

Homicide: The Game

Presents

Painseeker

“A Day in Hell”
by Kyle McAllister

Lance Wagner refers to August 17, 2000 as “That Day.” For him, I am sure it was just a day.

There were too many enemies. Too many images. Just too much, too wrong. If Hell is where your worst dreams come true, then for me August 17, 2000 was a day in Hell.

It didn't seem like it when we woke up. There was nothing out of the ordinary for the morning. I guess that's the secret in Hell, to lull the damned into thinking they aren't there.

A few minutes after noon, Raychel, Sharon and I parked a block away from Terror Trax, and walked the rest of the way. Instead of walking through the front door, we came in via the back door by the dumpster. Sergei (the janitor) let us in. The coast was clear of Geoffrey MacIntyre. Thankfully, Geoffrey is a creature of habit. One of those habits is leaving for lunch at exactly noon. This afforded us reliable and unobserved access into the studio level of Terror Trax.

Since near the end of July, Ken Kincaid had arranged our access and studio as a favor to Raychel and I. He made the arrangements with Sergei to let us in only after Geoffrey MacIntyre had left for lunch. The studio was chalked up to equipment repairs that were expected to take months. Maybe longer. To this day I don't know why he helped us. I can guess, though.

Regardless, Raychel and I headed to our studio where everything was already set up. Not that we required much more than the space itself. We had a couple of my guitars, a bass, and a small drum kit.

Contrary to Geoffrey's lumbering and lackadaisical recording style, I prefer a more organic approach. If you have ever heard The Trinity Session by the Cowboy Junkies or Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska, you immediately understand what I was going for during my recording sessions with Raychel. Focus on the principles of music and voice and discard the noise. Very minimal. Very not Geoffrey MacIntyre.

We worked on two songs that day. They were "Baby's Breath" and "Endless and Less." Since the sessions were recorded by us and performed by us, we would record a vocal with guitar or whatever instrument we agreed was best for her to work with, then I filled in the other parts after we had a satisfactory track. All of the instruments were done on single takes.

It was a very different approach than the one forced on us by Geoffrey. He would record one instrument at a time, get it absolutely perfect, and then move on to the next instrument. If I came up with something better to do that changed the song for another instrument. He would demand to go back to the beginning of the recording process and blame me for not giving him a better finished product. I know he thinks I was intentionally trying to obstruct the recording process but I wasn't. I am just a less structured talent than he is. Rather than bend his rigid recording style to match our strength, he forced Raychel and I into his cookie-cutter formula. I understand why he likes to believe everyone is out to get him. Geoffrey loves conspiracies.

What Geoffrey doesn't love are surprises. Some time just before 6:30 PM that day he received one. Unknown to Raychel and I it was the beginning of the real day in Hell. It officially began for us with one door swing thud in the midst of a perfect harmonic note. Somewhere in there we left the world and I've spent each moment since trying to get back home.

The thud was Geoffrey MacIntyre barging into our studio. He must have expected to find us there, because he didn't even pause when he saw us in the midst of recording in the studio. Raychel and I, on the other hand, were less prepared. Geoffrey didn't give us a chance to catch up, charging past a sitting Sharon in the control room on his way into the recording booth. He screamed that Raychel had betrayed his trust and how we were stabbing him in the back.

I stood up and took him head on. We had gone out of our way not to draw attention to ourselves and he should have respected our right to privacy. I didn't care if he was the great king of creativity at Terror Trax. He was not involved in our project. He had his chance to work with us and he screwed it up. I wasn't going to take crap from him just because his ego was bruised. I used louder and more colorful words to say this to him, but it was the thrust of my argument against him. I stand a good head or so over him, so it comes off much better in person. And more threatening, which at this time was needed to get him out of the room. He wasn't going, though. So I got louder, and closer to him.

Past Geoffrey, I could see Sergei Brosovsky standing awkwardly in the studio doorway. I didn't know if he had finally broken down and told Geoffrey, but he was looking like it. As soon as he saw me looking at him, he disappeared.

Raychel, meanwhile had gotten off her stool and backed into a corner of the studio away from Geoffrey and myself. That was fine, I was handling him fine.

Sharon, having noticed Raychel's retreat, was standing behind Geoffrey. She gave me a look which asked if I wanted her assistance. I knew her heart wasn't in it. The two of them had become close over the past month or so. I looked her off to let her know that I was in control of him. So she backed off a few grateful steps.

He must have noticed my look because he swung around to face Sharon and whirled around to face me again. That was when he really got mad. He started screeching about how he wasn't going to be thrown out of his own studio. Real power

trip stuff. And he decided to get closer to me. Unfortunately for him, he was now well within my cheap shot punching range.

Unfortunately for me, Ken Kincaid came into the studio before I could punch Geoffrey. Sergei must have gotten Ken because Sergei was back to standing in the doorway. Ken sensed the tension in the room and tried to diffuse it by saying that everyone needed to take a step back and calm down.

Geoffrey was doing neither. Instead, he chose to get further out of control. He dragged Ken into the fray by accusing him of sabotaging his project. Ken just laughed at him. I guess he thought he was letting the air out of the situation. The opposite was true, as Geoffrey screamed himself red. He got so angry he tried to fire Ken. Ken laughed again, harder this time. He calmly explained that, if Geoffrey would check his contract, he would see that he was unable to fire him. Fit to be tied, he then fired Sergei Brosovsky, who finally disappeared from the doorway, as if not hearing it would make it less real. There was no need, as Ken informed Geoffrey that again, he was firing employees that he had no responsibility over. Ken reminded Geoffrey that he was only the Chief Creative Officer, and as such did not have the power to hire or fire anyone outside the creative process. Not even the janitors.

I smiled at this and said to Geoffrey, "Not your day today, is it?"

Geoffrey turned on me again and got back into my range. He returned my smile and said, "You're not the janitor here yet. I can still fire you."

I spelled it out for him, "Fire me and you fire Raychel. Terminate my contract and you've done the same to her." His face fell, and I knew I had him beaten. Pressing the matter, I got right down to his face and sneered, "Do it. Please."

If we could have extended that moment another second, perhaps Raychel would still be alive. Because Geoffrey would have taken a very ill-advised swing at me. Then I would have wiped the floor with him, and we all would have gone in different

directions. The police would have gotten involved earlier. Everything would have changed.

Instead, Raychel took the floor with a flat and forceful, "Stop it!"

The alarm cued Sharon and the two of them stepped right in the middle of the beautiful moment between Geoffrey and I. We all stepped back, Sharon covering Geoffrey while Raychel tugged at my arm. We stepped back into her corner of the studio against my baser instincts.

At Raychel's instruction, everyone went their separate ways around 7:00 PM. A still-giggling Ken Kincaid went back up to the executive level of Terror Trax (presumably to let Sergei know that he wasn't fired). Sharon took Geoffrey out of the studio for another one of their "non-dates." Meanwhile, Raychel and I broke down the studio for the night and left to go back to the apartment.

I knew something was wrong the whole ride back home. Raychel was quiet. Usually we will still discuss the day's work or at least something of interest. But not tonight. She waited until around 7:30 when we got back to the apartment to unleash herself.

As soon as we made it through the front door she started in on me, "You were stupid! What the f**k were you thinking? Were you thinking?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You dared him to fire us! You actually dared him. After you went behind his back to record there, he finds out and you dared him to f**king fire us!"

She carried on like this for some time. All the while trying to deny her own involvement in our plan. I reminded her that she had agreed with me that we should keep Geoffrey away from us. That he was a negative influence on us. That no amount of her running away from that decision was going to please Geoffrey now that he

already knew. I also tried to tell her that if he fired us we could get another contract in short order. But she was not convinced. Worse, she was not convinced and loud.

We have had the police remind us a number of times that we weren't the only people in the apartment complex. Since the last time we were given our "last warning", I had begun grabbing the car keys and leaving to cool down the situation. After all, it takes two to either tango or fight. I grabbed the keys, and got out of there, with a far-too-flippant, "Later." It was 8:15 PM and that was the last time I saw her alive.

Driving always gives me a sort of free-association meditation. I just blank out while driving and hash things out. I re-played the argument between us and tried to see things from her perspective. I went back to the fight between me and Geoffrey in the studio. More importantly, I remembered her retreat into the corner. And saw it through her eyes.

I think it was the first time she was afraid of Geoffrey MacIntyre. The previous times she had met him, he had been working for us. Now, after closing him out of our loop, we was an angry boss. Worse, an angry boss with a fear of looking incompetent. The only people he could punish were Raychel and myself. Tomorrow was not going to be a good day. Unfortunately for me, I had not realized that today was the worst day ever. Geoffrey had opened the door and nothing would ever be the same. No going back now.

My only solace was that Raychel made the wise decision to pair Geoffrey with Sharon for the night. When they first seemed to be getting close, I wondered if he was the person who hired Raychel. If he was, though, there was no way he would have waited weeks before barging in on our clandestine recording sessions, and he never would have looked as out of control as he did. Although he was able to hide one secret from me for some time before I found out about it. So maybe he is a better actor than I give him credit.

I kept driving away and around until about 10:45 PM or so. Then I turned around and headed straight home.

I got back to the apartment at 12:20 AM, parked the car and headed upstairs.

I put my key in the lock. It didn't click open. It was already open. I had locked it when I left. I entered the apartment.

I turned the corner and saw everything.

End tables knocked over.

Bloody handprints smeared on the wall.

Guitar smashed on the floor.

A streak of black-red across the floor.

Raychel lying face up and dead on the floor.

Flat shock. I lost time. Dead time. How long? The police said about ten minutes. Ten years. It felt the same.

I called the police, dropped the phone, turned around, locked the door, went outside. Cried.

The police arrived, unsympathetic. Word must have gotten around about our disturbances. The police detective took my statement, made me punctuate the times. Asked me for an alibi. I didn't have one. Raychel is dead. He asked several more times. I still didn't have one. Raychel is dead. I was out driving. That is not an alibi. Raychel is dead. I didn't have an alibi. I don't need one. I didn't do anything. But I didn't have an alibi. Raychel is dead. The lights were flashing. Radios were blaring and cops were all over the place with yellow tape. Coroner's truck came. Flashes coming from my apartment as technicians comb through the evidence. Raychel is dead. I was driving. No alibi.

Sharon Wolfe grabs me by the shirt and picks me up off the ground. “You finally did it, you bastard!” She jackhammers me with punches and lets me fall to the ground again. For the first time in my life, I don’t hit back. Raychel is dead.

It hits me. No one stopped her. Everyone is looking at me. It’s all adding up for everyone. Neighbors complain. Sharon is talking to police about the June fight and more. The last two months of peace are thrown aside. A theory is reinforced. The police have records of disturbances. Violence in the apartment. A brutal boyfriend with a dead girlfriend. A bodyguard who talks non-stop about what she’s witnessed and hearsay is good enough for the occasion. The theory is in place. Find the evidence that fits the theory. Nothing more is needed. The boyfriend did it.

Who cares that there are no bloody clothes?

Miranda rights read and straight to the interrogation. I can’t confess. There is nothing to confess to. I’m crying. What’s the matter, son, guilty conscience? You’re going to spend the rest of your life in jail guaranteed if you don’t talk now. Jail first. Then there’s Hell to look forward to. I can smell you burning now. Just confess, son. Go with a clean slate. You know we’ve got your fingerprints in there.

I see myself, guiltless, drowning in an ocean of guilt. And I pull myself out.

“Really? MY fingerprints? In my apartment? Nice work, buddy. You planning to write a crime novel about this?”

Not my best work, but I’m starting to feel myself.

“I want a lawyer. We’re done. Get out.”

No charges came. Not enough evidence against me. No bloody clothes. Whoever killed Raychel didn’t get away as clean as he or she might have hoped.

I didn’t do it and I still didn’t get away clean.

There's been a target on my ass for almost a year now. Every once in a while I get pulled over by an officer. He mentions I look familiar. It always comes out the same. Practically on notecards. "Now I know who you look like . . . that guy who murdered his girlfriend. She was a singer. Real pretty, too. Never could charge that bastard. But don't worry, sir. We'll get him just for you."

If that's not enough, I have been warned not to leave the vicinity, so I cannot move and start a new life (or go home to North Dakota). So I have tried to make the best of it by becoming a session musician. I made some contacts at Terror Trax and have filled in for some bands. It's not much but it keeps me working.

I know I am public enemy number one for the police, and (if you add them all up) I am on this site, too.

That being said, I'm the first one to come forward with a detailed description of what happened that night. I don't count Lance because he wasn't there (or was he?). I challenge everyone else who met with Raychel that day to do the same.

And if you don't?

To Hell with you!