

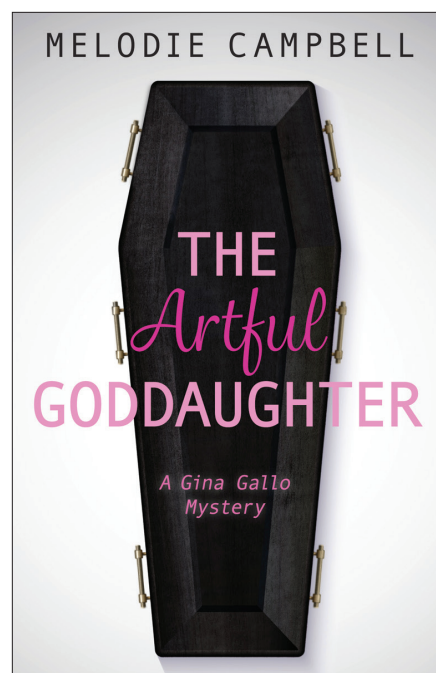
READING  
GUIDETHE ARTFUL GODDAUGHTER  
MELODIE CAMPBELL

Reading level: 3.5

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, the mob, art, theft,  
female sleuth

978-1-4598-0819-5 PB

**Summary**

Gemologist Gina Gallo isn't just the owner of a jewelry store and the fiancée of sports reporter and one-time football superstar Pete Malone. She's also part of Hamilton's biggest mob family. And as such, she gets dragged along on all manner of nefarious adventures.

*The Artful Goddaughter* opens with Gina learning from her cousin Sammy that the family is now counterfeiting money in China and laundering it in Canada. Frustrated with her family, she storms away from the conversation (with a bundle of freshly minted five-dollar bills) only to get a call from Sammy the next day announcing that Great-Uncle Seb is in the ICU. Gina travels to the hospital with another cousin, Nico, an artsy metrosexual who is whip-smart.

When Great-Uncle Seb dies, Sammy delivers to the jewelry store a painting that the old man had wanted her to have (he bequeathed Nico a dirty-talking parrot named Pauly). Gina recognizes the painting as a Kugel, having seen it hanging in the City Art Gallery. She becomes concerned when she realizes Seb, an expert forger, has left her not with a forgery, but with the original—and she grows even more concerned when the deal comes out: Great-Uncle Seb has left her a whack of cash, but in order to get it, she's got to switch the fake painting out of the gallery and replace it with the real one—or else his money goes to Gina's arch enemy, cousin Carmine. And with her wedding to Pete coming up, Gina doesn't want to let any of that money slip through her fingers.

Before she can even begin to make arrangements, Gina gets a call from Pete. He's down at the police station, busted for trying to pass fake fives. She realizes in horror that it's her fault for leaving the bundle of fakes on the counter at home. Furious at being dragged into illegal activities because of her family yet again, Gina calls Paulo, the family lawyer, who convinces the police to let Pete go. She explains the counterfeit situation to Pete, then gives him the heads up that a lot of money is headed her way, but skirts the truth of how she's supposed to get it.

With no choice but to do the switch to meet Seb's terms of inheritance, Gina consults Nico for help. Together, the two of them work out a plan for how to pull off the switch. With Sammy's help, they locate cousin Jimmy, the expert burglar, who now lives in a retirement home. The plan snowballs until seven elderly criminal masterminds are unleashed in the gallery to do the job. Gina



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drives the van; the old folks create a diversion; Jimmy pulls off the switch...and then Gina realizes they took the wrong painting.

Knowing she needs to do the whole thing over again, Gina calls on her sexy country-singer friend, Lainy McSwain. She lines up a number of associates, and takes the entire gang to the gallery, where Lainy—and a cat and the foul-mouthed parrot—creates a diversion that allows Gina to oversee the switch. Switch complete, Gina hands the fake painting off and washes her hands yet again of another dirty family job.

### Questions for Discussion

1. The first line in *The Artful Goddaughter* accomplishes two things: it tells us a bit about the main character, and it also engages us as humans, calling to mind our favorite movies when we were growing up. What was your favorite movie? Has it shaped your life in any way, like *The Pink Panther* shaped Gina's?
2. Aunt Miriam is a matriarch who is often referred to throughout *The Goddaughter* series, yet she is never cast in an actual scene. What other characters (either male or female) have you known who play a similar "off-camera" role? What is the author's intention with this kind of character development?
3. Early in the story, readers are introduced to Gina's internal conflict: she is born to a mafia family and resents being dragged along on all of their illegal adventures...yet there's a part of her that actually lights up with the challenge. Explain how and where this conflict is developed throughout the story.
4. In chapter 1, Sammy tells Gina that the family has been manufacturing counterfeit bills in China. Gina is simultaneously outraged at this illegal behavior and offended that the family is shipping its manufacturing offshore rather than employing local labor. Describe how this irony sheds light on Gina's character.
5. When Great-Uncle Seb has a heart attack, Gina reflects on his life, noting that he was a loner and an artist (ch. 2). Talk about the artist-as-loner archetype. Do you think visual and literary artists are more "alone" than the rest of society? Or do we just see this aspect of their personalities more clearly because their lives and works are in the public view?
6. Gina and Nico go to visit Great-Uncle Seb in the ICU at the local hospital. At present, we are still able to walk into a hospital, wander until we locate a patient, and then enter the patient's room, with no security checks and relatively few questions. Do you see this changing given the nature of sociopolitical developments in North America over the past several years?
7. At the beginning of chapter 4, Gina reflects that burning a Kugel painting is akin to a one-way ticket to hell. *Like I wasn't already going there*, she thinks. For what reason does Gina think she's going to hell? What's your stance on judgment? The afterlife?
8. When she is required to handle the switching of two paintings, Gina is upset at being dragged into the family's business. She angrily tells her cousin Sammy that her fiancé Pete thinks she's gone straight. Yet throughout the story, we see evidence that both Gina and Pete stretch, deny and withhold the truth from each other. Is a primary relationship of any value if the people involved are not honest and forthcoming with one another?





9. Gina is a colorful character who uses numerous figures of speech. For example, in chapter 6 she talks about how her cousin Carmine tried to pass off fake rocks to her customers: *Carmine the rat had nearly cooked my goose when he was babysitting my store a while back. It isn't nice to swindle my very best customers.* What does this saying mean? Find other figures of speech in *The Artful Goddaughter*. What do they mean?
10. There are many instances where Gina has tried, as she says in chapter 8, to “throw off the family connection.” It never seems to work. Why is this?
11. Following up on question 10, how does the saying “blood is thicker than water” apply to this book? Examine this adage in both positive and negative terms.
12. When Gina gets involved with a group of old gangsters, her distaste of aging (and the aged) is palpable. Find examples that support this fact. What worries you most about growing older?
13. How does the mistake of stealing the wrong painting add to the tension in this story? Make a plot map or timeline, noting points at which the tension and excitement increase due to specific mishaps.
14. When the wrong Kugel painting is revealed to Gina after the first heist, she reflects on the subject of the painting: *She was quite beautiful, in fact. Rubenesque, but in a good way* (ch. 9). What does “Rubenesque” mean? Discuss how Gina’s observation implies that being Rubenesque is generally a bad thing. Discuss why and how our standards of female beauty have shifted in the Western world. Talk about how disconnected from reality our beauty ideals have become.
15. Gina is surprised to find out little old Mrs. Bari is actually the legendary Mad Magda, thief of all thieves. When asked, Mrs. Bari tells Gina, “People don’t see past the gray hair and wrinkles” (ch. 12). Discuss how appearances can be deceiving. How many times have you learned something about an older person that you find shocking or surprising?

