

# Homicide: The Game

Presents

## Painseeker

**“Storming Safehaven”**  
by Kyle McAllister

The door is Old World familiar. It is made of wood so rough that even the several contrasting layers of stain and lacquer cannot keep you from feeling the grooves and grain underneath. The banding holding the door’s planks together are weathered iron. The handle is oversized for the building, let alone the door itself. Perhaps it was meant to be inviting. Instead it provides a physical challenge. You must clamp down on the latch at the top of the handle, reach down for the actual handle, and pull back. Many people are forced to use two hands, but that option is not mine today. I have a guitar case in my left hand.

I look back at Raychel, who is watching me with a bemused gaze. I warn her, “After this, there’s no turning back.”

She deadpans, “Really? I thought that was what we were doing.”

I suppose we were turning back in a way. It was just that we were the ones who were different. I pushed through the door to the past to reach for the future hiding inside.

Inside is impressive. Small, but impressive. The floor is hardwood and creaky. It has a right to be when you see what it supports. The walls are exposed brownish brick for the first four feet, the give way to stone and mortar walls. The stucco ceiling is high and punctuated by exposed wood supports. The wooden tables and booths seem like an afterthought in the design, something to separate the massive bar from the slightly raised stage. The seats are uncomfortable, but comforting. When a catastrophe strikes Los Angeles, this is the place to be.

Safehaven isn’t a bar. It is a fortress.

I was against this from the start. Returning to The Bleeders was the wrong way to begin our new career together. Obviously I didn't want Raychel being influenced by people like Laura or Lance again, but it wasn't the only reason. The Bleeders was an audience of sycophants, already trained to accept anything Raychel. They were not a real audience. This was not an adequate test for us to see how good we were. It was useless.

Raychel was adamant, however, that we should return to The Bleeders. She said it would be a fitting way for us to announce our return to L.A. (to the wrong people, I said to myself). She wanted the safety of the crowd. Besides, it was the only place we knew where we could get mike time without a reputation preceding us. She had me there. I had tried to set a stage for us at a number of places I knew, but no one was buying it. They would ask for the names of clubs we played and the conversation ended shortly after that. Raychel seized upon my inability to find a club to further her argument. Safehaven was a different place entirely. We were known and she was worshiped.

Our entrance was predetermined, calculated. Everyone remembers the image of a nuclear test on a two-story family home. Instead of a straightforward explosion, the home was drawn toward the blast momentarily and then was blasted outward. That was the type of reaction we were attempting. It worked perfectly. My initial entrance into Safehaven caught the attention of the room, and eyes began turning toward the door. The door wasn't even out of my hand and I could feel the anger rising to greet me. Then I stood aside, revealing Raychel, confident, clad in black. She surveyed the room without looking at anyone directly. The effect was instantaneous. Heads swiveled to see their friends to confirm what their eyes had just seen. The words ripped through the room, "She's back." Raychel had returned to The Bleeders. As I expected, they were obliterated. And they didn't know the half of it.

They soon would.

Raychel led the way to the corner booth, staring down people left and right. She stopped at a dumfounded Laura Douglass, who blubbered something I couldn't understand. Raychel reached for Laura's notebook and pen. The notebook is Laura's

catalog of the night's order of events. Raychel pulled it to her and scratched out the next act, writing her new name in its place.

Raychel Taurus.

Raychel turned and headed straight for the stage. Before following her, I looked back at Laura and told her flatly, "We'll introduce ourselves, thanks." On the way to the stage, I approached Lance Wagner. He was just standing there, stone-faced, paralyzed. I regarded him coldly. I had a good reason.

Raychel and I had returned to Los Angeles on June 17, two days earlier. We went back to my apartment to wait for the next meeting of The Bleeders; however, that was impossible. My apartment was in no condition to be used. It had been trashed completely by Lance Wagner and his minions. They had apparently picked the lock (the door hadn't been pried open or kicked in) and began searching for anything. The cabinets and closets were open and had obviously been vigorously searched. Too bad for them I took all of the information about my Hunter property with me. But the devastation of the room was clearly the work of Lance Wagner. He left a calling card. I think it was a love note to Raychel.

*Grabbing your throat  
is one of life's great  
pleasures,  
a gentle squeeze  
is part ceremony,  
part desire.*

*You smile at me  
through blue lips  
bug eyes  
and sweating body,  
clutching my hair  
in clawing hands.*

*Wrenching me  
by my hair  
back to the sheets  
you take your turn  
to express love  
in its fullest.*

*Our bed is  
not normal  
they say,  
but at least  
our sex is great.*

For those of you not aware of the terminology, this is called a “smoking gun.” It is also my explanation why I acted the way I did the following week (see Lance’s “Raychel Taurus Rising”).

In addition to trashing my apartment, Lance decided to harass us further by placing a missing persons report out on Raychel. I learned this from a friend of mine in The Bleeders. We cleared it up quickly. Raychel and I walked into a police station and stated that the report was a misunderstanding. That was it, over. Lance’s brilliant offensive maneuver. Make other people work. That was his best shot.

Now it was our turn.

No introduction. No banter. No apologies. We played three songs in ten minutes. They were “Endless and Less”, “Fighting for Twilight”, and “No More Dreams No More.” When we finished, they couldn’t wait to give us a standing ovation. It didn’t mean a thing to me. I thought it was a good set, but these people were incapable of giving us a true evaluation of our work together. Mindless of the crowd’s mindless reaction, I had my guitar packed before Raychel’s chorus finished reverberating in the amplifiers.

The typical escape route for a good act at The Bleeders is to walk straight through the center of the room and turn right into the bar. Patrons typically meet acts at the bar to congratulate them. We had expected this, and prepared accordingly. We walked straight down the center of the room and, just before hitting the bar, turned left and escaped out the front door in full view of everyone at the bar.

The door had barely closed behind us before Raychel began laughing out loud. She had done a tremendous job with her assignment: Create mystery with selective silence. It was a perfect hit and run attack. Had we gone to the bar, our entire evening would have been a waste. This way, the room was left wanting more and wondering. What was going on? What's with "Raychel Taurus?" Had we stuck around for gladhanding, it might not have happened. Now it was guaranteed.

We ran to the car and drove away into the night, Raychel laughing the whole way. With the passing streetlights and storefronts flashing by, momentarily lighting her already light-hearted face, she looked truly insane.

The smile faded some miles later just enough for her to speak, "Maybe we should go back."

"Now?"

"No. God, no. Next week."

I understood immediately. Finally. She needed this night. An untrained, inexperienced singer, she had been afraid. But she had delivered in spades. If she needed another fill of courage, I couldn't object.

Of course, Laura Douglass worked her magic and pulled Ken Kincaid out of her hat. It was a perfect move. I couldn't say no to him after he accepted all of my terms. Besides, it wasn't that I didn't trust him. I didn't trust Laura. I knew she would do anything to sabotage our music career, so I didn't know why she helped us. Now I do. And I was right not to trust her.

**But that night, we won.**

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