

# THE TOY MAKER

MELANIE FLYNN

A missing woman.

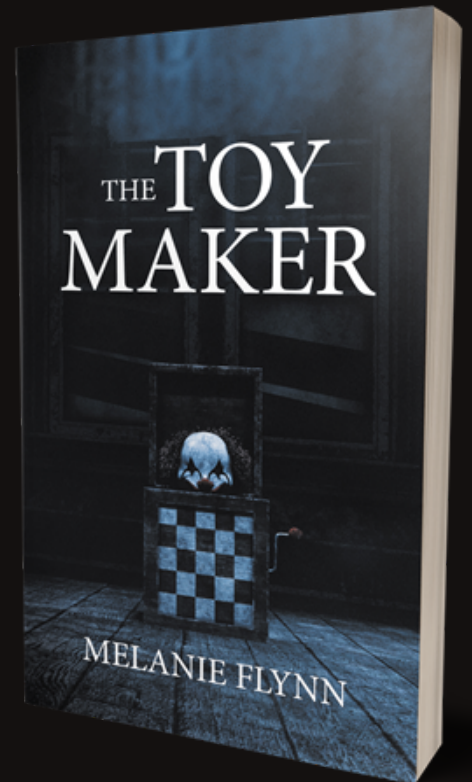
A serial killer on the loose.

A smart-mouthed private investigator on the case.

What could go wrong?

Rylee Scott is a New York private investigator with a secret: she's psychic and allergic to her cat. But only one of these secrets has the power to break her. When she's hired to find a missing woman, she finds herself racing against the clock to save her before she becomes the next victim of a prolific serial killer, the Toy Maker, who turns his victims into beautiful and horrific life-size versions of classic toys. After years of living under the radar, Rylee will have to enlist the help of the NYPD if she has any hope of bringing the woman home safe.

Calum Reese is an NYPD detective with a southern accent, a chip on his shoulder and a secret of his own. On the hunt for the Toy Maker, he finds himself working with a certain private investigator who knows things she shouldn't and refuses to play by his rules. Can they put aside their differences to catch the killer before more bodies drop? Or will they be drowning in corpses before long?



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## ABOUT MELANIE FLYNN

Melanie Flynn was born and raised in Gander, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. She is a graduate of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador where she got her Bachelor of Arts majoring in English and minoring in Psychology. She went on to graduate from the University of New Brunswick Law School with a Juris Doctor degree. Currently she is a practicing lawyer and small business owner. She co-hosts a variety podcast called Inconsistently Consistent. She is an animal lover and has two cats and a German Shepherd.

## CHAPTER ONE - RYLEE

A DIMLY lit workshop, a detailing brush lovingly caressing the face of the small plastic ballerina. Handcrafted perfection. He laid down his brush and set the figurine atop its pedestal. Then, turning the key on the side, he dropped his hands to his lap, sat back and watched as she twirled slowly. Soft tinkling music began to play. She would be beautiful. His best work yet.

CRASH! A loud metal clanging disturbed the craftsman and woke Rylee with a start. Rylee Scott lay tangled in her bedclothes, a thin sheen of sweat coating her, breathing heavily as if she'd just run a mile.

"Ugh," she grunted with the unexpected weight of her orange tabby Jasper hitting her square in the chest. "You're heavier than you look, J."

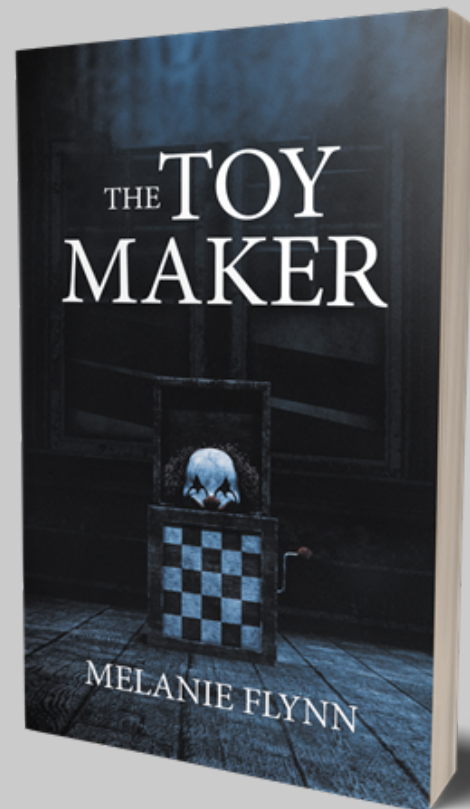
Jasper meowed indignantly but began kneading his paws and claws into her chest; the 'feed me I'm withering away to nothing dance' had begun. She scratched his head affectionately, the manipulative bastard. The memory of the dream was already slipping away; it hadn't even been stressful. Just some guy making a doll or something, altogether pretty anticlimactic for her. But her heart continued to race, and Jasper continued to try and soothe her. As far as her dreams went, this one was pretty much unworthy of note, but something about it stuck with her. The way the man touched the toy and caressed it like a lover. It was creepy. She felt uncomfortable watching it, let alone that she was the man in the dream. Stop, it wasn't real. It didn't deserve her attention, I so she had to shake it off. After a moment of consciously pushing the dream away from her mind, she sat up, lifting Jasper off her as she did. She kicked the covers off and swung her legs out of the bed, groaning at the stiffness in her limbs. At twenty-eight, she shouldn't feel this sore in the morning. She tentatively touched her feet to the floor and winced at the cold.

Jasper responded by winding himself around her legs, purring, as he did every morning to ensure she hadn't forgotten to feed him between the long, arduous journey from lying horizontal to becoming vertical. As if she could. She had fallen victim to the cat's begging on more than one occasion. Once, she had fed him a second breakfast before she was fully awake in the morning. He was devious like that. It was only five o'clock, but she might as well get going. It's not like she'd be able to get back to sleep at this point anyway.

Rylee bent down and scooped up Jasper, who immediately cuddled into her neck, purring loudly. She carried him out to the kitchen and let him down on the counter to feed him his breakfast. She placed the dish in front of him, and he immediately began scarfing down the food. She rolled her eyes and said, "savage" under her breath. She started the coffee maker and then went about her morning routine. Once she was washed, dressed and sitting atop a bar stool at her kitchen counter drinking her first coffee of the day, she felt much less zombie-like. Rylee drank her coffee and ate her bagel while scrolling through her emails and social media on her phone; Jasper perched on the counter next to her as if he was reading her emails over her shoulder. He wasn't, at least as far as she could tell. Rylee never did wait until she got to the office before diving into a new case. Luckily there was an email from a man wanting to hire Rylee to find his sister, who had gone missing from Columbia University's campus yesterday.

"Oh, a missing person case could be interesting, definitely better than another cheating scandal," she said, absentmindedly stroking Jasper. "You're right, J. Those do pay the bills." This missing person case might be just the thing she needed to get her out of her slump. The office was profitable, but definitely not at a point where Rylee could turn down paying jobs. "Speaking of, I need to get moving. The adulterous masses wait for no one, J," she said, grabbing her leather jacket and heading to the door.

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