

*extinguishing*  
**EMBERS**

By Carrie Daws

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*When I am afraid, I will trust in You.  
In God, whose word I praise,  
In God I trust; I will not be afraid.  
What can mortal man do to me?  
~ Psalm 56:3-4*

## CHAPTER ONE

*Wednesday, November 25<sup>th</sup>*

If Deputy Fire Marshal Cassandra McCarthy were Catholic, she'd call on the patron saint of fire prevention to help her through this inspection. As it was, she wasn't even sure Saint Catherine would have the patience required for this particular business owner.

"Look," said the petite but muscular woman, one hand on her hip and the other hand flailing about with her words, "I don't mind buying a fire extinguisher—that's just prudent and responsible. But I will not leave that door unlocked all day."

Cassandra felt the lady working her way up to yet another monologue, so she concentrated on her tablet screen, scrolling through the inspection report to make sure she'd checked all the necessary areas. The sunglasses propping her wavy blonde locks back from her face fell forward, and she readjusted them on top of her head.

"This is a place for women to come and work out," the woman continued. "Where they will feel safe to concentrate on themselves for a few minutes out of their overscheduled lives. Where I can pour a bit of health and wellness into their souls! And the surrounding area here is busy with all kinds of who-knows-what kind of men—"

"Ma'am." Cassandra saved the report and clicked the power save button on her tablet. She was all for healthy souls, but this was a bit over the top, and she didn't have time for this woman's social or political views. "Have you ever heard of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory?"

“What!?” The woman stopped her diatribe, apparently confused over Cassandra’s question.

“One hundred and forty-six people died because they were behind locked doors when a fire started. Many of these rules you’re fighting me on today were written based on what we learned from great tragedy.”

Cassandra emphasized each of the last two words and then paused to let them sink in. “I understand your safety concerns, but I also have some concerns based on my training and experience. If a fire starts in the kitchen of the food place next door, the women you serve will not thank you if they are locked inside this room.”

“So what am I supposed to do? Leave the door wide open for all the crazies to come in?”

Clearly Cassandra’s words hadn’t made the impact she was hoping for. She took a steadying breath. “Perhaps the owner will let you install a panic handle on the front door that will allow you to keep it locked on the outside but allow someone on the inside to still get out.”

“I’m not paying for that! It’s not my building. It’s not even my door! I’m just a renter, using the space to allow women a chance to find wellness. Why do I have to go buy a fire extinguisher, and make sure the sprinklers all work, and buy light bulbs for the exit lights, and—”

She was on a roll again, and Cassandra took a slow, deep breath. A woman opened the front door, half-stepping in and earning Cassandra’s eternal gratitude.

“Excuse me. Are you open for business?”

Cassandra watched as the firestorm that had been brewing in the business owner before her transformed into southern charm and congeniality.

“I’m so glad you stopped in to ask,” she said, walking toward the

woman and greeting her with a broad smile.

Cassandra took advantage of the interruption to hightail it out of the building. “I’ll stop by in a couple of days with the official report detailing the few things we discussed,” she said over her shoulder, letting the door close on her words.

She marched to her truck and tossed the file and her tablet into the passenger seat, not even stopping to check her vibrating phone before starting her white Chevy Tahoe and pulling out of the parking space. She needed distance between her and that business owner before she said something completely unprofessional.

Driving a couple minutes down the road, she pulled into a local coffee shop, a large caffeinated drink on her mind. Before getting out of her vehicle, she grabbed her phone to see what she’d missed—a call from her office.

Returning the call, she heard the clerk answer on the second ring. “Silver Heights, Fire Marshal and Emergency Management, Wendy speaking. How may I help you?”

The southern twang coming through each word fell on Cassandra’s ears, calming her anger and improving her mood. “You can deliver my latest inspection report when I get it done.”

“You only offer that up when it’s a doozy,” said Wendy, “and I’ve got a bucket full of my own crazy at the moment, thank you very much.” Cassandra imagined Wendy’s tiny brown braids swaying as her head bobbed with each word.

“You have no idea on this one.”

“Listen, you forget a meeting with FEMA?”

Cassandra groaned. “I didn’t forget. That inspection just ran longer than it should have. Are they there?” Cassandra ruffled through the paperwork in the seat beside her. “It should be the Disaster Assessment Team—no wait.” She found the file she was looking for and opened it to her handwritten list of the meetings with

the various teams with of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “DAT is later this afternoon. TSA is this morning.”

“The airport people?”

“No, Transitional Shelter something or other.” Cassandra put the file back on the seat. “They’ll be going through all the trailers, apartments, and such throughout the county, helping those who need it find temporary housing.”

“I thought that meeting you had first thing this morning was helping people do all that.”

“No,” Cassandra said, pinching the bridge of her nose. She felt a headache coming on and knew the caffeine waiting inside the coffee house would help. “This morning was the Community Outreach Team. They answer questions and help people get registered for assistance.”

“Girlie! How you keepin’ all these things straight in that there head of yours?”

Cassandra let her gaze travel outside the window to the sunny blue skies overhead. She wanted to ignore FEMA, but people were struggling to recover after Hurricane Matthew had swept through their county. Her home and two daughters had weathered the storm well, but others were depending on her to get them the help they needed. It weighed heavily on her shoulders.

“Truth is, Wendy...” She let her thought trail off into silence.

After a moment Wendy responded. “Uh huh. That’s what I was thinkin’.”

Cassandra’s brain took a couple of seconds to process what Wendy had said. “Wait. What did you think?”

“Look, it ain’t like it’s been slow around here. We’ve all been runnin’ around like a scalded haint—you especially.”

“A scalded haint?” Cassandra had lived in the south for thirteen years, but she’d never heard of a haint before.

“You just get yourself a bar of chocolate or a extra large cup of coffee afore you scamper back. I’ll get these FEMA people settled in.”

Cassandra turned off her truck and opened her door. Walking into the coffee shop, she said, “Thanks, Wendy. I’ll see you in about ten minutes.”

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### *Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup>*

Normally, Cassandra and her two girls headed to her family in upstate New York for holidays, but this year they’d decided to stay home. With the hurricane recovery going on, Cassandra couldn’t have gotten the time off anyway. The morning had been full of laughter as they’d worked together in the kitchen to prepare their Thanksgiving feast, complete with a fudge pie and homemade vanilla ice cream.

Jessica’s small turkey was a touch dry, but nothing that the gravy couldn’t handle. Cassandra savored another bite of mashed potatoes, soaking in her girls’ chatter about projects due at school after the holiday weekend and Black Friday sales. Her husband, Robert, would have loved every minute, and she felt his death more poignantly than usual.

“You okay, Mom?” Jessica grabbed another deviled egg off the serving platter. “You got quiet on us.”

“Just enjoying the moment,” said Cassandra.

“Are you going shopping with us in the morning?” Ashley pushed aside the remaining green beans on her plate and reached for a biscuit and the honey jar.

“Not if you’re leaving at 3:30 in the morning.” She picked up her

plate and walked to the sink. She turned on the water to start rinsing dishes before loading the dishwasher.

“But all the best clothing sales start between three and four! We really should be leaving by 2:30, but Maddie’s mom wanted the extra hour to sleep.”

Cassandra smiled, rolling her eyes at her youngest. “I can’t think of a single shirt I want bad enough to call me out of bed that early.”

Ashley appeared beside her with more dishes from the table. “But they’ll have winter jammie pants for only five dollars each. And my favorite jeans for fifty percent off!”

“I can’t say I really need more pajamas or blue jeans.”

“What about movies?” Jessica opened the cabinet filled with storage containers. “You know you like to relax with a good movie, and these are some of the best prices of the year. Some stores will have them as low as two dollars!”

Cassandra shrugged. “I can never remember what we own, so I never know what to buy.” Cassandra dried her hands as her cell phone started buzzing. “Besides, that will give you girls something you can get for me for Christmas.”

Her phone buzzed again, and she reached for it. Text messages from both her boss and the detective that worked with them alerted her to a suspicious fire just a couple of neighborhoods from her house.

“Conflicting reports coming in to 911,” typed her boss, Chief. “Fire and rescue responding.”

“Possible homeowner on premises,” added Detective Samuel Campos. “En route. ETA 15 minutes.”

“In Raleigh,” wrote Chief, neatly laying the burden of inspecting this fire at her feet.

“Got it,” she texted back to both of them. “Be en route in five minutes.”

She unplugged her phone from the charging cord and headed to grab her pink work boots. “Girls, I’ve got to go.”

“Another fire?” Ashley called after her. “Seriously? Today?”

Cassandra stepped back through the door long enough to throw the hand towel she was still holding at Ashley before sitting down on the couch to tie her boots. “Yep. The guys are just responding, so I may be a while.”

*Did You Miss Book 1?*

# KINDLING EMBERS



Inspector Cassandra McCarthy never thought she'd be raising her two daughters alone, but her husband's unexpected death forced her to find a career. Now working beside a retired Special Operations soldier and veteran fireman, she serves her small North Carolina town, protecting them from hazards they don't understand. She loves what she does and trusts God to provide—until a series of unexplained fires hits too close to home.

*Book 2*

# IGNITING EMBERS



Deputy Fire Marshal Cassandra McCarthy thought her life would settle down once the teenagers who had been starting nuisance fires were caught. But a hurricane heading to Silver Heights threatens to destroy both property and lives, and another unexplained fire evokes fears of a serial arsonist. Can she prepare the town for the looming emergency and protect them from the danger living in their midst?

Also by Carrie Daws

# CROSSING SERIES



**Book 1: *Crossing Values:*** For years, Amber traipsed around the Northwest avoiding the skeletons in her closet. As winter plants itself firmly across the Rockies, she decides to take a chance on a job at a logging company with a family different from any she's ever known before. Could they truly be genuine? Could Faye understand the trauma from her past or Peter think of her as more than just the winter office help? Could this family really hold the key to what she's seeking?

**Book 2, *Ryan's Crossing:*** After ten years, Ryan's parents found his runaway sister. As he meets her before her wedding, he must decide where she will fit into his life and what his future will look like. Seeing the town where his sister lives only brings more questions. Portland may be the better choice for him in his upcoming move, but small town life appeals to him. Is it the friendly people or the sister of the groom?

**Book 3, *Romancing Melody:*** A Crossing Journey: Newlywed Melody Podell gives up everything she has ever known to follow her

husband, a soldier in the US Army, to Fort Bragg, NC. Soon after giving birth to their first child and dealing with her husband's deployment to a dangerous part of the world, tragedy strikes forcing Melody to travel back to home. Walking back into the lives of her old friends in Crossing, Oregon, is the last thing Melody wants to do, but could she be missing something? Is God really in control?

**Book 4, *Crossing's Redemption*:** Many would describe Patricia Guire as an eclectic force to be reckoned with, but something is wrong. Amber Yager feels called to love on her, yet as she discovers Patricia's hidden past, she is drawn in to a group that brings disquiet to her own soul. Will the love she's found in Crossing be taken from her? Or could Amber and Patricia find peace as God shines light into the darkest places of their hearts?

For more information about  
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