

Homicide: The Game

Presents

Painseeker

“Raychel Taurus Rising”

by Lance Wagner

On June 19, 1999 The Bleeders learned in one lightning strike that Raychel Taurus was on the rise. Why? Astrologically speaking Taurus had been dormant since May 20. Technically, Gemini was descending, which was appropriate in itself.

For those of you in the astrological know, people born in Gemini (between approximately May 21 - June 20) are changeable in nature. They possess an active and restless mind that is in constant need of new and different avenues of experience. They are quick to investigate and quick to judge. A talent that works well for a writer. However, a quick peek at the top of the page tells you that Raychel was not a Gemini.

Raychel was a Leo. Leos are natural leaders, ambitious, independent, determined, and persistent. Quick to anger, they are also quick to be appeased. They are known to be candid and outspoken. That was Raychel to a “T.” Unfortunately, her new last name – Taurus – had nothing to do with her actual birth date.

A Taurus is generally stable, stubborn and concerned with outcomes instead of the means. They possess patience in the extreme, yet are especially sensitive to pain – both emotional and physical. This was not Raychel. Even with her new persona, hand crafted by Kyle McAllister, she could not maintain a personality like this. Why then was her name changed from Raychel Wagner to Raychel Taurus?

Kyle’s answer: “It’s gonna sell like Hell.” Despite being responsible for draining the poetry from her life (maybe really the other way around), the answer is too poetic. This name was crafted to sell everything from CDs to Pepsi. If Britney Spears stays around too long on the current pop culture merry-go-round, you can blame Raychel’s murderer. Raychel Taurus would have replaced her.

Where Brittney was young and flashy, Raychel Taurus was mature and strategically withdrawn. Raychel Taurus already had the experience you wanted to give Brittney. She also knew not to show everything to the public – something the current Pepsi icon has yet to learn. Where Brittney plays a public game of peek-a-boo, Raychel would invite you into the shadows around her. Hidden in the dark and delectable because of it, Raychel Taurus was the forbidden fruit you would yearn to taste yet was too far out of reach to acquire.

That was her marketability, as it is every successful pitch artist. You would want the product so you could either be her or be near her. But like all marketing ads, it was a mirage. The taste of the product is devoid of the person, leaving nothing but a mouthful of sugar water to quench your thirst for the person. Now that Raychel Wagner is dead, Raychel Taurus is exactly that. An empty promise of dark secrets. I'm sure Kyle McAllister is also aware of the irony.

But at 7:00 PM on Saturday, June 19, 1999, The Bleeders had yet to glimpse the hidden secrets of Raychel Taurus, let alone taste them. Whether they knew it or not, they were still in mourning over the loss of Raychel Vanderhoff, their most beloved poet (See Laura Douglass' article "Kyle Crystallized" for the complete details). Kyle McAllister had kidnapped her over three months ago, and the impact on attendance alone was significant to wonder whether the group would survive. Where usually 150 to 200 people would come for a chance to be a part of The Bleeders, only 50 people came that night to be a part of the open-mike festivities. The evening proceeded uneventfully for two hours when the room was hit by a shockwave.

I was onstage, reading from one of my post-Raychel endeavors (which is to say it wasn't anywhere near the heights I had reached while we were together) when the power of the room shifted from me on the stage to someone who had just walked in. I could feel it from the stage, the power as the rows of people turned their attention to what was going on in the back of the room. The lights in my eyes being too bright to see for myself, I improvised an ending and retreated from the stage with little notice from the so-called audience.

My abdication of the stage allowed the audience to lose the convention of half-silence. Many of the people got up and moved to the bar, then to Laura in the corner booth. Apparently, the person of interest was still on the move. The crowd stopped there. I cut my way through the people on my way to the booth. My expectations grew each time I heard someone say, “She’s back.”

As I reached the corner booth, Raychel flew past me with a quick glance and a quick, “Hey.”

I was frozen. Three months of agony had been dispelled in that moment. I couldn’t turn around for fear that it had just been my imagination, some half-forgotten ghost lingering in my brain. But the stunned expression on Laura’s face confirmed it. No words were exchanged between us. Had we attempted to say anything, it would have failed the moment.

I turned in the direction Raychel had passed me. She was standing onstage, but not alone. Kyle McAllister was tuning an acoustic guitar right beside her. They exchanged brief glances and he began playing. Conscious that I was the only person still standing, I slid into the corner booth beside Laura Douglass.

What followed was a ten-minute set of three songs: “Endless and Less”, “Fighting for Twilight”, and “No More Dreams No More.” There were no explanations, but anyone who heard Raychel’s poetry could realize that she was cultivating a new image, and that the Raychel we knew and loved, the real one, had been kidnapped, killed, and replaced with a hollow stand in. I glanced back at Laura, who looked equally dumfounded by their performance.

Apparently, though, we were in the minority. As Raychel finished the set with diminishing repetition of “dreams no more dreams no more dreams no more” the room couldn’t wait to erupt in a standing ovation.

Laura pushed her schedule in front of me. Raychel and Kyle had come to her to grab a slot on the program. Realizing that anyone performing before them would be

forgotten or worse, she put them onstage immediately. Raychel had signed the slot “Raychel Taurus.”

I got up to see her, as they were already off the stage. Everyone was crowded around the bar, which is customary. Performers are rewarded with a free drink. If they are good, they frequently receive more (as admirers buy drinks in exchange for conversation – Raychel was the undeniable queen of this). I looked around the bar, but couldn’t find Raychel. I looked around the bar, but couldn't find Raychel. I made some inquiries and learned that they had left as quickly as they had entered.

I was getting whiplash from my flashback to my first meeting with Raychel. I felt the same: Left high and dry with a promise of a future meeting. My feelings, however, were not similar.

The following week’s Bleeders meeting was attended by well over 300 people, and only a few dared to get on the performance list. Raychel’s request for people to tell their friends had been well heeded. Laura had even brought one of her big money friends with her, Ken Kincaid. Ken was the owner of an independent recording label called Terror Trax. Laura admitted her real intentions to me, though. Laura had asked Ken to listen to them, pretend to be thrilled, sign her to a recording contract, then exercise his leverage as owner of the label to pry McAllister away from Raychel. After hearing Laura complain about McAllister for an hour, he had agreed and the trap was set.

As they had the previous week, Raychel and McAllister arrived late and started immediately. The only change to their program was that they had replaced “Fighting for Twilight” with “Looking Grate.” Again the room erupted and again they made their way toward a quick exit; however, now aware of that possibility, Ken Kincaid headed them off, introduced himself, and began to pull them into another booth.

Aware of the trap, I seized the opportunity and touched Raychel’s arm. She whirled around, saw that it was me and smiled. I asked her if she could talk to me for a moment. She came with me to a corner of the bar.

I only had thirty seconds to talk to her, but during that time I opened myself up to her about what I had gone through during the time she was away, how I missed her, how much I loved her. She just sat and smiled. When I took the time to breathe, she stopped me, looked back to the booth where Ken was trying to talk to an obviously agitated McAllister, and told me, "I can't be with you anymore. It's over."

I made immediate protests and asked her to take our marriage to mind. She cut me off with a laugh. She said, "That will always be our little secret, won't it?" With that, she kissed me and left. She was back by Kyle's side by the time I realized it was a good-bye kiss.

I made my way for the door and, after brief conversations with a few friends, almost made it out before McAllister grabbed my shoulder and pulled me aside. I don't know how I looked to him but he was staring at me like I was dinner. He smiled at me, stretched out an arm, and asked me, "No hard feelings, Lance?"

I politely took his hand. Which was a mistake, because he locked onto my hand and pulled me in close to him. His voice distant from the hate radiating from his eyes, "Because I'd hate to have to beat the s**t out of you again. That goes for anyone from your whole stinking group. If anyone tries anything to get between Raychel and me, I'm liable to take it out on you. Understand?"

He didn't stick around for a response. He released me and joined Raychel and Ken at their booth. I left Safehaven, and that was the end of my relationship with Raychel. There and gone, just like so many significant moments in my relationship with her. It was made of quick and painful events. We meet. We fall in love. We marry. She is kidnapped. She comes back. She leaves. She dies. Gone. There were a few awkward incidents between us after that, but they aren't worth mentioning. It wasn't the same.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened had I won my fight with McAllister. I imagine myself dropping him with a single punch. Would Raychel have

left me anyway? Maybe Laura was right about Raychel needing challenges that I couldn't provide. I like to think she's wrong, but it's not often that I do.