

the  
GALLUCCI  
GALLERY

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*To the individuals who have been abused  
and must live with mental illness*



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GALLUCCI  
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K.B. RICHARDS





## What a Wonderful World

I GREW TROUBLED, JUGGLING the authenticity of my reality. I pinched myself, hoping the life I lead wasn't a dream. The mess I made humbled me, allowing me to remove the rose-tinted glasses. There's no cure for what I am, and who I've become. People tell each other they should embrace who they are—that they should live their truth. My truth compelled me to stare into the mirror every single day, facing the ugliness which once laid dormant. Must I espouse the destructive side I possess? Society will never accept who I am once they learn of my interior nature. I will be rejected and shunned to a place distant from their inner social circle. They can't feel my pain. They don't understand my deep-rooted trauma and remorse brimming from the surface of my core.

I hated my husband and wanted him to suffer. He would become an afterthought someday and acknowledge the anguish he rained on me for the rest of his life. Revenge still isn't enough. I wondered if my children would cope without their father around.

Will they despise me one day? Will they act out, due to his absence? People say, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." I hoped to God my son wouldn't turn out like his father. Worse, I hoped my daughter wouldn't inherit my illness. My transgressions are etched into the universe's book of karma, but when it came to protecting my kids, I chose to endure any punishment. I would sacrifice my life for their happiness and safety. I would do anything necessary.

A pair of bloody scissors resided in my hand while I contemplated my life and illegal action. And as I departed from the space I created in my head, I fumbled necessity and my sanity, hand in hand.

*Oh, God, what have I done?* A sliver of guilt migrated from hell and forced its way into my derailed mind. I stood in my gallery comprehending my crime while my victim's blood crept toward my feet like cough medicine crawling out of an open, toppled bottle. *Step back.* I dropped a .38 revolver from my hand while holding scissors in the other. Blood proceeded to claim the marble floor, following me. My thoughts whirled into a scattered frenzy. My cuticles dampened and my clenched grip, unable to release my scissors. They bonded to my hand—tethered by the crimson saturating my pores. *Take a deep breath, Bianca.* My heart slammed against my ribs. A devilish chill conjured its way to my skin's surface, skewing my grip on reality and immobilizing my legs. Nothing but time could stop my unnerved, bloody hand from shaking and drops claiming the floor.

My intermittent, pounding chest forced me to my knees. The adrenaline surged through my veins and a feverish sweat claimed every inch of my face, neck, and forearm. *Breathe, Bianca, breathe.* The shock alone restricted my movements until I was capable of uncurling my fingers. I stared at my hand with a catatonic glare, as if afflicted with Locked-in syndrome. Nausea surfaced while I conceded second-degree murder. My eyes drowned in regret, knowing the likelihood of prison. No forced entry and or signs of a struggle. My prints resided on the gun and scissors. *I had motive.* I allowed the scissors to fall to the floor and acknowledged blood splatter on my gray shirt—the one I deemed worn-out and old. I rubbed it with the cuff of my sleeve, eager to

vanquish the undeniable proof. *What am I doing? It's getting worse.* I contemplated my situation while wiping my cheek, smearing blood on my face.

*Think, Bianca. Think. Calm down. Rationalize your thoughts.* A small sense of relief permeated the air while I justified my actions. "I did it for the kids," I kept telling myself until I gained the strength to stand. My arms rested by my side while my victim surveyed my presence with furrowed brows. Although she didn't say anything, her eyes spoke to me. They displayed emotions of regret and sorrow, asking for forgiveness. No one witnessed my crime. *No one needs to know. Don't freak out, Bianca. Don't freak out. Think. Think. Think.* No alibi. No one to corroborate my story. *Did anyone see her enter?*

She tried speaking with an abundance of blood flowing out of her mouth. Her body sat upright a few feet from me, as I paced back and forth. I was afraid to touch her, petrified to dial the authorities, and terrified to leave. *I need to call for help. Oh God, where's my phone?* I searched the front desk after scouring my office and found it in the wastebasket. 'What a Wonderful World' played through the speakers overhead.

A familiar apparition merged into my body. My pounding heart accelerated before slowing down, and I existed in a world of complete peace while listening to the melody. *This song—oh, I love this song.* The music grew faint, dissipating with every note that followed. I smiled, closing my eyes—ready to bask in the ambiance of my surroundings.

The walk back to my victim appeared timeless, and the closer I got, the more I enjoyed watching death devour her. I smiled while kneeling to caress her pale, saddened face. Her breathing labored.

"You deserve this. You should've stayed away. Now, you'll be gone forever. Time to clean you up," I said. I elevated to a superior version of myself. Rejuvenated. Renewed.

"I promised to keep Bianca and the twins safe, and that's what I'm going to do. She *will not* rot in prison because of you. We're ready to do what's necessary," I said.

I knelt over her almost-dead body, placing one hand over her mouth while my other pinched her nostrils. It was only a

matter of time until she stopped struggling. She convulsed. *Shh. Be still. It'll be over soon.* She ceased to budge, and the power I possessed from taking her life exalted my superiority. She was no more.

The radio continued playing in the background, cradling my core while I sat next to her lifeless body. I contemplated disposal of her corpse and to finish my painting. The hint of red I desired laid within my reach, and I fell intrigued by the color before me.

I dipped my brush into the pool of blood, smearing it onto the canvas. *There. Perfect.* The mixture of her blood and the paints gave it an astonishing, robust hue. *Beautiful.* One hour turned into two, as I created a masterpiece. *Hide the evidence in plain sight. No one would be suspicious.*

My victim's body and work of art sat side by side. My adrenaline wore off, and I grabbed an opened bottle of wine, sat down on the floor, and gestured a toast to myself. My eyelids grew heavy, consumed by sleep. *I'll deal with the corpse soon.*

## He's Dead

I HELD AN INTERVIEW a few weeks prior. All was well with the world, but I needed an assistant to help run my gallery. A mother of two can only do so much on her own in a twelve-to fourteen-hour day. My husband, Lucas Pope helped on the weekends. Forty-eight hours wasn't enough for quality family time. I sat at my desk in a pencil skirt and blouse with a notepad and pen in front of me. My interviewee sat across the table, wearing a similar style of clothing. She complimented my shoes before crossing her legs and interlacing her fingers.

"Hi, Makaela. It's so nice to meet you. I'm glad you were able to be here, today," I said. "Thank you for having me, Ms. Gallucci!" She was a confident girl, asking all the right questions with all the right credentials under her belt. Beautiful, too. She appeared to be smart, capable, competent, and what I searched for in a perfect candidate. I navigated toward my computer to refer to her resume. We hit it off, and her widespread knowledge of art impressed me. Besides that, she also acquired solid recommendations from past employers. I wanted to hire her before she walked through my door, but I needed to examine her mannerism before making a concrete decision. I listened to the way she spoke as she answered my questions.

"Tell me a little about yourself," I said. She was careful with her words, and there might've been some nervousness on her part, but I was fond of her. The more comfortable she became, the more she rambled, but I didn't mind. She was expressive, captivating, and articulate. I admired her passion for art. After some more questions, her time was drawing to a close. *Yes, she's the one.*

"So, anything else you'd like to ask?" I said. She peered with inquisition before asking me a borderline-private question about my past, a few about my kids, and the establishment of the gallery. Our interview transitioned into an old-fashioned conversation filled with rapport and personal connection. We spoke of many subjects such as my childhood in Italy, the crazy motorcycle story Lucas and I experienced when he and I first met, and my sister's memorial. Speaking with her was easy. She didn't over-complicate anything, and I could've spent the entire afternoon chatting, but work needed to be done.

"So, you kept the Gallucci name alive. I find that honorable," she said.

"Family first," I said.

"Yeah, I see how important that is."

"So the job is yours if you want."

"It would be my pleasure," she said.

I had a good feeling about her, and I extended my hand to shake hers.

"Makaela, welcome to my Gallery. Any more questions for me?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Let's give you the tour and introduce you to some of my staff."

She marveled at the interior of my office, admiring the decor, quotes, artwork, and pictures before leaving. One particular portrait caught her eye.

"Is that your family?"

"Oh, yes—my husband and the twins."

"Beautiful! Not every woman is as lucky as you."

"Thank you! That's sweet of you to say."

"How'd you two meet, if you don't mind me asking? I'm sorry, I'm a sucker for stories about how couples meet, especially the relationships that last for decades."

"Oh, okay. Well, since you ask. We were young when we met in Naples, and I was a little bit of a pick-pocket, back in the day. Oh, my God, I'm embarrassed to admit, but my family was poor, and we had to eat, you know? Anyway, I stole his wallet and he caught me red-handed. To make a long story short...well, he took me to dinner instead of the police. I fell in love with him since that day."

"Aww, that's so sweet. Thank you for sharing that with me."

She smiled at me, at stared at the photograph while I walked away from my desk. I paused, cleared my throat, and gazed at her with a slight raise of my eyebrow. She delivered a sharp exhale and blinked more times than I could count.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't mean to be rude. I just—my contact lens is getting old. Time for new ones."

"Those things are so bothersome. I don't know how you deal with them."

Her hand raced to her eye, moving the lens around before retrieving a bottle of eye drops from her purse. I handed her a tissue after she glanced at the stationary items near my family photo.

"Are you sure you're okay?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm fine. I'm ready," she said.

I moved from around the desk while she got herself situated. "This way, please," I said. We walked through the door and continued down the hallway as I gave her a small lesson in the professional structure and setting of my gallery. We soon set foot in the showroom where all the paintings hung on the walls. Each piece of art had its spotlight cascading upon it.

"I house some of the most popular and most obscure art. This is where some of the starving artists get discovered, and I'm proud to house their work."

Makaela appeared to be enjoying the tour, and paused a moment, staring at one of New York's highly-regarded artists.

"This is—no way!"

"Yes. Robert LaRue. His work is remarkable."  
Makaela sauntered about, walking past my artwork hanging next to LaRue's with only a subtle glance. My current assistant approached us.

"Bianca," he said.

"Peter. You're back! Did everything go well with delivering those packages?"

"Yes, here's the receipt," he said.

He handed me a slip of paper. I grew engulfed in the detailed receipt, forgetting Makaela lingered in our presence.

"Oh, forgive me, Makaela. Peter, this is Makaela, your replacement. He's relocating to California for a new position. I'm sad he's leaving, but he'll show you the ropes and start training you tomorrow, perhaps?"

"Uh, yeah, tomorrow will be great!"

"Could you come in at 11:00?"

"I'll be here."

"Okay, good! I'm sorry I have to leave you, but I must make a few phone calls. Please excuse me."

"Oh, no, it isn't a problem. Thank you, again."

"Sure thing. I'm glad to have you onboard."

I walked away, leaving her with Peter while they commenced their chat. He appeared to be a little shy at first and blushed as she stared at him. I was sure it did more good than harm to have some eye candy around the gallery. I was content in my decision, and I smiled as I sauntered along the long, narrow hallway back to my office. The short story I told Makaela about my family made me reflect and treasure everything I had in my life. I took a minute to appreciate my family and to admire my fruitful career. I extended my hand, barely touching the wall, and adorned the beauty of my accomplishments before stepping foot into my office. There was work to do. And as soon as I was done with my calls, I handled a couple of issues before departing for lunch.

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I gathered my belongings and headed toward the entrance. To my surprise, a suspicious-looking man—a stranger

stood outside the gallery window, staring in with a bleak, sinister presence. I couldn't move. I was too fearful and rendered powerless, as I tried moving my feet to walk away. He gazed at me, and I returned the gesture, observing his appearance. Something about him was unsettling—unnerving, as he stood motionless. His height was... about six feet (1.83 m)—and he just... looking inside with his hands in his pockets. My experience with weirdos in New York was deemed mundane, but my curious nature sensed something different about him. His beard was visible, but his large fedora covered his eyes and most of his face. Fearful, yet interested, I wanted to know his identity.

"Peter, can you come a moment, please?" I said. "Peter, can you hurry up? Come quick!"

He jogged toward me, furrowing his eyebrows, and by the time he was by my side, the stranger disappeared.

"What's wrong? Are you alright?"

"Umm, have you seen any strange men come around or wander in here?"

"Um... no, I haven't."

"Oh... okay. My mind must be playing tricks on me or something. I'm going out to lunch. I'll be back in an hour or so."

"Alright, enjoy."

A gust of wind guided me in the direction I intended the second I walked out the door, swaddled in apprehension. It was brisk outside, and I tried to forget about the mysterious man while I enjoyed the sun and chilled air. I kept my wits about me, checking over my shoulder in recurrence like a paranoid maniac who's lost their mind. The illusion of safety grew, as long as I felt like I wasn't being followed.

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I arrived at my favorite restaurant to meet my best friend, Claire Benoit. We were great friends, like sisters who looked after one another. When she needed me during her divorce, I was there to console her—help her out with whatever she desired. She and I were as 'thick as thieves,' as the phrase goes. Claire is a charming French woman who couldn't leave her accent at home, like me and

possessed the cutest attitude. Her hair was short, curly, blonde, and her eyes, a mesmerizing blue—constantly attracting men.

"Oh, you caught me off guard! I didn't see you there," I said.

"Ah, you look more beautiful every time I see you, Bianca!" she said.

She was standing on the street corner in front of the Empire Diner with a cigarette in her hand—her lighter returning to her purse. Her embrace and warm personality discarded the chill in the air as we hugged and kissed each other on the cheek.

"Claire, it's *so* good to see you!"

We entered the restaurant—escorted by Leo, the host and long-time acquaintance who had always been so genuine to me and my family whenever we dined. We had much to catch up on.

"You look fantastic, Claire! How long's it been?" I said.

"I... think about... three months, yes?" she said.

"Yeah, I think so."

"So tell me. How are my beautiful babies doing?"

"Oh, forget about it. Every two seconds it's, 'mommy this and mom that'."

They're growing up so fast, though. The both of them are always telling me something new they've learned in school—and that's the least of it. Isabelle has a new best friend almost every week! You know what it's like at that age. I love them so much, though."

"Aw, they're so adorable I could steal them from you, and hug and kiss them till they become sick of me! I miss them a lot, Bea. I can't wait to see them!"

"Yes, they're going to be *so* happy to see their Aunt Claire."

"How's Lucas doing?"

"Oh, he's well, and busier than ever. Work's good, too. He's working on expanding his medical practice."

"Oh, wow. What wonderful news. Congratulations to you both!"

"It's great, yes, but I don't get to see much of him anymore. He's been *so* busy working, but I wish he was around more to spend time with the kids."

"That's got to be tough on you."

"It is sometimes, but I manage. How about you—any *lovers* in your life, yet?"

"Um, yeah, actually, I do!"

"Uh—oh, here comes a husband and children in your future."

"Oh, stop it. A husband, someday? Yeah, maybe. Children? I don't have to tell you how f\*\*ked up my insides are, thanks to my military accident. *Anyway*, he has two ki—"

"*No*, don't say that, hon. We have modern science these days... and miracles happen all the time. So, what's this lucky guy's na—"

I couldn't believe my eyes and stopped mid-sentence, peering out the window. Fear immobilized me. Somehow, I couldn't help to look away. I stared in disbelief.

"Bianca, what's the matter?" she asked.

I didn't respond. My eyes fixated on the huddle of people walking by. Claire also looked and touched my hand, diverting my attention.

"Bea? What's wrong? What are you looking at?" she asked.

"Oh my God. It's... it's him again," I said.

"What? It's who? *Who are you looking at?*"

"It's the man. The man from earlier."

"What man are you talking about?"

He drifted along the sidewalk near the window within an intermittent throng of strangers. He was the same as earlier—hands in pocket and head held down in black attire. The nearer he got, the more nervous I became—the more recognizable he became.

"What man are you looking at, Bea?"

I took my time scrutinizing as he got closer, but it was so damn hard to get a glimpse of his face with his eyes hidden under the fedora. He took his time lifting his head, allowing me to view his eyes and his long, intentional stare. Such a leer burned a hole through my soul while he walked by.

The mystery man's eyes were full of malevolence, and I somehow unveiled his true character. It was like a transference—

an instant, confirmed knowledge of his authenticity. *No, this can't be happening!* I couldn't *believe* what I was seeing! He held a strong, striking resemblance to my father! He never broke eye contact and stared at me until I was no longer within his field of vision. An internal heat arose in my chest, crawling up my neck. Tears ran down my face and into my cup of tea, as I bowed my head in disbelief. Staring at him awakened images of my past.

"Honey, are you alright? Talk to me. What's going on?"

She handed me a tissue from her purse and begged me to verbalize my thoughts.

"Did you see him... the man in black? You *had to* have seen him."

"I—I didn't get a good look at who you're talking abo—"

"That man that walked so close to the window looking *right* at me! The one with the hat! You didn't see him?" I said.

"Bea, I saw a lot of people in that crowd. I'm not sure who you're talking about."

"It was him! My father. Oh, my God, how is he still alive?"

"Bea, that's not possible. It's been 32 years. He's dead."

"I know! I watched him die," I said. I got up from the table and rushing outside.

"Wait. Where are you going?"

"I need to know that what I saw was real."

"Bea? Bea, wait!"

I scurried out of the restaurant and stood out front, hoping to spot the stranger I believed to be real. I couldn't spot him. It's like he vanished into thin air!

"Wait, where'd he go? I'm not crazy. I know what I saw."

Claire lingered at the door, leaving it halfway opened.

"Bianca. Bea! Come back inside," she said.

"It *has* to be him. It looks *so much* like him, Claire. I mean, he's older, but... his eyes. A person's eyes don't change much as they age. I *know* those eyes!"

"*Bea*, come in and sit down. Let's talk about this."

There wasn't much I could do. I was anxious, uneasy, helpless, and confused. Keeping my legs from fidgeting was impossible while Claire tried consoling me.

"Bea, calm down, please. Take a deep breath," she said. Her hand rested on mine.

"I *am* taking a deep breath. He just needs to stay away from me! That's it, okay? That's all I want! I *will* call the police if I see him again."

"And what will you tell them if you see him again, *huh?* Honey, you're not even sure it was him. Bea, look at me. Are you *positive* it was him?"

"...I'm ninety-five percent sure, but I had a dreadful sensation the moment I laid eyes on him. You *had* to see the evil in his eyes, Claire. You *don't* forget eyes like his. Fathers aren't supposed to rape their daughters!"

The instant those eyes met mine, a flashback of my past overwhelmed my mind. The mere thought of him imprisoned me—shackled by his dominance, and noosed with terror. I don't want him near my children.

"You've told me everything before, and no child should have to go through that. I understand why you're so scared, but sometimes our minds play tricks on us and..."

"And what? Were you about to say I need to visit a shrink or increase my medication? That would be hypocritical. You *know* me better than anyone. You know I don't see things."

"And that is why I'm concerned. I looked right out that window and didn't see anyone staring at you. You know I love you and would do anything for you. My shrink helped me years ago, and I'm just looking out for my best friend. I think I've earned the right to give sincere advice."

She showed genuine concern, but I couldn't shake the image of the stranger's face.

"Perhaps you should give my cousin a call or visit him at his office. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. He's always happy to see you," she said.

*I dunno. Maybe I should visit Dr. Summers again.*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thank you for reading! Richards visits Manhattan's art scene often. The Gallucci Gallery is his first novel. Follow along on Instagram: @kemrichards or visit [www.kbrichards.com](http://www.kbrichards.com) and submit your email to the eNewsletter for future updates!