relatives fighting to inherit Huguette's copper fortune. Richly illustrated with more than seventy photographs, *Empty Mansions* is an enthralling story of an eccentric of the highest order, a last jewel of the Gilded Age who lived life on her own terms. Praise for *Empty Mansions* "An amazing story of profligate

wealth . . . an outsized tale of rags-to-riches prosperity."--The New York Times    "An evocative and rollicking read, part social history, part hothouse mystery, part grand guignol."--The Daily Beast    "Fascinating . . . [a] haunting true-life tale."--People    "One of those incredible stories that you didn't even know existed. It filled a void."--Jon Stewart, The Daily Show    "Thrilling . . . deliciously scandalous."--Publishers Weekly (starred review)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What goes on behind closed doors, especially when those doors are of the gilded variety, has fascinated novelists and journalists for centuries. The private lives of the rich and famous are so tantalizing that Robin Leach made a career out of showcasing them. One of the biggest eccentric, rich fishes out there was Huguette Clark. Deceased for more than two years, Clark, brought to life by investigator Dedman and Clark's descendant, Newell, owned nouveau riche palaces in New York, Connecticut, and California. An heiress, Clark disappeared from public view in the 1920s. What happened to her and her vast wealth? Answering this question is the book's mission. Based on records and the hearsay of relations and former employees, the book pieces together Clarks life, that of a woman rumored to be institutionalized while her mansions stood empty, though immaculately maintained throughout her life. Clark left few clues about herself, but she willed vast sums to her caretakers and numerous charitable endeavors. Still, her absence acts as a shade to seeing her fully, hinting at possible financial malfeasance, all the while conspiring to produce a spellbinding mystery. --James Orbesen --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“An amazing story of profligate wealth . . . an outsized tale of rags-to-riches prosperity.”

•The New York Times “A fascinating investigation into the haunting true-life tale of reclusive heiress Huguetta Clark.”

•People “An exhaustively researched, well-written account . . . a blood-boiling expose [that] will make you angry and will make you sad.”

•The Seattle Times “An evocative and rollicking read, part social history, part hothouse mystery, part grand guignol.”

•The Daily Beast “A childlike, self-exiled eccentric, [Huguetta Clark] is the sort of subject susceptible to a biography of broad strokes, which makes *Empty Mansions*, the first full-length account of her life, impressive for its delicacy and depth.”

•Town & Country “One of those incredible stories that you didn’t even know existed. It filled a void.”

•Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show* “So well written . . . such a gripping, gripping story.”

•Bill Goldstein, NBC 4 New York “A compelling account of what happened to the Clark family and its fortune . . . a tremendous feat.”

•St. Louis Post-Dispatch “A fascinating story.”

•Today “Meticulous and absorbing.”

•Bloomberg Businessweek “Brilliantly researched, tough-minded, and fair . . . a fascinating read.”

•Santa Barbara Independent “Riveting . . . deliciously scandalous . . . a thrilling study of the responsibilities and privileges that come with great wealth.”

•Publishers Weekly (starred review) “A spellbinding mystery.”

•Booklist “Enlightening.”

•Library Journal “*Empty Mansions* is a dazzlement and a wonder. Bill Dedman and Paul Newell unravel a great character, Huguetta Clark, a shy soul akin to Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—if Boo’s father had been as rich as Rockefeller. This is an enchanting journey into the mysteries of the mind, a true-to-life exploration of strangeness and delight.”

•Pat Conroy, author of *The Death of Santini: The Story of a Father and His Son* “*Empty Mansions* is at once an engrossing portrait of a forgotten American heiress and a fascinating meditation on the crosswinds of extreme wealth. Hugely entertaining and well researched, *Empty Mansions* is a fabulous read.”

•Amanda Foreman, author of *A World on Fire* “In *Empty Mansions*, a unique American character emerges from the shadows. Through deep research and evocative writing, Bill Dedman and Paul Clark Newell, Jr., have expertly captured the arc of history covered by the remarkable Clark family, while solving a deeply personal mystery of wealth and eccentricity.”

•Jon Meacham, author of *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* “Who knew? Though virtually unknown today, W.

A. Clark was one of the fifty richest Americans ever—copper baron, railroad builder, art collector, U.S. senator, and world-class scoundrel. Yet his daughter and heiress Huguette became a bizarre recluse. *Empty Mansions* reveals this mysterious family in sumptuous detail.

—John Berendt, author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

“*Empty Mansions* is a mesmerizing tale that delivers all the ingredients of a top-notch mystery novel. But there is nothing fictional about this true, fully researched story of a fascinating and reclusive woman from an era of fabulous American wealth. *Empty Mansions* is a delicious read—once you start it, you will find it hard to put down.

—Kate Alcott, bestselling author of *The Dressmaker*

“More than a biography, more than a mystery, *Empty Mansions* is a real-life American *Bleak House*, an arresting tale about misplaced souls sketched on a canvas that stretches from coast to coast, from riotous mining camps to the gilded dwellings of the very, very rich.

—John A. Farrell, author of *Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the Damned*

From the Hardcover edition.

EMPTY MANSIONS will surely climb the best-seller list. The book about Huguette Clark, heir to an enormous fortune and mistress of several large, poetically empty properties, is easy to fall into and harder to remove oneself from. Although not an especially interesting person, Huguette is fascinating on the written page mostly for what she didn't do in life, rather than what she did. Usually biographies that hold readers captive are about creative, adventurous, and avant-garde individuals doing unusual activities and living fascinating lives. Huguette doesn't fall into those categories. Instead, she is a shy, retiring individual who withdrew from the world upon the death of her mother with whom she had a close relationship. EMPTY MANSIONS is several stories in one. The first is that of Huguette's father, the ambitious W.A. Clark, who took himself on a classic American adventure from nothing to extreme wealth. His story is also the story of the American West, of the mining industry, and railroads. Once comfortable financially, Clark displayed his wealth in rather ostentatious manners such as the building of the Clark mansion in New York City, an intriguing but rather short-lived folly. The second story within the book is really the story of Huguette's mother, Anna. As W.A. Clark's second wife, she bore him two children, but never had the status or respect in society that she may have desired. Anna seemingly lived for her daughters and when the elder one, Andree, died, she and Huguette became inseparable. During this period, however, the two did make use of their wealth through traveling, collecting art, and buying and furnishing houses. For those interested in symbiotic relationships between mothers and daughters, EMPTY MANSIONS will definitely provide interesting, thought provoking reading. For readers who liked THE SECRET

LIFE OF THE LONELY DOLL by Jean Nathan, the story of author Dare Wright and her mother, Huguette's life might prove similarly intriguing; the difference, of course, being that Dare Wright was creative while Huguette was . . . well, Huguette. The third story in EMPTY MANSIONS is the story of the hard-to-understand Huguette and an outline of the last twenty years of her life. Suffering from skin cancer, she hid inside her grand New York apartment and put off going to the doctor's. When she finally called for one, she was admitted to the hospital and then, most curiously, never left. At the time she entered the hospital, Huguette had two very large New York apartments, a huge mansion on the coast of California, and a spacious country estate in Connecticut. There was plenty of money for Huguette to live as she pleased or to donate to charities she deemed worthy. After having her cancer treated and being proclaimed healthy, Huguette chose to remain in the hospital and live there for two decades until she died at age 104. The last section of EMPTY MANSIONS changes in tone a bit as the reader is thrust into the present day and reads about court cases still going on in 2013. All of the sensational newspaper headlines of the past few years telling the story of Huguette Clark flash by, page after page, as the reader puzzles over the ethics of doctors and nurses accepting large monetary presents from their patient and of accountants and lawyers whose roles in Huguette's affairs may have been questionable. But above all, whatever else EMPTY MANSIONS is about, it leaves the reader pondering whether Huguette was merely sheltered and shy or whether she was emotionally immature or suffered from a mental illness. It does appear that her life would have been quite different if her mother had lived longer, if her sister hadn't died, or if she had a mother figure in her life to guide and direct her. As it turns out, her nurse, Hadassah Peri, may have emerged as just that figure. All that makes the story of Huguette and her money a most captivating read. EMPTY MANSIONS is the perfect book for a long weekend at the seashore in the rain, for a few days snowbound in the mountains in a snug, warm cabin in winter, or for taking along on a cruise. No one will regret reading EMPTY MANSIONS as there is something to be learned about American history, wealth, and yes - about loneliness.

Really enjoyed reading this book because it gave us so many historical facts. I live in Clark County, NV, so this was very interesting and informative for me. Amazing that the Clark family are so little well known. A family that exceeded the wealth and property of Rockefellers, Vanderbilt's and Carnegies, but has left a little known imprint on Americans today is baffling. This book explains the eccentricities of that family and especially Huguette Clark with unbiased facts, testimony from her family members, employees and acquaintances. The mansions are interesting, but it's the family that makes this book a page turner. Highly recommended and well written book. Bought copies for

my fellow Clark County neighbors.

Wonderful insight into the forces that shaped an American fortune, as well as into the more personal story of Hugnette Clark, who until recently was no longer a household name in America. The material in this book led to me to look into many other related topics such as political corruption of the time, environmental impacts that last to this day, the ultimate location of various paintings, instruments, and jewelry, and the empty mansions themselves, one of which is now used as a bed and breakfast. The life of a young lady not constrained by any sort of financial limits was interesting to me because she was able, as few of us are, to follow her interests and talents to their extreme yet logical conclusion. She once described herself as peculiar, and many thought she was demented to live in a small hospital room when empty mansions were available. And yet, she was allowed to do just as she wished because of the resources at her disposal, which is really the American dream, after all.

Huguette Clark became more well-known after her death than during her adult life. She had been born to an incredibly wealthy, but forgotten, family. Her father was a public figure, but his much-younger wife, was publicity shy. Huguette was shy and distrustful of strangers as a young woman, but she became a recluse after her mother's death. She seldom leaving her New York apartment, living on things like sardines and crackers. She eventually suffered from ill health. She was taken to a hospital, where she fully recovered, but she remained there year after year, in a rather tawdry hospital room. All the while, the hospital administrators and staff bled every penny they could from her, without helping her, and they certainly weren't the only ones. Through it all, her three mansions remained empty but were maintained in perfect condition, at great expense. All of this became public knowledge after her death and the distribution of the estate became an issue. What is less well known is, who exactly was Huguette, and how did this all happen? Was it a single event or a series of small events that made her live her life that way? Was she sane? Did people take advantage of her against her will? This is a fascinating book about a fascinating, and likeable, woman. At times, it made me furious, and let's just say I'm really glad I don't have an account at CitiBank. When a nurse, who literally received millions from Huguette, has the audacity to complain about how many hours she worked (essentially as Huguette's companion), and her son wrote Huguette a letter complaining that he didn't have his own car (boo hoo, the family received numerous cars, houses, and cash enough to buy a

thousand cars), I just wanted to scream. At times, the authors came across as a bit condescending in their attitudes toward Huguette, as if they were trying to make her sound more eccentric, if not downright odd. She had many interests, including collecting dolls. I've had a few good friends who collect dolls (I don't), and I have attended doll shows with them. I have to say that I found doll collectors to be wonderful people, warm and friendly. They are not any odder than men who collect Star Wars or G.I. Joe dolls ("action figures"). In fact, much less so, as many of the dolls Huguette collected were individual works of art worth thousands of dollars, not mass-produced plastic. And, in fact historically, men have been the collectors of the most expensive dolls and teddy bears. So back off, guys. All in all, I would have liked to have known Huguette, and I certainly was interested in reading about her and her family. I recommend this book.

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