

• THE CATE KINKAID FILES • BOOK 2 •

Dolled Up to Die

A Novel



Lorena
McCourtney


Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Lorena McCourtney, *Dolled Up to Die*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2013 by Lorena McCourtney

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McCourtney, Lorena.

Dolled up to die : a novel / Lorena McCourtney.
pages cm. — (The Cate Kinkaid Files ; Book 2)

ISBN 978-0-8007-2159-6 (pbk.)

1. Women private investigators—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3563.C3449D65 2013

813'.54—dc23

2013002702

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

With thanks to Rosemary Rhodes for her helpful information about the life-size dolls she creates, and to Sherrie Vig for introducing me to the dolls.

◆ 1 ◆

Case closed!

Until she'd become an assistant private investigator, Cate Kinkaid had never realized how satisfying those words were. Gleefully, she threw her hands up and clapped. She added the time and date to the report and hit the print button.

Okay, the case didn't rank up there with capture of a most-wanted serial killer or an episode of *CSI* on TV, but she had successfully cleared Ridley Jackson of his wife's suspicion that he was cheating on her. Ridley had decided to learn to play the saxophone, knew his wife would disapprove, and had been practicing with friends in a barn out in the country. Having heard the sounds emanating from Ridley's sax, Cate suspected a barn might be the appropriate setting for his musical talent. But her job was just to uncover the facts, not to critique them.

She changed to jeans worn thin at the knees and a faded sweatshirt for an evening with Mitch on a cleanup job for the Helping Hands project sponsored by the church. She and Mitch Berenski had been dating more or less regularly since they met on her very first case. She was headed for the door when the office phone rang. She jumped back to answer it. Mitch? No, an unfamiliar name and number on the caller ID.

“Belmont Investigations. Assistant Investigator Cate Kinkaid speak—”

“Lucinda, Marianne, and Toby have been shot!” a breathless voice interrupted. “All of them! Shot! And—”

“Wait, wait! If there’s been a shooting, call 911 immediately! They’ll send the police and an ambulance.”

“I did call the police. I guess they’re coming, but they don’t seem in any big hurry to get here.”

Three shootings, and officers weren’t responding with screaming sirens and screeching tires? That didn’t sound like the capable and effective Eugene, Oregon, police force Cate had dealt with. She glanced at the caller ID screen again. J. Kieferson. Something about the name seemed familiar, but she couldn’t place it. “Mrs. Kieferson, are you all right?”

“Of course I’m not all right,” the woman snapped. “I told you, Lucinda, Marianne, and Toby have been shot! Marianne’s head is gone.”

A head gone, shot away? “Are you alone? Could the shooter still be nearby?”

“I don’t know! I just got home a few minutes ago and found this *massacre*.”

“Mrs. Kieferson, you should—” Cate started to tell the woman to lock the doors and stay inside until the police arrived, but if the killer could still be in the house, that was hardly good advice. “Can you get to your car?”

“I guess. Maybe.”

“Then go to the car and drive away from there. Contact the police again and tell them where you are. I’d like to help, but violent crime situations are outside our area of investigation.”

Uncle Joe had emphasized that when he hired her. Belmont Investigations handled routine matters only. Background checks, serving subpoenas, insurance investigations. Although Cate’s very first case had unexpectedly rocketed right into murder.

“You need the police,” Cate repeated.

“You won’t come, then?”

The woman wasn’t sounding too rational, but her reproachful tone jabbed Cate’s conscience button. Which immediately shouted, *You can’t just ignore this woman and three people shot!* Although barging into a triple homicide scene was a situation Mitch would probably classify as right up there with skydiving with an umbrella. He’d accepted her becoming a full-time private investigator, but he wasn’t exactly a cheerleader. He always seemed to think she needed a protector or rescuer, maybe a full-time bodyguard.

“How did you happen to call me?” Cate asked.

“You were highly recommended.” Before Cate could ask “Recommended by whom?” Mrs. Kieferson rushed on. “Please, come! I’m at 17453 Randolph Road.”

That was some distance outside Eugene. County sheriff’s department territory rather than the city police. Cate hadn’t dealt with them before.

“I’ve got to go now,” the woman said. “I hear—”

“Wait—”

The phone clicked and went silent. Cate immediately tried to call the number on the caller ID back, but, after five rings, an answering machine clicked on. Leaving a message seemed pointless, and she punched in Mitch’s cell phone number. Tonight he could do his protective, knight-in-shining-armor thing. Except that what she got was voice mail.

All the blessings of technology.

She tapped her fingers on the desk. She could wait for Mitch to call back so he could accompany her. But who knew when that might be? She could call Uncle Joe on his cell phone and ask for instructions. He was leaving much of the day-to-day business at Belmont Investigations up to her now, but this was definitely out-of-the-ordinary business. But she hated to

interrupt his and Rebecca's anniversary celebration at some classy restaurant.

Octavia jumped up on the desk, her white tail twitching. She tilted her head at Cate, then batted the knob on the top drawer of the desk.

"You want me to look in there?" Cate asked. "Oh no. You may be the richest cat in Oregon. You may soon be queen of your very own Kitty Kastle, and you may accidentally have been helpful before. *Accidentally helpful*," Cate emphasized. "But I don't think now is the time to take advice from you."

Octavia was an indiscriminate batter anyway. Pens, keys, stray coins, bare toes. Although Cate did have to open the drawer . . .

"Only because the county map is in there," she informed the cat as she yanked the knob. "But you really should get up to date, you know. Everyone uses GPS now."

Except her. She hadn't been able to afford it for her car yet, and Uncle Joe stubbornly believed GPS might send you on a wild ride to nowhere.

She grabbed the map, then spotted something else in the drawer and hesitated.

Uncle Joe's gun and holster, long unused but freshly cleaned and oiled. In a triple homicide situation, having a gun for backup might be a good idea. Was the gun, not a map, what Octavia had in mind?

She slammed the drawer shut. Sometimes it seemed as if her deaf cat knew unlikely things, but Cate was not about to rank them above coincidence.

She couldn't take the gun anyway. Uncle Joe had done the paperwork to make her assistant PI status official, but the state's instructions about guns had been specific.

"Remember, oh brilliant furry one? I can't carry a gun until I'm a fully licensed private investigator." And that wouldn't

be for some months yet. Surely deputies from the sheriff's department, well supplied with guns, would arrive before she got to the house on Randolph Road anyway.

"So you're not so clever after all," Cate told the cat.

Octavia departed the office with tail held high, probably headed for Cate's bedroom. Or maybe Uncle Joe and Rebecca's room, since Octavia seemed of the opinion her presence was desirable everywhere in the house. A definite don't-say-I-didn't-warn-you message stiffened her upright tail.

Cate took a moment to locate Randolph Road on the map, grabbed a jacket, and headed out to her old Honda. She'd call Mitch again from along the way.

Clouds blotted the stars and warned that fall rains were coming soon. Leaves littered the yard and street, and a gusty wind swirled piles at the curb. She took the freeway to avoid slow city traffic, then headed west through wooded hills. By the time she made several turns and reached gravelled Randolph Road, the first drops of rain splattered the windshield.

She pulled over and tried Mitch's number again. Again that frustrating voice mail. She left another message and pulled back onto the road. There were no prominent house signs posted out here, just numbers on the rural mailboxes.

And there it was in her headlights: 17453. She braked. A bullet hole punctuated the 4. Dread at what she was about to encounter kept Cate's foot on the brake. Blood. Death. A killer still lurking? Mrs. Kieferson might even be dead by now.

A dilapidated house stood on the right, the weedy driveway banked with overgrown blackberry bushes. It was obviously unoccupied, so Mrs. Kieferson's place must be the rambling farmhouse behind a chain-link fence on the other side of the road. Two trees canopied the yard, their bare branches reaching skeletal fingers toward the sky. Shrubbery lined the fence.

Concealing shrubbery, she noted with a certain uneasiness. A dark outline of some other building rose beyond the house.

No ring of police cars. No flashing lights. No ambulance. Strange.

A vehicle was coming up behind her on the road, and she reluctantly turned into the down-sloped driveway to get out of the way. The pickup swept on by, leaving a flash of red taillights and a feeling of emptiness in its wake. Not another house light visible in any direction.

Apprehension tightened her throat again. Yes, the woman had sounded desperate, and Cate wanted to help her. But this was no Ridley-and-saxophone kind of case. There were three dead bodies in there. Or more by now.

She'd just decided she'd call 911 herself when the phone in her hand jingled. She looked at the screen. Mitch!

"Hey, what's going on?" he asked. "Where are you?"

"I had a phone call from a woman. I'm at her place now."

"A phone call about what?" Mitch sounded instantly wary. "Where is 'her place'?"

Cate told him. Lucinda, Marianne, and Toby, shot. Randolph Road.

He groaned. "Cate, get out of there. Now. Let the sheriff's department handle it."

"But the woman said she'd called them, and they aren't here! I can't just drive away. Maybe something's happened to her, and she needs help."

"Do you see anyone?"

"No. There's only one car parked up by the house. It's an older white van." Cate let her car roll farther down the driveway and peered closer. Oregon license plate, with a bumper sticker that read Vote 2008. Did killers drive old vans with out-of-date bumper stickers? "I think it probably belongs to the woman who called me."

“Just stay in your car, and I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“It took me at least twenty minutes to get here. I think I should go to the house. I’m worried about Mrs. Kieferson.”

Silence, as if he were deciding if it would do any good to argue with her. Finally he said, “Stay on the phone, then. Keep talking to me.”

Cate kept the phone to her ear, grabbed her purse, and slid out of the car. The gun she wasn’t allowed to carry would feel pretty good about now. She knew a little about guns. Her dad had taught her to shoot one back home. She kept a wary eye on the shrubbery as she picked her way around the white van, raindrops sprinkling lightly around her.

“The path to the gate in the front yard fence doesn’t look as if it’s used much, so I’m going to the back door.”

“Keep talking. And be careful.”

“I’m heading up to the door now. I still don’t see—”

An unearthly sound blasted the night. Cate jumped, then stopped short, her legs too paralyzed even to run back to the car. It came again. A discordant bellow, a guttural roar, a monster in the night. And close, so close—

“Cate, what was that?” Mitch yelled in her ear.

A light came on over the back door. A shadowy face appeared in the window beside it. The door opened a few inches, and the face peered around it.

“Who are you?” the woman called.

“Cate Kinkaid. Belmont Investigations. You called me?”

“Oh, I’m so glad you’re here!” The door opened wider. The monster noise blasted again, and a matronly shaped silhouette stepped outside and yelled, “Maude, will you shut up!”

The light illuminated movement behind a rail fence, and now Cate saw the source of the noise. Not a fiend or monster.

A donkey. A white donkey. With floppy white ears. She’d been frozen to the spot by the braying of a donkey.

The woman motioned Cate to the door. “Don’t mind Maude. She’s just like a watchdog, lets me know the minute anyone comes around.” She peered at Cate. “Haven’t you ever heard a donkey before?”

Yes, growing up in rural southern Oregon, Cate had heard a donkey or two. But they’d never sounded as if they came with monster DNA. “It’s been a long time.”

“She’s really very sweet. She loves apples,” the woman said. “Thanks for coming.”

“You are Mrs. Kieferson?” Cate asked. She could see the woman better now. Middle-aged, short gray hair with a permed curl, stout figure in dark slacks, sturdy shoes.

“Yes, Jo-Jo Kieferson. You’re a lot younger than I expected.” She sounded disapproving. “And a lot more redheaded.”

Cate couldn’t think of any suitable response to that. At twenty-nine, she didn’t think of herself as terribly young, although by Jo-Jo’s standards she probably was. And she was definitely redheaded.

She followed Jo-Jo Kieferson through a back porch/laundry room and stepped into a homey kitchen with sunny yellow walls decorated with cute-kitten calendars and wall plaques. Ivy trailed from baskets above the cabinets. A huge teddy-bear-shaped cookie jar sat on the counter. An inviting kitchen scent of vanilla and cinnamon suggested the cookie jar was often full.

It did not look like the proper setting for a triple-homicide crime spree. And Jo-Jo Kieferson was either in shock now, or she’d calmed considerably since that panicky phone call.

“Cate?” Mitch’s voice came distantly from the cell phone that had slid to Cate’s chest.

She yanked the phone up to her ear. “Everything’s okay. I’m inside the house now. I haven’t seen the, um, crime scene yet.”

“Keep talking to me.”

Jo-Jo frowned at Cate as if she considered the phone conversation rude.

“I have to keep in touch with my associate,” Cate explained to her. *Associate* wasn’t quite the right word for Mitch Berenski, but overprotective boyfriend sounded somewhat less professional.

“They’re in here.” Jo-Jo headed toward the adjoining room. Heart thudding with apprehension, Cate followed.

◆ 2 ◆

Cate reported her progress to Mitch. “We’re in the dining room now . . . nice, old-fashioned table with claw feet . . . framed painting of Mt. Hood on the wall . . . now going into the living room. Everything’s still okay.”

Jo-Jo stopped in the archway to the living room. “That’s Marianne.” She flung a finger toward the figure in a child-sized rocking chair next to the brick fireplace. “As I told you, her head is gone.”

Yes, it was.

“Lucinda’s over there.”

Brown-haired Lucinda, in a girlish pink dress, sat behind an old-fashioned school desk. She was faceless, the front of her head blown away.

“And Toby, with the gunshot hole in his chest.”

Toby sat in a window seat, a fishing pole dangling a line into a miniature pond of blue plastic at his feet.

“Cate, I heard that!” Mitch said. “It sounds like a-a slaughter!”

“Well, yes, it is kind of a slaughter,” Cate said to Mitch. Marianne’s head gone. Lucinda’s face shattered. Toby with the hole in his chest. “But they’re *dolls*.”

“Dolls?” Mitch repeated.

“They look almost like real children. But they’re dolls, big, life-sized dolls.” Dead dolls.

The hole in Toby’s chest leaked white pellets, not blood, and the remaining section of Lucinda’s head was hollow. The pieces of head on the floor were ceramic shards, not bone. No ugly scent of death thickened the air.

Yet it was a macabre scene because the figures appeared so truly childlike. Except for the leaking hole in his chest, Toby looked like a mischievous seven-year-old, sprinkle of freckles on his nose, blond hair tousled. The fact that he was still smiling only seemed to make the scene more macabre. Plus there was Lucinda’s eyeball looking up from the floor.

“Did you tell 911 that the, um, victims were dolls?” Cate asked Jo-Jo.

“The woman was going to send an ambulance, so I explained why that wouldn’t be necessary. I suppose that’s why the police aren’t in any hurry to get here.” Jo-Jo sounded resentful about this discriminatory attitude toward non-human victims. “Perhaps I should have mentioned it to you too.”

Yes, that would have been helpful. Cate made a mental note for future PI reference: *Always inquire if victims actually have human DNA.*

But the police should be here. Even if there weren’t actually dead human bodies, someone had been flinging real bullets around.

“Do you know anyone who would want to injure—” Cate broke off and corrected that statement. Dolls, even ones that looked as lifelike as these, didn’t suffer injuries. “Anyone who would want to damage your dolls?”

“I think it was me the shooter was after. And since I wasn’t home, he just went after Marianne and Lucinda and Toby.” Jo-Jo’s voice went scratchy. “Destroying something he knew I loved.”

“He?”

“My former husband. Eddie the Ex.” Jo-Jo said the name as if she’d like to do something personally destructive to him.

“Eddie the Ex might want you dead?”

“Isn’t a dead ex-wife usually preferable to a live one? Although shooting dolls, that might be more of a woman thing, don’t you think? Maybe that new wife he left me for did it. If she could steal my husband, I sure wouldn’t put it past her to shoot my dolls.”

Noises coming from her cell phone reminded Cate that Mitch was still in the loop.

“Cate, I’m coming,” he said in her ear. “This is a weird situation. You don’t know what else a wacko who’d shoot dolls might do. What’s the address?”

“I can handle it,” Cate said. “Just go ahead with the cleanup job for Mr. Harriman.”

“We can do Harriman another day. I’ll call him. What’s the address?”

Cate finally supplied it, though she decided this was something she had to get straight with Mitch. Yes, she had called him to come to her rescue a couple of times. She’d had in mind having him come with her tonight. But having an overprotective male trailing along behind was not an image that suggested competent PI. She dropped the phone in her pocket.

Mitch was right about one thing, however. Shooting dolls qualified as weird. Maybe even a psycho thing? “What about the bullet hole in the mailbox?”

Jo-Jo’s wave dismissed that bullet hole as irrelevant. “That’s always been there. The stop sign down the road has seven of them. I think it’s a country thing.”

“Where did you get the dolls?”

Jo-Jo looked as indignant as if Cate had just asked if she

bought her children at Walmart. “I made them, of course. That’s what I do. Create dolls, usually in the image of real children. They’re very dear to me. And to the people I make them for.”

“Did you make Marianne and Lucinda and Toby for clients?”

“No. I keep them here in natural settings as displays of my work.” She reached over and smoothed the skirt on the headless doll. “I used a photo of my mother from her third grade class to create Marianne. And Toby is a boyfriend from my own second grade photo.”

Jo-Jo wasn’t acting as upset as if these were her real children, but a tear dribbled down her cheek. She brushed it away. Something clicked in Cate’s head.

“Do you know a woman named Krystal Lorister?” Cate had met the woman with a lifelike doll when she was investigating that other murder case. Seeing that doll in Krystal’s reading room with a book in hand, Cate had first thought it was a granddaughter. “I don’t remember the doll’s name.”

Jo-Jo beamed. “Camille! Yes, of course I remember Krystal and Camille. Actually, she’s the reason I called you. Krystal, I mean, not Camille.”

“You talked to Krystal tonight and she told you to call me?” Cate asked doubtfully.

“No, no, not tonight. She told me once that if I ever needed help, you’d be the person to contact. That you were really clever at investigating things. So I wrote your name down.”

“Krystal thought you might need help?”

“Eddie the Ex keeps trying to weasel out of his alimony. He has the most expensive restaurant in town, making money hand over fist, but he always acts as if he doesn’t have two jars of caviar to rub together.”

“So now you want me to investigate your ex-husband or find out who shot your dolls?”

“The dolls for right now. But I think they’re connected.”

Uncle Joe hadn’t been happy when Cate got involved in that other murder situation. Belmont Investigations didn’t do cops-and-robbers or violent stuff.

But this wasn’t murder, she argued with herself, and no killer was involved. And business had been slow. The economic crunch affected even private investigators.

“Belmont Investigations is a business, of course. We charge an hourly rate.”

“That’s okay.” Jo-Jo smiled slyly. “I’ll think of some way to make Eddie pay for it.”

“Did anyone know you were going to be away from home this evening?” Cate asked.

“I was talking to my friend Donna earlier. I might have told her. I don’t remember.”

Cate asked for Donna’s full name, address, and phone number. She wrote the information in a notebook she always carried in her purse now. “Do you have a list of people who’ve bought dolls from you?”

“I keep a scrapbook of all my dolls and the people who’ve adopted them.”

“Is there anyone among them who might be angry with you?”

“I don’t think so. My customers have always been very nice people.” Jo-Jo’s eyebrows crunched in a frown. “I don’t think not-nice people tend to be interested in dolls.”

Probably true. Cate couldn’t recall ever seeing a photo of a killer clutching his dolly. “You make the dolls right here?”

“I turned the master bedroom into a workshop. I create everything from the original molds for the head and arms and legs right down to making the clothing myself. I always put my initials on the fabric part of the body, kind of my personal signature.” Jo-Jo lifted headless Marianne’s skirt

and showed Cate the little JJ embroidered on the midsection of the doll. “I’ve been thinking maybe I should add a belly button, but I haven’t decided if it should be an innie or an outie. What do you think?”

Cate figured they had more important matters to think about than innie/outie belly buttons. But still . . . “An innie, I think. Is this a full-time business with you? Or a hobby?”

“It used to be a hobby, before Eddie the Ex had his midlife crisis. Now it’s a business. Do you have a little girl or boy? I could give you a nice discount.”

Sometimes Cate had fleeting visions of herself and Mitch and a family. She wanted a little girl or boy someday. Both, actually. But she wasn’t sure if her relationship with Mitch was headed that direction. “Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind. Why do you live so far out of town? Wouldn’t it be better to have a location more accessible for clients?”

“That was a glitch in the divorce settlement. Eddie wanted our big house in town. My lawyer said okay, but if Eddie got the big house, he had to buy me another house. Unfortunately the lawyer didn’t specify where, and good ol’ Eddie stuck me out here in the boondocks. I imagine he and Kim got a big laugh out of that. Kim’s his new wife.” She paused to glance back toward the kitchen. “Although it’s a nice, cozy place, and I like it a lot better than the Ice Cube in town.”

“Doesn’t it make you uneasy living out here alone?”

“Not really. But I’ve been thinking maybe I’d move down to California or Arizona.”

“You have family there?”

“No. I raised Eddie’s two kids, but his son lives back east and his daughter Karen killed herself a few years ago. Karen and Eddie had been estranged for a long time, so that made it even worse for him.” Jo-Jo paused and swallowed. She

brushed a knuckle across her right eye, then swiped the wet knuckle on her leg. “Karen and I were close when she was little, and I’d kept hoping . . .”

Jo-Jo obviously felt very bad about her dolls, but Cate could see that this other loss went much deeper.

“But Eddie and his son are estranged too, and he never tried to fix that, even after Karen died. He can be stubborn as a mule. Although comparing Eddie and a mule is really unfair to the mule.”

“Have you checked the premises to make sure the shooter isn’t still here?”

Jo-Jo glanced uneasily toward the dark hallway leading off the living room. “I didn’t want to do it alone. But I don’t think anyone’s here or they’d have jumped out and shot me by now, don’t you think?”

Cate’s glance followed Jo-Jo’s. Her nerves shrieked an internal alarm siren when she spotted something standing there in the depths of the dim hallway. She touched Jo-Jo’s arm and pointed silently at the shadowy outline.

“That? That’s my dust mop. I didn’t want to get out the vacuum, so I was using the dust mop there in the hallway. I suppose girls your age don’t even know what a dust mop is.” Jo-Jo’s eyebrows pinched together in disapproval of the shortcomings of Cate’s generation.

Okay, Cate could see now that the shadowy figure was stick-handle thin. Maybe her nerves were a bit overwrought even if the victims here were only dolls. She certainly did know what a dust mop was, although it had always seemed to her an inefficient way of managing dirt.

“On the phone, you said you heard something. And then you didn’t answer when I tried to call back.”

“It was a noise, a kind of thud from down the hallway. I started to go see what it was, but then I got scared and hid

over there behind the sofa. The phone's in the kitchen, and it stopped ringing before I got back to it."

Now Cate also heard a noise from down the hallway. *Thud. Thud.* She and Jo-Jo both stiffened as if they'd turned into dolls themselves.

"You have a gun, don't you?" Jo-Jo whispered.

"No."

"I thought private investigators always had a gun. They do on TV."

Cate chose not to explain that she had not yet reached gun-toting status. "Don't you have a gun, living way out in the country like this?" she counter-whispered.

"I bought one when I first moved here. But I accidentally shot the hot-water heater, and after the flood I figured I'd better get rid of it. But we can find something in the kitchen to use as a weapon."

Cate saw herself armed with a potato peeler while searching for a guy brandishing a gun with bullets. "I think we should go out to the car and wait for the police or my associate to arrive."

Then another noise came from down the hall, not a thud this time. A much more familiar sound. Jo-Jo smiled delightedly at the yowl.

"It's just Effie! She must have gotten shut in my workroom. She likes to sleep on an old beanbag chair in there."

Jo-Jo flicked on a hall light and headed confidently down the hallway. Cate followed. Jo-Jo barely got the door partway open when a calico cat even bigger and plumper than Octavia squeezed out and thudded down the uncarpeted hallway.

"Well, what in the world got into her?" Jo-Jo took off after the cat.

Cate turned to follow, then stopped short. No sound came from the room. No thud or thump, not even a rustle or squeak.

No drifting scent of male aftershave or feminine perfume. No movement in the skinny oblong of light cast on the bare hardwood floor by the hall light.

But that PI instinct that sometimes surprised Cate suddenly kicked in.

She knew with horrifying certainty that the room was not empty.