

## WHO HAS THE WARHOL?

By Ganga Fore

Brooke Harrington stood in her elegant living room, arms folded, nodding approval at the electrician. He was putting the final adjustments on the subdued lights that he had installed around the painting.

He grinned as he looked over at Mrs. Harrington. “Ready?”

“Wait. Wait, Tim, let me sit over here on the sofa. Okay ready.”

Tim hit the master switch casting the painting in a marvelous light that brought Brooke up off the sofa. Silently she walked in a half-circle in front of the art. She patted the electrician on the shoulder.

“Perfect, Tim, just perfect.”

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The invitations were stacked in neat rows on the kitchen table. Brooke Harrington’s three friends would be over for a light lunch, then they would select 75 couples out of the three hundred names they had accumulated over the past few years.

She knew from past experience that there would be a lot of disagreement between her and her friends, but somehow they would have to pick the right ones. She flipped through an issue of *art & society* magazine, looking for names.

Some, of course, would have to be rich, others popular, and still others influential in Peoria, Illinois. Of course, Brooke wanted her guests to have fun, but this was to be a fund-raiser, with the spotlight on *fund*.

Her new tactic this year was to get her friends to select the couples that she knew they could all agree upon quickly, then see what was left over to argue about. It was all done in good fun, especially if the wine flowed easily.

The women spent well over two hours to finalize the guest list, and now Brooke was busy picking up after her friends. Leaning against the railing of her deck she looked out at the panoramic view that swept atop the trees to the Illinois River. Some of the trees were just beginning to take on their fall colors and within two weeks or so the view would be breathtaking.

Beth, her family cat rubbed up against her ankle. Smiling, Brooke picked her up and sat with her on her lap, pondering her rise from a rented house in Rolling Acres to this immense, incredible home on Detweiller Drive. Now she was the wife of Dr. Phillip Harrington, a prominent plastic surgeon, highly respected, and very wealthy.

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Harrington, now in his fifties, had it all. The son of a physician known as one of the most lovable doctors in Peoria, Harrington inherited a small fortune from his father and with his own shrewd business sense he soon was extremely wealthy. His second marriage to his nurse, Brooke Bentley, in spite of her humble upbringing, had been the social event of the year.

Life was good for Dr. Harrington. He had an attractive wife, children off at college, and all the money and material things a man could ask for. But, like so many rich, prominent men, there was a dark, if unspoken, discontent in his life.

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After a few years of marriage to Brooke, Phillip Harrington met the most beautiful woman he had ever seen at his financial advisor's office. There she was, sitting behind a computer, a lovely vision that struck him like a painting he had seen in a European museum.

They smiled at each other as Phillip walked past her desk. Two months later, after too many shameless visits to his advisor, Phillip ran into the lovely lady at a favorite watering hole.

To his utter surprise she agreed to fly with him to a Chicago conference in his private plane, and that began an affair that had lasted for two years.

Of course Phillip knew it was madness, even stupid, but it continued just the same. He made no demands of Gloria Ryan, and she made none of him.

He enjoyed her company, she enjoyed his. It was that simple. And he lavished her with gifts.

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Brooke Harrington stood talking on the telephone in her kitchen. She had grown fond of the people she worked with in the World Affairs Council, and really liked Missy, who had recruited Brooke's help some three years ago.

Brooke volunteered for the events at the Contemporary Art Center, but this was to be the first time for such a huge fund raising event in her own home.

On more than one occasion she felt like a fraud after talking to all the people involved in the World Affairs Council event. Bright people like Frank Butler of the Peoria Historical Society and those experts from the Peoria Art Guild and the Fine Arts Society. After all, what did she know about art?

She grinned at remembering a painting of an Indian on a horse she once had in her room. She laughed again as she recalled that it was on black velvet. Now here she was, because of a wealthy husband, with real, expensive paintings in her home. Like the Warhol.

She had little idea who Andy Warhol was until her husband told her. She sighed. "What the hell, my job is to have a party not to be an art critic."

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Dr. Phillip Harrington arranged to have an alarm expert meet him at his home on Detweiller Drive. The young man, Bruce, an aspiring artist and Gloria's neighbor, paid his bills with his day job as an employee of an alarm company.

But this was to be a simple 'side-job', as Bruce called it. Strictly cash, and with a promise to keep it strictly between the doctor, and Bruce, the expert.

Dr. Harrington would have the only code to disarm and reset the alarm.

The two ruled out any fancy system like the world knew from "The Pink Panther." "I don't think we have many cat burglars in town, doc," Bruce

explained, “so no sense throwing money away...even as much as you got.”  
The two laughed.

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The cold, clear morning of the party saw a worried Brooke up early, to run over the final checklist. My God, she thought, why on earth had she agreed to this. She needed a group to tackle all of the things she had done and still had to do.

She had spent quite a bit of time in meetings with Missy, and the other board members with World Affairs Council, the artsy people in town and the folks at Lakeview Museum and the Fine Arts Society. She tried her hardest to make a quick study of some of the art they had assembled, but truth be known, she remembered very little.

She zeroed in on the people who would actually cater the party and the list was long. Valet parkers and musicians and actors and a butler at the door, kids hired from Illinois Central College’s art and theater departments.

Brooke took her notes, and her coffee into the impressive library, seating herself at the antique desk. Twelve beautiful paintings were arranged in front of the books, all remarkably well done for so-called students.

The idea of an art contest came from Glen Carrigan, the handsome young man from the Prairie Center of the Arts. He rounded up prizes for all the artists, to be awarded based on a popular vote of the guests, and special prizes for the top three paintings.

Another suggestion that Brooke liked was the idea to have the Andy Warhol exhibited over at Lakeview Museum for a public exhibition.

All twelve of the contest paintings also would be part of the Lakeview exhibit. Hal Swanson from the museum told her that he had put out the word to the art collectors in Peoria, and many of them had agreed to display their art pieces as well.

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By 6 p.m., everything seemed to be ready for the party. Dr. Harrington and Brooke strolled together around the entire house talking to the caterers, the volunteers and the entertainers. Bruce, the security expert and aspiring artist was on hand just in case a problem arose.

Soon every couple that had been invited, along with several others not on the list initially, were busy having a wonderful time.

At precisely 9 p.m., the musical combo broke into a loud, musical introduction tune as Phillip and Brooke walked up to the microphone. Phillip gestured to his guests to gather around the couple.

“First I want to thank you for coming and your generous support of the World Affairs Council and our local artists. They do such wonderful work, and all the artists and art establishments in Peoria will benefit from your generosity. But...you did not come here for speeches even though we do have the mayor and the sheriff in our presence.

“Now I would like to introduce the beautiful lady that planned this glamorous affair. Here she is folks, my pal, my wife, Brooke Harrington.”

Brooke, looking glorious in her little black designer gown smiled at the applauding guests. “Thank you, and thank you for coming. I know that all of you are wondering what we have hidden under that velvet drapery on the wall. Well, I will ask Phillip to do the honors.”

Dr. Harrington quickly untied the bows on either side of the cover, smiled at the crowd and pulled at the cover allowing it to fall to the floor. The crowd moved closer, applauding, and yelling out their enthusiastic approval.

Phillip made his way back to the mike. “Here is my original, never seen publicly before, Marilyn Monroe by Andy Warhol.”

Phillip related the brief story of how he had acquired the Warhol, years ago from an art gallery in New York.

What he didn't tell was the bargaining that took place during his divorce, to keep that painting, now worth perhaps \$2 million. Better than the stock market, he mused to himself.

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A few weeks after the gala party, Dr. Harrington and Brooke entered Lakeview Museum and mingled with the other guests on hand to see the exhibit that featured their Warhol.

In all, counting the twelve contest artists, 64 paintings were on exhibit, owned by individuals living in Peoria. It was a magnificent night, and the donations rolled in.

Phillip introduced Brooke to his resident, Dr. Richard Remington and his date. “Brooke this is Dick Remington, he’s the young resident teaching me what’s new in plastic surgery.”

After the laughter, Dr. Remington smiled at the incredibly beautiful woman he was holding hands with. “Gloria Ryan, this is the famous Dr. Harrington and his gorgeous wife, Brooke.”

Dr. Harrington and Dr. Remington walked over to get some punch. “Thanks for bringing Gloria, Dick, she is ravishing isn’t she?”

“Maybe the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Did you have something to do with that, Doctor?”

Harrington laughed. “Well a tuck here and there, but over all she is pretty much a gift of the gods. And she wanted to see the art exhibit but didn’t have a date,” he added.

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Dr. Harrington and Gloria Ryan settled back once he leveled off the Cessna on their way to Davenport, Iowa. Phillip was to attend a symposium where he was the guest speaker.

He loved these twilight flights, and as he chased after the setting sun he was in a wonderful mood.

The party had gone off well, a lot of money had been raised and all the praise had gone to Brooke. He was happy for her, she was happy, hell, the whole world was happy. Here he was with Gloria and life was good.

Gloria smiled at Phillip. “I could go for your resident, you got any more plans to fix me up with him?”

Dr. Harrington grinned, “Not on your life. I must admit he is almost as handsome and charming as I am, but he’s got a long road ahead of him.”

“Just asking,” Gloria said, kissing him on the cheek.

Harrington banked the plane left to make his approach into the airport. After he called in for landing instructions, Gloria looked over at him.

“You are always asking me what I want in the way of a gift, right?”

“Always.”

“Well, I know what I want, wanna know what it is?”

“I sure do. Christmas is not that far off.”

“I want that Andy Warhol painting of Marilyn Monroe.”

Phillip roared with laughter. “The Warhol? Gloria are you nuts? I bought that years ago, and my wife loves it, or at least the status it gives her. Perhaps you forgot that there is only one of those in the world, and like me, it is hers. For now.”

Undeterred, Gloria grinned. “Oh I know that. But...but I got a plan...you wanna hear it?”

“Sure I do, but tell me during dinner. I need a drink.”

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Brooke had arranged an informal brunch to thank everyone for the tremendous success of her party. She invited two members from each of the art organizations, reporters from the Journal Star and *art & society* magazine, and left it up to Missy of the World Affairs Council to work it out.

After brunch Brooke and her guests gathered around the Warhol discussing the artist and his works. Susan from ArtsPartners told her listeners what method Warhol had used to paint the piece and some interesting facts about Andy Warhol. “You know, at one time Andy Warhol was the most prolific and famous artist in America.”

Fred from the ICC Art Gallery remarked. “To tell you the truth I never took him seriously. I mean the man painted soup cans for God’s sake.”

“I agree,” said Gene from the Peoria Art Guild. “He was a screen writer, made films, Album covers, as well as sculptures. Actually he led an incredible life. If you ever get to Pittsburgh, heaven forbid, make sure you go to the Warhol Art Museum.”

“He was a little weird looking, if you ask me,” Sarah responded from the Contemporary Art Center.

“He was that,” agreed Gene, “but he was phenomenal as a Pop Art artist and he did quite a few celebrities, including Liz Taylor. When did he do all these paintings, Fred?”

“He did most of them in the mid sixties, you know, ’67 and ’68.”

Bob from the Apollo Theater asked Gene when Warhol died.

“You know, Bob, he almost died in 1968 when some woman shot him. He survived that to die from complications of gall bladder surgery in 1987.

Sara spoke up. “Was he an old man by then?”

Gene laughed. “He was born in 1928 and he died in 1987. I’ll let you do the math.

“Where’s my calculator?”

Meanwhile, Charles Packard from the Peoria Art Guild was carefully studying the painting. Once the guests went to the library Packard slipped back to the painting. He jumped when Bernice Robbins, the Journal Star reporter, spoke.

“You look like Sherlock Holmes with that magnifying glass, she said.

Packard, embarrassed, quickly slipped the small glass away and blushed a bit as he looked over at the reporter. “Just curious, just a bit curious,” he replied.

Bernice touched his arm as he moved to leave the painting.

“Like I said, Sherlock Holmes was too. You find anything?”

Packard nodded toward the sofa. Once they were seated Packard stared at the woman for a moment.

Packard held up his hand. “Now listen, Bernie, this is strictly off the record. That means you keep it to yourself until I say it’s okay to print. Is that a deal?”

“Absolutely...scout’s honor.”

“Well, between me and you and the lamp post, I think that Warhol painting is a phony!”

Bernice looked at her old friend, a look of utter disbelief on her face. “A phony? The authenticity letter is right there.”

“Bernice, those things, like paintings can be forged, duplicated or whatever. I say it’s a phony.”

So, I gotta keep this to myself, is that what I just promised to do?”

“Absolutely and you threw in your scout’s honor for good measure.”

“I guess I’m stuck” she said with a grin. Then she headed for the Peoria Public Library to do a little research on Warhol.

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Gloria Ryan lived in a condo that she sub-leased from her employer. It was far beyond her financial means, but her boss told her it was hers as long as she worked for him.

She knew it was bribery in a sense, but throughout her life men seemed to want to please her, so she quickly learned to be receptive. At least she didn't have to sleep with the guy. He was happy with a smile and a short skirt that showed her knees.

Tonight was her poker night with friends who played at each others homes. They mainly giggled and laughed and got a bit tipsy, but it truly was the most fun in her life. Women as a whole resented her good looks, but her friends loved her and that was all that mattered. Tonight her friends were in for a surprise... a very special prize indeed.

All of the women were curious as they walked into her living room and saw the red drape over what must be a painting that hung above the fireplace mantel. Gloria refused to talk about it. "Later...ladies, later," she said.

Once her guests had glasses of wine in their hands Gloria stood up. "Okay I teased you long enough. Wanna see what's behind door number one?" Gloria grinned at their response. "This way, girls."

Gloria untied the bow and let the drape fall to the floor. Her friends gasped. Gloria held her glass up high. "My friends, may I propose a toast to Andy Warhol and the beautiful Marilyn Monroe!"

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Dr. Richard Remington pulled his car around back then walked to the front door of the condo. All day long he had fretted over his decision, knowing what an idiot he was for even thinking about Gloria, let alone actually deciding to see her.

Here he was just one year away from ending his residency and finally starting out on his own. No more slave duty under the watchful eyes of so-called superior physicians at the hospital. No more feeling like a third rate citizen with enough debt to choke a horse. Finally!

But here he was apparently ready to jeopardize his whole future. His hand hesitated to ring the bell. He almost walked away.

Suddenly there she was at the open door. Dr. Remington looked at her. His heart skipped a beat. He was a doctor, and he knew a heart beat skipping when he felt it.

She smiled, and holding out her hand, said, “Come on in Richard, you are right on time. I like that in my men.”

Dr. Remington swallowed and was barely able to speak. “Good evening, Gloria.”

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Bernice Robbins couldn't believe what she was hearing. She had run into her cousin, Sandy, at a coffee place, and the two decided to catch up. Sandy had quite a story.

She told Bernice how she had played cards with her usual friends at Gloria Ryan's condo last week, only to be treated to Gloria's story – that an Andy Warhol painting on her wall was an original, given to her by her boyfriend. “It's worth \$2 million, according to Gloria. Wow.”

Bernice asked the inevitable question: “who's the boyfriend?”

“Gloria wouldn't say. What do you think?”

Bernice had plenty of thoughts to share. “Is she lying about its value? Is it stolen? Or has the guy taken it himself and stashed it at her place so he can file a fraudulent insurance claim?”

The next day Bernice called the various police agencies to ask if anyone had reported stolen art. “No,” they all replied.

Then she recalled her conversation with Charles Packard about the Warhol that had been the centerpiece of fundraising lately. Could the original have been stolen somehow and a duplicate installed in its place?

Had the donors been duped into giving money after seeing a fake? What a story that would be!

Bernice dialed Gloria Ryan at her office. She introduced herself and said she had heard about the Warhol. Could she come see it?

Gloria was dumfounded. “Absolutely not,” she replied. “I don’t have any such thing,” she added, and hung up, furious that someone had ratted her out to the newspaper.

Bernice recalled that the Peoria Historical Society had recently hired someone to track down missing artifacts, including art. She reached the new hire, Jim Hollister, and asked him what he knew about Andy Warhol’s work.

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Bernice, Jim Hollister and Charles Packard sipped beers and devised a plan. Bernice would call the Harringtons and ask to come see the Warhol for another newspaper story about the work, and bring the two art experts with her.

Then the two experts would get a close up look at the Warhol while Bernice interviewed the Harringtons about the fundraising galas, the money raised, the main attraction of the \$2 million Warhol, and how anyone could top this season for fund raising events.

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After taking a closer look at the Warhol, Hollister and Packard were perplexed. If the Warhol was a fake -- and it had a few odd features -- how would they prove it?

Over drinks, Bernice got the two men to agree to be quoted about the Warhol, to admit that they had questions about its authenticity but couldn’t say for sure that it was a fake.

Bernice’s editor wasn’t convinced. “We’re not running this story,” he said. “That would be begging for a lawsuit.”

Then at an Apollo Theater event, Bernice bumped into Dr. Richard Remmington with a stunning young woman on his arm.

Bernice, who had done a story on medical residents, was pleased to see Remmington again. Remmington introduced his companion as Gloria Ryan.

“Oh, aren’t you the woman with the \$2 million Warhol?” Bernice blurted out. “I’d love to see it.”

Turning to Remmington, Bernice asked, “Did you give it to her?”

“Remmington and Gloria had turned pale together. “It’s only a copy,” Gloria said, “not an original.”

Remmington frowned. “We’ve got to go,” he said, taking Gloria’s arm and steering her toward the coat rack.

The couple stumbled into the snow flurries outside....

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