

“The air around him seemed to buzz, and the eye contact he made with me was so direct and intense that I wondered if I had ever really looked anybody in the eye before.”

Robert Hare

Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us

HEART OF ICE
A TRIPLE THREAT NOVEL
LIS WIEHL with APRIL HENRY

Chapter 1

Southwest Portland

The fuel sloshed inside the red metal gas can, splashing in rhythm with Joey Decicco’s steps. As soon as the house at the end of the long driveway came into view, he stopped and took stock. Wooden. Two-story. On the porch, a rocking chair and a blue bike with training wheels. And no lights on, no car parked in front. Nobody home.

Just like Sissy—or Elizabeth, as she called herself now—had said.

Because Joey didn’t want to kill anyone. He had already caused enough death.

The sun was setting, but the fading light was enough for what he needed to do. Joey walked to one corner, carefully tilted the can and began to trace a line around the house, drawing an invisible noose. By the time he finished, it was nearly full dark. He trailed the last of the gasoline and diesel mixture back up along the driveway.

Pulling a silver Zippo from his overall pocket, he flipped open the cover. The thin metallic clank gave him goose bumps, as it had every time since he was eleven.

It was showtime.

Fire made Joey powerful. He could cause ordinary, boring people to wake in fright. He made the alarms sound. Made the fire trucks race down the road, sirens wailing. And right

behind them stampeded the television cameras and reporters. All of them eager to look upon his handiwork.

Without fire, Joey was nothing. People made a point of not looking at him. At the patchwork skin on his face and his scarred left hand. But fire drew their eyes like iron filings to a magnet. They couldn't *not* look at fire.

He flicked the lighter and then bent down, shielding the quivering blue flame with his free hand. With a whoosh, a line of fire raced away from him, advancing into the dark.

This was Joey's favorite part. The beginning. He had surprised the night. What was supposed to be dark was suddenly filled with light and heat.

The flames circled the house like a lasso, then began to crawl up the sides. Joey's hands were clenched, his eyes intent as he followed the spreading fire. But like a kid determined to spot the magician's sleight-of-hand, sometimes even Joey was surprised by the fire's next move. The blaze leapfrogged over the open porch and to the top story. A window shattered. With a *whoosh*, the curtains caught. For a second, Joey thought he saw a flicker of movement, but he told himself it was a trick of the shifting light. There was no one home. Sissy had promised.

Heat tightened his skin. He stood at the end of the driveway, ready to slip into the woods as soon as he heard the sirens. But with no nearby neighbors, they were slow in coming.

Then came a moment when Joey knew the fire would win. The sound shifted, like an engine shifting to a higher gear. The flames must have found a new, more concentrated source of fuel. Cans of paint in the basement, a natural gas line—something. He sniffed, but couldn't smell anything except the sweet smell of burning wood. But still, the crackle and hiss became a roar, building and echoing until it was a wall of noise.

Finally he heard sirens wailing in the distance. He moved further back into the trees. As soon as he saw the first fire truck, he would slip away and make his way back to his El Camino. Like a man leaving his lover before a long journey, Joey feasted his eyes on the fire's beauty—the undulating colors, the flickering flames licking the sky, and the great pillar of smoke visible only because it blocked out the evening's first stars.

Tomorrow morning, the house would be nothing but charred timbers and puddles, gray ash still drifting through the air. And the fire would be dead.

But for now, it was alive. And so was Joey.

“Believe me, she deserves it,” Elizabeth had told him through gritted teeth as she gave him a hand-drawn map and five hundred bucks. Joey had been desperate for cash. It wasn't easy to get a job when you looked like he did. Not when a background check—even something as simple as typing his name into Google—turned up the truth of who he was. What he had done. So he needed the money.

But the thing was, Joey thought, his heart beating wildly in his chest as he watched the hungry flames, he would have done this for free.