



Fire and Ashes

Elaine Viets

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In the exclusive, gated enclave of Olympia Forest Estates, death investigator Angela Richman watches a mansion go up in a fiery blaze. With it, seventy-year-old financier Luther Delor, a drunken, bed-hopping rhinestone cowboy. Embroiled in a bitter divorce, Delor may have scandalized Chouteau Forest, but his murder has united it against the accused: Delor's twenty-year-old girlfriend, Kendra Salvato, an "outsider." With an engagement ring bigger than Chouteau County, she's being railroaded straight to death row as a gold-digging killer.

All there is against Kendra is vicious gossip and anti-Mexican rage, and both are spreading like wildfire. Meanwhile, Angela is trying to douse the flames with forensic work that's putting the Forest on edge. After all, facts could implicate one of their own. Now, sifting through the ashes of a vicious crime—and the guilty secrets of the privileged—only Angela can get to the truth, and prevent an innocent woman from getting burned.

Fire and Ashes Details

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Author : Elaine Viets

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Terri says

This is the second book in the Angela Richman, Death Investigator series. When Angela is called to a death scene after a fire in the Forest (a very affluent area), she finds a man killed in the fire while his fiancee' is suspected of his murder. Because the Victim was wealthy and his much younger (and "Mexican") fiancee', Kendra is automatically convicted in the minds of law enforcement and the community. It appears that The Forest is very polarized along economic divides and there is a very strong racism embedded in the culture. Though there had been a series of non-lethal arsons leading up to the murder, Kendra and her father are arrested and accused of all the crimes. Angela, isn't so sure. She and her friends want to find the truth behind the racial accusations.

It is a very well told story with strong characterizations and makes you think a lot about insider/outsiders in communities and the quick blame that is often thrown around at the expense of the truth which I find very timely as well.

I love this series and enjoyed the dramatic finale -- the suspense was palpable. Oh - and it has horses used as stress therapy too -- an added bonus!

Kelly says

I was drawn into this book by the main character, Angela Richman, and the interesting job that she has as a death investigator. I don't think that I have ever read a book whose main character has this job. I found it quite interesting and learned a lot of information about both dead bodies and also about horses, Angela's escape when she is stressed. I was hooked from the beginning of this book and look forward to reading the first book in the series, Brain Storm, to learn more about Angela and her backstory.

Betty says

I have always enjoyed Elaine Viets' books and this one does not disappoint. This one is not a light fluffy mystery and deals with series. I could feel Angela Richman's grief, her 6 strokes, how the horses relaxed her, sloppy police inquiry, and the altitudes of the town toward those of Mexican heritage. I found it educational about the profession of a death investigator. I like learning about the difference from a coroner and a homicide detective. The new forensic information on how a fire starts is informative. I like the fact that Angela did not do anything stupid to put herself in danger.

Angela Richman is called to the scene of a fire victim to record the details of the death and the area where it occurred. The victim is a drunken seventy-year-old wealthy man. She recognized the man the public's view of the man was changing from a dirty old man to a man of honor because of the way his death happened. The hostile feeling toward his 20-year-old Mexican fiancee was increasing. The homicide detective had made up his mind that his fiancee was guilty and interrupted the forensic evidence to fit his decision. Angela will need the help her friends to save the Mexican-American and her father from death. The subplot of a series of fires added much to the story. I need to read the first book BRAIN STORM. I highly recommend this book.

Disclosure: I received a free copy from the author through NetGalley for an honest review. I would like to thank them for this opportunity to read and review the book. The opinions expressed are my own.

Kathy L. Brown says

I listened as audiobook on a car trip. Hearing a book read aloud exposes every flaw. Further editing and tightening would benefit story. the protagonist is a great character, a woman struggle with real personal challenges as she also fights for justice. her job, death investigator is interesting and a great excuse for sleuthing. I felt the book was solid up to the last 3rd or so. The main crime was solved, but many logical leaps were required of the criminal justice system to keep the sympathetic, wrongly accused people in the hot seat as Angela continues to investigate the secondary crimes.

Karen says

This is another great read from Elaine Viets.

Angela is still dealing with the death of her husband, and working to take care of the newly dead. She is interested in getting justice for those who have not died naturally or by accident.

This book deals with extreme prejudice in a community that separates their members into a class structure. If you are not a founding family, they don't see you as human.

Ultimately this works to their disadvantage on several layers. They don't see danger where it lurks, and they lose out on valuable people leaving their community to find a better life.

I bought this in audiobook from audible. I also have it in ebook.

Mary Garrett says

FIRE AND ASHES by Elaine Viets

Wow! There is so much happening in this book, and so fast! Fires, scandals, social divisions, dealing with grief at one's own pace, parents who care and who don't . . . and race horses who like peppermints and having their tongues held. The threads form an intricate lace pattern, much like the lace of a certain item of almost-clothing. Angela Richman, Death Investigator, gets the sometimes thankless job of trying to untangle all the threads to head off a miscarriage of justice fueled by class snobbery and racism. I put so many post-its to mark memorable passages that the book now resembles a porcupine, but I'll only share only *one, to avoid spoilers. You'll want to read for yourself, and be prepared to put other activities on hold when you do. It's so compelling, with one of the most satisfying endings ever! . . . and I love Big Al the Pizza Dude!

There's a page of local lingo at the end of the book, and technical terminology elsewhere, like HVAC - heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (I'd forgotten the V) and I predict "caned" meaning "walk with the aid of a cane" will be in mainstream usage soon, if not already — so useful.

*Life-saving quote/PSA: "When most people see small flames, they don't think the fire is dangerous yet.

They don't realize how quickly the fire can grow . . . Same with smoke . . . People think white smoke isn't as dangerous as black smoke. Not true."

Ed says

#2 in the Angela Richman, Death Investigator series. Angela receives a clean bill of health so perhaps her series of strokes, medical malpractice, and recovery will not feature in future books. I realize it's an autobiographical element, but Angela needs to get a life. She abruptly ended her luncheon with Ken with neither a subsequent explanation or apology - a major dangling thread. Finally, the community is filled with privileged bigots. Angela's parents were servants, so she doesn't fit in, and she's white so she doesn't fit into the Mexican underclass, either. The detective, fire investigator, and medical examiner are prejudiced and incompetent. In the fourteen days covered by the book, she has to investigate three cases- a process of a few hours at most. She has one friend. Why stay in a community you despise for the sake of a part time job and bad memories. I much prefer the authors humor - in her Dead End Job and Mystery Shopper series.

Wealthy, 70-year-old Luther, an obnoxious drunk, was divorcing his wife of 40 years and planning to marry Kendra Salvato, a beautiful 20-year-old manicurist. Det. Ray Greiman and fire investigator Capt. Douglas Hachette are sure that Kendra murdered Luther in an act of arson, but Angela Richman, the death investigator for Chouteau County, has her doubts. Kendra's Mexican heritage and the unlikely engagement are enough to convict her in the eyes of the residents of Olympia Forest Estates, where rampant prejudice is the rule and where Angela finds suspects other than Kendra.

Christine says

I have been a fan of this author's "Dead-End Job" and "Mystery Shopper" cozy series for quite some time, and now I can add the "Angela Richman" series to my list of favorites. This series features Angela Richman as a "death investigator" in a wealthy suburb of St. Louis. Angela's job is to gather and analyze evidence from crime scenes in assistance to the medical examiners.

"Fire and Ashes" is the second book in the series, a follow-up to "Brain Storm" which described Angela's brush with death after suffering multiple strokes. This is a more serious, more complex series than the previously mentioned cozy series and Angela is a complicated, but likeable character. Angela is back to work, but still recovering from the strokes and subsequent brain surgery. She is also grieving the loss of her husband and despite the attempts of interested men and well-meaning friends, she is not ready to date again. Although the tone of this series is somewhat dark, there is plenty of the author's wonderful sense of humor throughout the book to lighten some of the tragedies that occur in Angela's personal and professional life.

In "Fire and Ashes", Angela is one of the few people in town to believe in the innocence of a beautiful young woman of Mexican heritage accused of murdering her much older fiancé, Luther Delor. The elite gated community Olympia Forest Estates, within the town of Chouteau Forest, bands together against Kendra Salvato, who they see as an outsider because of her ethnic background, even though she was born and raised along with their own children. Angela is intelligent, a thorough investigator, and is determined that Kendra is treated fairly. She teams up with not only with her best friend Katie, who is the assistant medical examiner, but also Katie's boyfriend, Monty, the attorney representing Kendra. The solution of Luther's death is unexpected and provides closure to the case and those involved. I look forward to more books in this unique,

well-written series, which will appeal to fans of Kathy Reichs.

I received this book from NetGalley through the courtesy of Thomas and Mercer. The book was provided to me in exchange for an honest review.

Barbara Tobey says

Realistic racism and class distinction form the basis for this mystery. Exciting and some surprises along the way. I really appreciated the epilogue. Nice to see things wrapped up in a satisfactory manner (well, some of the characters may not see it as being satisfactory). I look forward to reading the next one in this series. The publisher provided a copy via NetGalley for my voluntary review.

Linda Baker says

I did not like Fire and Ashes quite as much as the first in the series, which was fascinating in its close look at the effects of stroke. Angela is recovering now and back to work when she is faced with a string of arsons culminating in a murder. I also did not much care for the narrator. She was perfectly competent but not gripping. I am interested to see how Angela continues to grow and recover more fully.

Mimi says

This was a book I really enjoyed reading. So much so, that I ended up adding a bunch of other books by Elaine Viets to my list of 'books to be read' (or TBR ;))

The story, which is the second one in a series, follows Angela Richman, who's a death investigator. Which sounds a lot more ominous than it is, because basically, what a DI does, is go out to the scene of a death and record every detail about the corpse. So expect a couple of gory scenes, although I must admit, the author handled some gruesome scenes really tasteful.

Add to that the fact that Angela is recovering from a series of strokes and brain surgery, is a recent widow and usually investigates deaths in a community that's isn't very accepting of outsiders, it all makes for a rather interesting character. She's not all doom and gloom, or totally reckless, or 'look at how bravely I'm living on'. No, she's a nice, believable balance of all these factors.

When one of Chouteau Forest's (a gated, rich folks community) more illustrious figures's house goes up in flames, with him inside, and his Mexican American mistress barely escaping, all hell brakes loose for the poor girl.

Angela, knowing the girl, and noticing how she's getting railroaded by the uptight community, takes it upon herself to start looking for the real culprit.

And (thank god!) she doesn't do it in the clueless cozy mystery style of walking straight into danger. She handles herself rather well, and spurns on the professionals to dig deeper, as well as assisting in the investigation.

Besides the unfortunate death, and the outcasting of hardworking people, there's also an arsonist active in the neighbourhood...

I don't want to reveal too much, because it really is a nice read, not very shocking, but the story meanders along at a pleasant pace, there's a few nice twists and the climax is fairly exciting.

I received a copy of this book through Netgalley in return for an honest review. This has had no influence on my opinion of the book.

skw says

I won this book in a goodreads giveaway. Goodreads encourages, but does not require, winners to review the books they've won.

This is such a GOOD series. Our heroine is believable, intelligent, likeable and human. The puzzles are interesting, challenging, believable and mostly solvable. Ms. Viets writing is straightforward and well-constructed. It makes for a really engrossing book.

I have no quarrel with the plot line, character development, puzzle solution or anything else in these two novels. To me, they're practically perfect. (Nothing is truly perfect.) The characters grow over the course of these two novels and I look forward to seeing where they go from here.

I recommend this series to EVERYONE, no matter what your favorite genre is. Read them. I think you'll enjoy them.

Cynthia Daniel says

Fire and Ashes by Elaine Viets

This book is a very good story. I really liked the way Angela was able to get through her handicap of many strokes and still figure out and solve the case. It would be extremely helpful though if you could go back and read book 1 in the series Brainstorm. I will be reading more from Elaine Viets.

(I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway)

J. Roslyn says

Elaine Viets' s new "Death Investigator" series is a world apart from her "Dead-End Job" and "Mystery Shopper" mysteries. While the protagonists in those novels led problematic lives (including hiding from court orders by staying off the grid), Viets's new Angela Richman novels are interestingly darker. In both the first book in the series, "Brain Storm," and this second novel, Viets successfully depicts a physically and emotionally flawed stroke survivor who investigates often gruesome deaths while grieving for a recently deceased husband. In addition, although not as stark as "Brain Storm," "Fire and Ashes" pulls no punches when describing the white privilege demanded by the wealthy residents in Angela Richman's town of Chouteau Forest, Missouri.

Richman, back to investigating deaths after recovering from six strokes and a coma, is tasked with investigating the deaths of a wealthy, but grubby sexist-70 year old, and a seventeen year old heroin user. In both cases, in order to find the truth, Richman must push back against assumptions of guilt made by the

police, prosecutor, and leaders of society, based on bigotry concerning local Mexican-Americans.

Viets's mastery of criminal forensic science is impressive, as is her skillful ability to give voice to the characters depicted. Several years ago, her narrative concerning overt law enforcement and prosecutorial bigotry probably would have been viewed as unrealistic and over the top. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said today.

Without a doubt, this book should be at the top of summer reading lists.

(In return for an honest review, I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.)

Grace Koshida says

In Missouri, Chouteau County death investigator Angela Richman watches flames destroy a multi-million-dollar mansion. Its owner, 70-year-old Luther Delor, is a drunken, lecherous businessman with a chain of sleazoid payday loan storefronts. Luther's fiancée, 20-year-old Mexican-American manicurist Kendra Salvato is blamed for the fatal fire. The gated community of Olympia Forest Estates quickly closes ranks around the sleazy Luther, rewriting his history and condemning both Kendra and her father Jose of murder and a series of unsolved arsons in the area. Convinced that the police and medical examiner have done a shoddy job, Angela works secretly with her friend Katie and Kendra's lawyer Marty to help find evidence to clear Kendra of the crimes. Then Angela gets called to another death scene when a teenager is found dead of a heroin overdose. But things look suspicious when recent purchases that can be used to set a fire are found in the victim's car. When Angela gets a tip that the teenaged arsonists are planning to set a fire at a nearby horse stable, she sets a trap to catch them in the act.

Elaine Viets is known for her cozy mystery series but this hard boiled thriller is another welcome read.

I received an ARC from Netgalley and Thomas and Mercer in exchange for an honest review.
