



## CHAPTER 1

Inspector Cassandra McCarthy is based on a friend and real fire inspector in a small, North Carolina town, although details of her life were changed to simplify her story and mask her identity. She really does wear pink work boots, but the pink hard hat is still on her wish list.

All characters within the story, other than Cassandra, are fictional including Detective Campos, Chief, Kelan, and all firefighters.

Silver Heights is loosely based on the town of Raeford, North Carolina, although names of fire departments, neighborhoods, and other identifying places have been changed.

Inspections and fires within the story are loosely based on true stories from the experiences of various firefighters and inspectors I read through books and news reports from around the world. In each case, key details were changed to make them my own, so any resemblance to real life is coincidental.

Fire inspectors rarely want to know what anyone else thinks before they investigate a fire for themselves. Most of them develop a routine for how they work a scene. Cassandra's habit of always starting outside and to the left is how my inspiration investigates.

The Fire Marshal's office in my town regularly works with two detectives on suspicious fires and the entire sheriff's department on emergency management.

A small majority of arson arrests in the United States are teenagers. Typically, children set fires accidentally or out of curiosity while teenagers tend to be more malicious—to cause damage or injury to people or property out of revenge or to send a warning. A small percentage of teens set fires simply because they love to watch fire or the effects of fire make them feel powerful.

## CHAPTER 2

Many accelerants leave a rainbow sheen that lies on the top of the water used by firefighters. Accelerants also tend to leave char patterns that indicate where they were poured and how they pooled. Many who use a gas can to pour accelerant will discard the can at the scene, which the detectives can dust for fingerprints.

90% of our fire departments across the United States are entirely or mostly volunteer. Junior firefighters are used as additional volunteers. They receive training along with the other firemen, build support among their family for

emergency workers in the community, and provide a ready source of recruits as they graduate high school. Most of them serve honorably.

When I visited a detective's office in my local Sheriff's Office, it was small, although a little bigger than I describe in the book. Cassandra's real-life office truly is small.

The information on firefighters and inspectors starting fires is as accurate as I could make it from the plethora of complex information available. While it's true that many arsonists do tend to either come from those career fields or from people turned down for those jobs, exact numbers are not known. Those who best understand fire and its habits can be the toughest to catch.

### CHAPTER 3

Inspectors across the country have stories to tell about difficult inspections. The first scene in this chapter was inspired by an actual event in my inspiration's life, although the lady was not the manager of a nail salon and did not give in as easily as the woman in the story did.

Collapsible tanks are used by many rural fire departments to provide a supply of water when a hydrant or other water source (like a pond) are too far away.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency, "electrical failures and malfunctions [cause] one of every eight (13%) of reported home fires, one of every five (20%) of home fire deaths, 11% of home fire injuries, and 20% of the direct property damage from home fires" in 2014. Lighting and wiring are the leading cause of these fires, followed by fans, washers and dryers, space heaters, and air conditioning units.

(Reference: [nfpa.org/~media/files/news-and-research/fire-statistics/latest-estimates/latestestimateselectricalfailures.pdf?la=en](http://nfpa.org/~media/files/news-and-research/fire-statistics/latest-estimates/latestestimateselectricalfailures.pdf?la=en))

### CHAPTER 4

Gangs are becoming a larger problem in small town communities. Between 2005 and 2012, Tennessee saw gang-related crime triple. The FBI's annual National Gang Threat Assessment report in 2011 said, "Gang members are migrating from urban areas to suburban and rural communities to recruit new members, expand their drug distribution territories, form new alliances, and collaborate with rival gangs and criminal organizations for profit and influence." Because smaller communities have a smaller force and are less funded, they are often not as able to respond to the growing threat, making rural areas more attractive to gangs.

(Reference: [policeone.com/gangs/articles/5815982-Gang-crime-increasing-in-small-cities-too/](http://policeone.com/gangs/articles/5815982-Gang-crime-increasing-in-small-cities-too/))

The method Cassandra uses to discover the cause of the fire is a standard method. Fire Inspector's will follow the burn patterns to the area most heavily damaged then begin to pull away one layer at a time (debris, furniture, carpeting, etc.) until they are satisfied with their hypothesis. Evidence is collected in sanitized cans or mason jars and delivered to labs for testing.

On average, candles cause twenty-five fires every day in the United States, and roughly one-third of those started in the bedroom. Most often, these fires start because something flammable, like a curtain, blanket, or item of clothing, came into contact with the flame of the candle.

## CHAPTER 5

Flammable liquids only burn in their gaseous state, but some can turn from liquid to gas (called the flash point) at very low temperatures. For example, gasoline turns to vapor at -40 degrees Fahrenheit, which is why it is so dangerous. Rags used to wipe up gasoline drips or spills give off vapors, then a spark from a discarded cigarette or a powered up chain saw can ignite the rags and start a raging fire.

## CHAPTER 6

After a hose has been used, the firemen must clean it and dry it out before using it again to prevent mold and help extend its life. So they are ready when the fire alarm sounds, each department must maintain multiple lengths of hose that the firemen can trade out for wet or damaged hoses.

## CHAPTER 7

Improper use of extension cords is a major cause of home fires. Extension cords should never be fed through walls, snaked under carpets, or daisy-chained (multiple cords connected in a series) because they can overheat. They can also overheat if they are being used to draw more power than they were designed for, such as when an appliance is plugged into them.