

Homicide: The Game

Presents

Painseeker

“The Broken Point”
by Lance Wagner

I flush my face with three golden spiced Cuervos to remember the Bleeding Jewel on the day when every friend failed her. I should not have been there to see it happen or to be part of this failure. I was not supposed to be there, but Fate forced Chance’s hand and allowed me to fail, too.

In light of Laura’s recent incarceration, it is only appropriate that my story starts with Laura’s lie to The Bleeders. Perhaps I should clarify first. Laura’s lies were in such supply that they force further simplification.

It was October 30, 1999 when it happened. I was scanning the booking schedule for The Bleeders meeting and I realized that there were no open positions. Laura always kept a space vacant for them. Since signing with Terror Trax, Kyle and Raychel had continued attacking The Bleeders with their “hit and run” performances. Songs shuffled in and out of their weekly three-song rotation, with at least one new song included. It kept The Bleeders packed to the walls. I asked Laura, “You didn’t leave a spot for Raychel?”

Laura had been talking to another artist when she let her lie slip up, “God, no. They’ve got to rest for tomorrow.”

Dumbfounded, I asked, “And what is tomorrow?”

This is where she works worst. When she holds all of the cards, she shows her comfort, doling out droplets of information at whim. But this was her flipside. This is Laura lost and looking into the oncoming headlights of truth. I did not know what I was asking for, but she had not planned to tell me anything until she made this blunder. I was going to get my answer. She is not creative enough to lie on the fly.

“They’re going into the studio, Lance. You know that.”

I did, but better than she might have hoped at the time, “That’s on Monday, Laura. What’s going on tomorrow?”

She waited a beat too long before launching into a faint, “Isn’t tomorrow Monday?”

Sitting in a meeting of The Bleeders while she said that seemed to make my point for me, so I merely stared at her, growing angrier.

She gave up almost instantly, “All right, but you can’t tell anyone. I’ve been sworn to secrecy.”

“By who?”

“None of your business. I shouldn’t even be telling you this much,” she looked around to ensure no one was paying attention to us. “Raychel and Kyle have a concert tomorrow. That’s why they aren’t going to be here today.”

“Where are they playing?”

“No, Lance. I can’t tell you any more. None of The Bleeders are supposed to go to the show.”

“Why?”

“Lance! I can’t tell you any more.”

“You’re going, aren’t you?”

“I’m not allowed.”

“That wasn’t a no, Laura.”

“Stop it!” she shouted. We both looked around and noted the amount of attention we had drawn to ourselves. The musician onstage had stopped his song to stare rudely at us. I drank my beer and dropped the subject momentarily. Laura had taken that momentary pause to get up, walk back to the bar, talk to the bartender, and escape out the back exit, not to be seen for the rest of the night. As second-in-command, I took over for her as ringmaster for the evening. I knew she escaped so she could not be forced to tell me more about the next night, and I considered it a form of respect.

As the meeting unfolded, I tried to complete the puzzle of Laura’s lengthy lie. I believe her lie truly began on June 26 when she pulled her chains against Kyle McAllister and convinced Ken Kincaid to come to a meeting of The Bleeders. It was hard for me to initially decide who won that battle. Kyle won because he got everything he ever wanted: he had Raychel and a chance to earn real money as a musician. Laura won because she set her trap at Terror Trax: She believed Ken Kincaid would quickly tire of Kyle’s constant demands and remove him from the musical equation. However, Ken Kincaid apparently fell so over himself with Raychel that he gave in to Kyle’s constant demands to numb him to his own affair with Raychel. So maybe Laura really lost her end by losing Ken to Raychel, but if Sharon is still to be believed maybe she never did lose him (see “Always Watching...”). Regardless, between June 26th and October 30th, Raychel and Kyle prepared to enter Terror Trax to record their first album. As demanded in Kyle’s “no outsiders” policy, the sessions were scheduled to be limited to Kyle and Raychel. There was only one demand placed on them by Ken Kincaid, and if he had not been sleeping with Laura, I doubt that even she would have known about it. Now I needed to find out where they were playing.

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How many clubs are there in Los Angeles? Certainly more than you can call in an afternoon. On top of that it was Sunday. A perfect needle in a haystack? How could I possibly find out where Raychel was performing that night?

I called Terror Trax. They were most helpful, especially when I told the helpful secretary that I was interested in hiring Raychel Taurus for a week at my bar, Safehaven. My hiring her was conditional on my ability to see her perform prior to my signing any

contracts. The secretary snapped into action and told me that Raychel was playing that night at The Bone Yard. I thanked her. Who wouldn't? Think of all the phone calls she saved me.

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I arrived an hour before the show to get a feel for The Bone Yard. At least that was what I told myself at the time. The truth is I was nervous about the night for Raychel. I could not imagine Raychel performing without a single friend in the audience. She deserved at least one. I decided I would be that one. So while she waited backstage for her grand entrance, I waited in front of the stage for her grand entrance. In the meantime I had the opportunity to acclimate myself to the club.

It may be only a few blocks from Safehaven, but The Bone Yard is a world away spiritually. Where Safehaven had the warmth of a basement, The Bone Yard was an abandoned and converted factory. An acoustic nightmare, the ceiling was at least thirty feet high and lined with sheet metal. No matter how loud Kyle's amps would be, I knew that most of the sound would travel up to that ceiling and never be heard from again. I wondered how a hole like this club could stay open. As the opening of the show approached, I began to understand. Arriving an hour before the show and proceeding directly to the front of the stage did not afford me the opportunity to see the bulk of the club's patrons. It looked like a tattoo convention held in Hell. If it was not tattooed, it was pierced. If it was not pierced, it was covered in leather. But the most unsettling feature of the crowd were the faces. The painted faces.

At least two of every three faces were made up to look like a skull: with blacked out eyes and cheekbones while wearing glowing white makeup. Others were more extravagant. Grinning skulls. Screaming skulls. Skulls on fire. This was a hardcore crowd. I understood what this meant. This was not a concert for Raychel. It was a hit on Raychel. A pang of terror gripped my stomach as the lights went out and the crowd grew eerily silent.

I prayed in the darkness. Please, please, please, God, let there be more people on stage. Don't let it just be Raychel and Kyle. Give them a full band. Make them loud.

Make them overpower the crowd. Keep their minds open to her work. Please please please.

A single, razor-thin bulb high above the stage began to grow stronger, cutting through the black to light on Raychel standing alone on stage in skin-tight white leather. Head bowed, her hair flowed down the right side of her face, pulling that side into shadow. The white light continued to build, radiating off her leather. The light was so strong it began to hurt to look at her, but I could not turn away. I did not want to turn away. She was beautiful. A single shadow hiding a sliver of this angelic apparition. It was fascinating.

An acoustic guitar glided into the hall, almost lost, as I anticipated. Then Kyle appeared in the afterglow of Raychel's light. The low line of the guitar spiraled and turned on itself, wrapping around and repeating a mantra everyone in The Bleeders had grown familiar with. It was "No More Dreams No More." Raychel lifted her head as she sang the haunting opening line.

*"I know a girl
who feels the world
is but a toy
that's why she cries"*

It was then that Raychel finally opened her eyes and looked at the crowd. One thousand painted skulls looked back. They locked into one another and the guitar passed them by, wandered forward for a few bars, and came to an abrupt end as Kyle realized he had lost his singer. Raychel was transfixed on the crowd and the silence continued.

Kyle broke into Raychel's light and tried to whisper in her ear, "Come on, honey. Do something."

Unfortunately for them, the microphone was there and the silence was finally broken.

Someone in the back shouted out, "Yeah, honey, take it off!"

The first response from the rest of the crowd was scattered laughter. Then the copycats came out to play. Finally, the whoops and jeers completed the cacophony. Fully assembled, the noise built on its momentum and grew exponentially. They had lost the room entirely.

Kyle grabbed the microphone to quell the crowd as only he could, "Shut the f**k up!"

Kyle threw off his guitar and leapt into the crowd in the general direction of the taunt. As soon as he landed, someone threw a punch at Kyle and caught him over the eye, spraying blood. Kyle obliterated that person and moved on to anyone else who stood in front of him.

Raychel watched him do it -- frozen and horrorstruck.

People collided into one another. Most away from the fight. Some towards it. A flood of monsters orange security jerseys came running from the stage area to separate the combatants. Three of them grabbed Kyle and pulled him away from the rest of the audience.

Raychel stayed onstage as the club lights were suddenly switched on.

It was over.

It was all over.

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There are those who say that getting backstage at a concert is an art form. I disagree. Or rather, I recommend that if you truly want to get backstage, wait for the lead guitarist to start a riot. Then, while all of the security guards are busy restraining the ruffians, walk straight backstage and wait for an opportunity to talk to whoever you

want. I was not as cavalier then as I am now in describing it. I knew that I would be unwelcome backstage by anyone I knew who was already backstage.

The backstage area was a corridor created by the back wall of the building and a row of glorified rest rooms which the management must have considered dressing rooms. Thankfully, the corridor was strewn with enough of the bar's remaining inventory and leftover club equipment to provide me with ample cover.

I needed that cover almost immediately, as I noticed Laura and Ken Kincaid arguing with one another. The two of them were standing in front of one of the dressing room doors, but showed little inclination of going in. I made the simple assumption that Raychel was inside. I had no choice but to wait for my own opportunity to enter. I tried to make myself inconspicuous, but a corridor is a very difficult place not to be noticed.

“Hey, buddy, you wanna give me a hand?”

The voice came from behind me. I wheeled around to see a 6' 7" monster staring down at me. “Me?”

“No, the stiff next to you, dumba**! Grab those amps and put ‘em in the loading zone.”

He thought I was a roadie. Why wouldn't he? I was backstage. I was wearing black. I wasn't doing anything. Therefore, I must be a roadie. I grabbed the amplifiers and looked at him, “And the loading zone is...?”

Exasperated, he thrust his hand just past my eyes, “Down the hall. On the right. Big door.” He huffed and walked away.

He wanted me to go down the hall. Great. Walk right past Laura and Ken. Then, I was supposed to come back. I saw my opportunity closing fast. Thinking just as fast, I put one of the amps on my shoulder and walked down the corridor. The amplifier shielded my face from Laura and Ken. Perfect. I just hoped they would fail

to recognize my shoes. I walked right past them with no one the wiser. In fact, I would love to see Ken's face as he reads this.

Just as I made it past them, the door to the dressing room flew open. I could feel the breeze from the door whiff across the exposed side of my face. I heard Kyle roar, "Ken! Talk! Now!"

I was most of the way down the hall, but I could hear Ken's underwhelming monotone, "Laura, you'll excuse me?"

"No, I'm coming with you."

I thanked whatever lucky stars might be left in the sky.

Their footsteps came upon me from behind. As he walked past me, Kyle gave me an obligatory shove into the wall followed by his almost apologetic, "Get out of my f**king way!"

I did. I stopped walking and waited for theirs to die away. When they did, I put down my amplifier and walked back down the hallway to Raychel's dressing room. I knocked on the door. No answer. I knocked again.

The sarcasm bled through the door, "If you have to knock, you're not important enough!" Typical Raychel. That was heartening. I opened the door and went inside.

Raychel was sitting in front of a mirror with her face buried in her hands. Tissues were strewn about the counter in front of her. She was still wearing her white leather, but her hair was a mess. Her breathing was in low, staccato rushes followed by calming breezes.

I suddenly felt that this was wrong. I was not meant to see this. I was not important enough to make it through the door, and I was invading her privacy. I turned to leave, but got stopped by her weakened voice, "Lance?"

I turned back to face her, “Yeah, honey.”

Her face fell further, “No!”

I stepped toward her but she stood up and retreated, “No! Not that! You didn’t see that out there! NO!” Her face cracked and began bleeding new tears. She collapsed onto the floor in a heap, repeating, “Not that!”

Now I was the frozen one. I couldn’t leave her like that but she had retreated before. I didn’t know what to do. Worse than that, words were failing me. I didn’t know what to say. I just stood there, watching her at the broken point of her life. Raychel would never be the same after this. No matter what happened between us, I would never get the vision of this night out of my mind. I love Raychel, and not a day goes by when I don’t think of at least one new thing I could have done that would have made that day better for her. My actions failed Raychel. My words failed Raychel. I failed Raychel.

Everyone failed Raychel.

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Someone told me that success comes with a price, but failure adds a 20% gratuity. Each person who failed Raychel that night received their 20% charge.

Ken Kincaid, who booked the concert, lost Terror Trax to Cain International.

Kyle McAllister, who created the disturbance that killed the concert, lost Raychel to Geoffrey MacIntyre.

Laura Douglass, who barred The Bleeders from Raychel’s concert, lost Raychel’s intimate friendship to a parade of others.

I can almost sympathize with all of them. Almost. I cannot, though, because I paid the second heaviest price that night.

I, who could not comfort Raychel in her hour of need, lost my wife that night.

But the heaviest price paid that night was Raychel's.

She lost confidence in everyone she felt was important to her.