

GHOST

An Angela Masters Detective Novel

By Mike Worley

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Dedication

To my wife and principal editor, Nancy, without whose love and support this project would not have been possible.

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Chapter One

Dee-Dah-Deeee. The Santa Rosa, California, Police dispatcher pressed a red button on the dispatch console which sent the three-note tone alert across all four radio channels. The tone told all officers that an emergency message was about to be broadcast.

“Santa Rosa 225 and SR 221, see the man, a possible 187, Zinfandel Fields apartments, unit Frank 2. 225 and 221, your call is code three.”

“SR 225 enroute,” Officer Jared Hagen acknowledged the assignment as he flicked on the emergency lights and siren.

“221 copy and enroute,” Officer Max Rapacon acknowledged as he also lit up his cruiser.

A 187 call, the California Penal Code designation for homicide, was a rare event in Santa Rosa so it spiked every officer’s attention level. “220 copy and enroute,” Sgt. Ted Simmons spoke over the airwaves without prompting. A field supervisor was required to respond to such emergency calls.

The officers responded with emergency lights flashing and sirens knifing through the late afternoon hum. Even though the call was reported as a homicide, there was always the possibility that the victim might still be alive and medical attention could be urgently needed.

Hagen arrived first, parking in front of the G building, next to the F building. A few seconds later, Officer Rapacon arrived, parking in front of the E complex. The two officers cautiously approached the F building. The officers, familiar with the complex, knew that apartment F2 would be on the ground floor closest to the E building.

Standing in the parking lot outside apartment F2 was a 30-ish man with obviously fresh blood staining his white dress shirt and tie, and splattered on his hands and face. Two other people consoled him. As the officers approached, an older man, casually dressed, broke away from the group and approached them.

"I'm Steve Beaudoin, Officers. I live in apartment E3. I came out when I heard a commotion outside and found Bob on his knees, screaming and crying in front of his apartment. That's Bob Jensen there. He said he came home from work and found his wife murdered in their apartment."

"Thank you, Mr. Beaudoin. Wait here please while we talk to Mr. Jensen," Hagen said. Beaudoin nodded his acknowledgement.

"Mr. Jensen, I'm Officer Jared Hagen. Can you tell me what happened?" Hagen placed his hand on the sobbing man's shoulder, while Rapacon discretely stood watch. Seconds later, Rapacon saw the supervisor's car wheel sharply into the parking lot and motioned for Sgt. Simmons to join them.

As Simmons approached, Rapacon moved to the woman who had been with Jensen. "Can I ask you to step over here, ma'am?" he said, leading the woman a short distance away. Simmons assumed the discrete observation of the area.

"Oh my God, Officer. I can't believe this has happened," Jensen said, his voice cracking with emotion.

"Where is your wife, sir?" Hagen prompted.

"She's ... she's in our bedroom in the back of the apartment. She's on the bed and ..." Jensen broke into heaving sobs.

Hagen motioned to Rapacon to join him. "Wait here, please, ma'am," Rapacon said to the woman.

"Let's check it out, Max. The sarge will stay with the vic's husband."

Hagen and Rapacon entered the open front door of apartment F2, their guns drawn. The door opened into a living room which spanned the front of the apartment. Pale green carpet covered the floor. To the right of the front door, against the wall adjoining apartment F1, sat a couch upholstered in red velvet with white and black accents, clashing with the carpet.

A matching love seat sat against the back wall at right angles to the couch. A faux-wood coffee table rested in front of the couch, its narrow end almost reaching the love seat. An inexpensive print of Monet's *Impression, Soleil Levant* in a chintzy frame hung on the back wall over the loveseat.

Across the room against the outside wall, a moderately sized television sat on another coffee table, which matched its counterpart. A few photographs in metal frames sat on the table near the TV.

“This room looks clean,” Hagen said, referring to the lack of evidence of criminal activity rather than the victim’s housekeeping skills.

Rapacón nodded and moved to a doorway next to the loveseat which opened to a hall. A short distance down the hall on the right, another doorway opened into the kitchen, the only room with a light on.

Hagen stood guard while Rapacón inspected the kitchen. He saw no one in the room, which seemed very warm to him. To the right, a small table topped with white Formica and its two matching chairs filled a tight corner of the room.

The young officer noted a tray of raw cookie dough overturned on the floor near the still-lit oven. A woman’s shoe rested on the floor near the cookie tray. Another sheet tray, this one holding baked cookies, rested precariously on the edge of the counter. Beyond the kitchen area was a small pantry and, further down a narrow passageway, a door which opened to the parking lot. No one else was present.

“Clear,” Rapacón said as he returned to the hallway.

On the left side of the hall, a door opened into a bathroom, which Hagen checked. The medicine cabinet was open and appeared to be in disarray, but otherwise the room was clear.

A few feet further, another doorway on the left opened into the bedroom. A few threads of the afternoon sun, peeking through the closed venetian blinds hanging at the lone window, provided the room’s only light.

Even in the dim light, the body of the woman on the bed was clearly visible. She was nude except for a pink bra pulled up above her breasts. She lay on top of the bedcover, a tan quilt, her baby-blue eyes staring blankly at the flocked ceiling. At least four stab wounds marred her torso, although no knife was readily visible. A disorganized pile of women’s clothes rested on the beige carpet near the side of the bed.

The woman’s arms and left leg had been tied to the corners of the bed frame with lengths of rough sisal rope. Her right leg was loose, but a length of rope leading from the bed corner and abrasions on her right ankle suggested that leg had been tied too,

leaving her nearly immobile on the bed. A man's necktie, red silk with a blue diagonal striped pattern, was looped loosely around her neck. Her neck showed signs of bruising.

The sight was bad enough for Rapacon, who had never before seen a violent death. Then his gaze drifted to something that seemed exponentially worse -- a souvenir miniature baseball bat protruded from the victim's vagina, a 'Louisville Slugger' embossed logo clearly visible on the bat's exposed barrel.

Rapacon coughed and covered his mouth, willing himself to hold down the bile that surged in his throat as the sights mixed with the sickly smell of blood filling his nostrils.

Hagen placed two fingers on the side of the woman's neck, checking for a pulse. There was none and the body was cold to his touch.

"She's been dead for a while." Then keying his portable radio, he said, "Dispatch, 225. Confirmed 187 at my location. Request detectives and lab."

Hagen and Rapacon carefully retraced their path out of the room. Further examination of the victim and the scene would wait for the investigators.