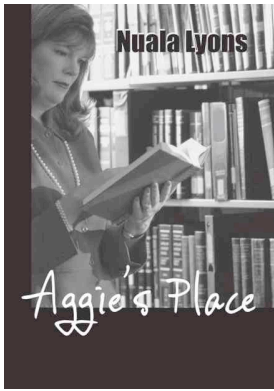




**Nuala Lyons**

*Aggie's Place*



*Aggie Hanrahan owns a bookshop in Rathfarnham Village and runs with her dog Madra every morning in Tymon Park.*

*A seventy-eight year old friend and literary sparring partner, Mr. Leo Ireland, is found dead in his bed. The Gardai investigate and discover he had been murdered.*

*When she receives a death threat, the Gardai say they do not have the man-power to protect her.*

*Why is Aggie being threatened? What does she know about Leo's hidden cache of diamonds? And why is Aggie's old boyfriend hanging around her? Detectives Monaghan and King wonder if Aggie knows more than she admits and why did Leo give her an expensive rare book as a gift?*

# Aggie's Place

by Nuala Lyons

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NUALA LYONS

AGGIE'S PLACE

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*For the girls  
Fiona, Akiko, Sarah and Rachel*

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*And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;*

Edward Fitzgerald,  
THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM  
First edition







## Prologue

*He stood at the side of the bed. Cold anger radiated from the pores in his body, bringing a strong sweat odour into the room. The perspiration further enraged him.*

*The seventy-eight-year-old man stared up from the dazzling white pillow. He knew why the intruder was there, but he pinned a smile on his face.*

*“You’ll lose it all,” he said, in a low modulated voice. “You can’t control the threads or make instant decisions. You don’t have that ability. You’re a brilliant team player, but not a boss. Be content with your place. Allow the leader to do his job. This way we’ll all make money.”*

*“I’ll take over,” the younger man replied, through clenched teeth.*

*“I’ve been a bit player for too long, having to tag along, to pretend to be happy while others collect the pot. The time has come for me to wager everything. I’ll win the game playing by my rules, not yours.”*

*He held a pillow in his hands, looking down at the bed as if drawing strength from the man lying there. This person, who’d been in control of his destiny, had never given him a chance. He’d always had to work to his commands, his ideas. Well it was over now.*

*“It’s time to pass the torch.”*

*The old man’s age faded blue eyes bored into his, trying by an act of willpower to stop the killer from carrying out his threat. He’d known he’d be challenged for leadership, but never in his wildest dreams had he imagined he’d lose his life because of it. It had never*

*happened before. They did not use violence; the change was always one of cunning. The leader would be ousted—yes and a new one would take over.*

*He did not want to die.*

*Pride prevented him from begging.*

*He'd been at the pinnacle of his world for too long to let an upstart wrench the last bit of control he had in this world away from him.*

*While his shout could not alert anyone to what was happening in the master suite, he refused to reveal the fear racing through his body as he approached death. With an extreme act of self-discipline, he smiled his last smile, and waited for the smothering weapon to descend.*

*"You'll taste the bitter pill of failure," he prophesied into the gag, which blocked off his last breath.*

*Strong hands held the pressure steady.*

*No remorse was etched on the younger man's face while the old body struggled, fighting its last fight.*

*Even when it stilled, he maintained the downward force, trying to drive the old man's head through the mattress into the empty space below.*

*"At last," he grunted, suffused with anger. His arms had tightened with the effort of pushing, pushing the face of the man who for years had denied him.*

*"From this day forward I will decide what to do. You can't stop me."*

*He gently lifted the old man's shoulders to position the pillow beneath his unresisting head. His soft hands brushed the nostrils and closed the mouth. Perhaps he'd found a more gentle emotion, now he'd succeeded, but his actions were more concerned with his own*

safety. He wanted to leave no evidence of an attack on the man he'd killed.

Taking his mobile from his pocket, he held it close to the nose. He brushed his thumb across the face of the phone.

It was dry.

"Even in death, I don't trust you," he stared down at the corpse. "With all the power and control you wielded when you were alive, in death even you cannot fool the glass. Your last breath has gone."

He walked to the door. With his hand on the knob, he looked back over his shoulder at the motionless mound.

"Good riddance." His lips curled in a crescent replica of a smile as he said a last farewell. "I win the final round. You are history."

He made sure the door didn't squeak, although there was no one in the empty house to hear it, but the habit, of maintaining silence in strange houses at night, was hard to change. The reading lamp was on; the book lay open on the bedspread with the thick horn-rimmed glasses beside it. The scene was perfect – the old man had died while reading in bed. Nobody would suspect a thing.

For one last time he gazed on the old man's face before he went through the door. Dressed in his usual black thief outfit, which made him nearly invisible, he slipped out from the silent house into the dark night.

It was the first time he'd left a house without taking cash and jewellery: this night's work was worth more than the return from a few baubles. He wanted the big money that control of the firm, a position he should have been given long ago, would deliver.

He'd done what he should have done years ago.



# AGGIE'S PLACE



# Chapter 1

Aggie ran, alone. The March sun, low on the horizon, rose over Dublin bay, slicing light shards through slow moving dark clouds. The sports fields were uneven stripes of light, reflecting the sky above.

Leaving the lake with the ducks, swans, and a solitary, motionless, grey heron behind, she raced up the incline leading to the M50 pedestrian bridge.

Madra, her brown shorthaired, black-eared mongrel, stayed beside her, at her heels, in front of her or sprang away into the copse. There, among the trees, he would usually catch sight of a rabbit nibbling at the dew damp grass.

He'd run quickly, but the rabbits always managed to vanish as he was about to grab one. Bewildered, he'd lope back to Aggie. Then he'd continue with her until the next bunny ventured from the burrow in the hedge out into the open grass, or between the trunks of the trees.

She smiled. Perhaps his blue eye saw one thing, while his brown eye saw something else.

They ran in Tymon Park, in the mornings. She usually left her car at St. Jude's GAA club, ran from the lake past the playground, over the motorway, along a lonely path before turning through a break in the hedge onto more fields. They'd continue over the small pedestrian stone arched bridge straddling a cress-infested stream, past a larger bird-inhabited lake, returning via the second walkway.

Madra ran with her. They never met anyone. Well, almost never. Once or twice a stray runner crossed their path, but it was seldom.



## Aggie's Place

This Monday morning, they'd raced over the M50, turning from the Basketball Arena to the somewhat quieter tree lined tarmac lane, when Madra stood his ground. He growled deep in his throat.

Aggie was alone, but unafraid. Someone was coming behind them. She turned, motioned Madra to her side with a hand signal. A strange man came towards her, fast.

She would fight. Madra's hackles rose.

"I'd recognise those legs anywhere," the man remarked in a light baritone. Recognition dawned in her eyes.

"Ian. Wow! It's been a long time."

"Yep. I knew it was you. I'd watched your back for years, when we competed for our school. You were always in front, even though you raced against the boys. You might ask your dog to like me. I'm a bit concerned he might mistake me for the enemy."

"Madra, friend," she motioned at Ian with her hand.

Ian put his fist down. Her dog sniffed it cautiously.

"Let's continue," he suggested, "we can talk while we run. Did you ever enter athletics?"

"No, I do it for the buzz."

"Me too. What are you up to, these days? Married, partner, boyfriend or like me, happy to be single?"

"I'm happy," she laughed; glad to find a running mate. "But come on, tell the truth. You always had a bunch of girls around you."

"Not any more. I like my life the way it is. I'm a teacher in the Secondary School in Rathgar."

"What subjects?"

"Maths, honours maths, applied maths, and physics. You?"

"I opened a book shop in Rathfarnham Village."

"Never!"

"Yeah."

"I knew you liked English, but I thought you more of a writer of books than a seller."

"I did too. Yet I love books. I've surrounded myself with them, so I'm..." she threw him a glance, from shining green eyes. "Happy."

He laughed as the first drops of rain fell from those dark clouds, obscuring the fragile line of sunshine.

"Beat you to the car park."

"You're on."

He moved after her, admiring the way her nut-brown hair, bunched into a ponytail, bounced out through the gap at the back of her cap. The rain started to fall quite heavily when they reached St. Jude's. They each dived into their respective driver's seats. Madra, not a water dog, jumped in the moment the door opened. He was sitting on his towel in the passenger seat when Aggie shut the door.

Ian pulled alongside and wound down the window, signalling her to do likewise.

"I might drop into your shop, later on. What's it called?"

"Aggies Place."

"In Rathfarnham Village?"

## Aggie's Place

"Yep."

He waved his hand in goodbye.

Aggie was half way home when she realised she'd never spent a single thought on that self-serving, money seeking, miserable apology for a man, Kevin-who'd walked out on her three months ago. She was so over him. Humming to herself, she drove home in the driving rain to the penthouse apartment she shared with her two sisters.

An old school friend had returned.

"Aggie, you're bringing a wet dog into the apartment again before drying him, aren't you?" Genevieve, her blonde haired sister asked, from her open bedroom door.

"No. I'm not. How could you even suggest such a thing?" Aggie denied, her eyes lighting up with mischief. Standing in the hall, she grabbed Madra's towel from his basket. He squirmed. She rubbed him briskly. His flailing tail hit against the wall, leaving a wet trail on the paint.

"Aha. Caught you," Genevieve grinned, looking at her from the opening to the living room, "Telling porky pies."

"Am not. He's not wet; he's damp."

"It's lashing rain. How could he be only damp? Oh, I've got it. You've bought a dog's raincoat to take him out in this dreadful Irish weather we've been having lately."

Aggie was used to Gen saying she was a negligent dog owner who didn't take care of him properly, "Why Gen, you've designed one for him. How brilliant! Are you listening Madra? Clever Gen's designed a doggy raincoat especially for you!"

"Aha. Why aren't you snapping my head off, the way you've been doing since 'darling' Kevin walked out?" Gen queried, examining her sister closely.

"I'm over the miserable man. He's gone...forgotten."

"Thank God. Finally you realise men are there to be enjoyed, not slaved over. I was afraid you'd make the horrible mistake of wanting to marry him."

"He was my current boyfriend. We didn't talk about marriage. I never thought of him as husband material." She walked away to her room to shower. Time slipped away easily in the morning.

"Don't you dare come near me, Madra, I'm dressed for work. I most certainly do not want wet doggy smells on my designer clothes," Gen, moved away from the dog, with her palm held down. Recognising the sign, he went into his bed, where he curled up.

The third bedroom door opened. He lifted his head hopefully, but put it down again immediately when Bride showed him the downward motion, with her hand.

"Do I hear Aggie singing?" she asked Gen. Her startling violet eyes held a look of amazement.

"Indeed you do. Something happened on the run. I'll bet my next month's income she met a man."

"I won't take your bet. But he'd better like dogs or he'll be one of many very short-lived boyfriends," Bride predicted.

"Afraid so," Gen agreed. "We'll have to spy to see if he's suitable for our big sister."

"Naturally. Give me a lift, will you Gen; I've got an early client this morning and it's a takeaway coffee for breakfast."

## **Aggie's Place**

"Sure. We'll leave the singing mermaid, to be late opening her shop, while customers wait in the rain."

"Bye," they shouted over the sound of running water.

They rubbed their hands over Madra's head before they clicked the door shut.

## Chapter 2

"Gosh, is it nine already?" Aggie asked, opening the door to her shop. "I hope you, weren't waiting long."

"Not at all," Steve lifted a box from the back of his car and slammed the door shut. He was a slender, grey eyed, five foot ten, forty-eight-year-old bachelor with thinning blond hair, who was a founding member of the Thursday evening book club.

"Come in quick out of this rain. Isn't it dreadful?"

"And we have the April showers to look forward to next month. It's a wonder we're not flooded," he added, entering with Madra at his heels.

"I'm sorry you had to wait," she apologised, passing the table with the second-hand books on her left side before going into the storeroom to turn on the lights. "I hardly ever have customers this early in the day, and so nipped into Helen's for a takeaway."

"She does a good breakfast, all right," he agreed, putting the carton he was carrying down at his feet.

"And makes a great cup of coffee."

"Your cappuccinos are superior. You always get the cream heart perfect."

"Why, thanks, Steve. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Do you remember my telling you about the books in Dad's house? You promised you'd take a look to see if you'd be interested in buying them."

## Aggie's Place

"Yes, when your Dad died, last month. Have they done the autopsy?"

"Not yet. The Gardai said they'd let us know when they could release the body for burial. All we can do is wait. In the meanwhile, I've got round to packing up a few of the paperbacks."

She didn't mention the problem with his father's death, or indeed the reason why the Gardai were looking into it. He'd tell her, if he wanted to. She felt a tug in her heart when she remembered she'd never again be able to debate Literature with Leo. It was sad when a friend died.

"Would you like me to go through these?"

"Yes, please," Steve touched the container with the toes of his expensive Italian brown leather shoes. "If there's any you can't use, please dump them."

"Okay," Aggie agreed, eyeing its size. "Could you carry it into the storeroom, please?" He must have put fifty, to seventy books in there.

"Of course."

She led the way to stacks of cardboard cartons.

"Put it down here. I'll get to it, as soon as I can."

"There's no rush." He put the box down, dusting off his hands. "Enjoy your breakfast. I'll see you Thursday for the book club meeting." He dashed out to his car, which he'd left right outside the bookshop in a no parking zone.

"Right; see you then," Aggie shouted to his back before shutting the door quickly against the wind-driven rain, lashing the front of the shop.

She'd taken five bites from her half baguette breakfast when the door shot open.

"Aggie, I'm with my client, Aubrey. We need space."

Gen, dressed in her latest fashion raincoat, closed the golfing umbrella and ushered a young dark blonde woman in her late twenties into the shop.

"Come in, Aubrey, quick for heaven's sake. Sit at a table; let's recover our breath while my sister makes us one of her wonderful cups of coffee. There we are, we have much more room here, a hot drink to keep the damp out of our limbs while we discuss the dress you'd like for the big day," Gen smiled, at her customer from glowing hazel eyes. It appeared, like a sudden burst of sunshine had peeped out from sodden clouds, lifting the gloom of the day for her client, who smiled in return.

She carefully eased her raincoat off and hung it along with her own on the backs of the empty high stools. Before Gen settled the young woman down with batches of material samples, Aggie saw her take a quick glance around the room. Madra was curled up beside the cash desk, which took up a square area immediately inside the window display. The second-hand book table was snug against the inside wall where stairs led up to rows of more expensive nonfiction books. Downstairs, fiction was arranged in three long white bookshelves in the centre of the shop. Off to the left, near a second window showing children's books, sat the coffee dock alongside the baby and toddler section. On a casual table beside the cash register, Aggie had books wrapped in cellophane, tied with ribbons—pink, blue and yellow, 'quick buy' gifts for the hard-pressed worker who needed an immediate birthday, anniversary or thank-you present.



## **Aggie's Place**

She switched on the machine; aware Gen approved the layout and would call her away from her books if they needed an objective opinion. Aubrey, the bride to be, settled herself in for her morning's one on one special, private consultation with her personal designer concerning her choice of wedding dress.

Today would be a quiet day in her business, Aggie thought and wondered whether, if this rain kept on, she would make it to the end of the month, without going into red in the bank.

## Chapter 3

The heavy rain eased off by midday. Aggie prayed the soft drizzle would entice customers into the shop for a quick buy.

None, of the Mother and Baby Club members, had arrived. Of course she hadn't expected them to venture out in the downpour with their young babies, but one or two had phoned to apologise for not showing. She'd chatted for a while, accepting their promise to come the following Monday-weather permitting.

"Sorry, Madra," she told the patient dog as he looked up from his basket, "No run along the river today. Business calls."

The door pinged and Bride, her sister, a clever Insurance Broker came in shaking her umbrella before putting it in bucket container near the door.

"Aggie, give me a cappuccino. I'm demented with customers demanding cheaper car rates, plus businessmen and businesswomen, ranting about Public Liability Insurance. Everyone has vented off steam at me this morning. I'm not going to Helen's for lunch, because I know they'll be sitting there moaning about it. Then I'll be subject to more verbal annoyance, at insurance costs these days."

Bride was quite capable of handling whinging customers who returned year after year. They knew they got the best rates in Dublin city, while she often pointed out unforeseen problems to her business clients protecting many of them from being sued. She also loved coming in for coffee with a chocolate chip cookie.

Placing the coffee, plus the unrequested cookie in front of her sister, Aggie treated herself to a cappuccino. Madra

## Aggie's Place

sneaked over to beg for cookie. Bride took a nibble. His eyes tracked it to her mouth. She didn't look at him. He wagged his tail, thumping it on the floor. Bride broke off a chunk, throwing it high into the air. He jumped, grabbed and gobbled in one action. He sat watching again.

"No more, Madra. You're finished with treats for today. Bride, don't give him any more. They're not good for him."

"You run the legs off him. Those little bits will be gone by tonight, even before you take him out for his gallop along the Dodder."

"It's a half an hour walk along a river. He'll only begin to stretch his legs when we're home again. He's in good condition. I don't want him to get used to begging from the table."

Bride sighed, "I'll have to get back to training. Not only have I been indulging myself, I've also been skipping practice for the last few weeks. It's showing in my game. Those extra pounds make a difference. I was pathetic yesterday. If I don't improve, I won't be first choice any more."

"Is Jackie, trying for your place again?"

"Yeah, and she's better, than I am. She scored two points in the Sunday game. I only got one. My feeble effort at goal was saved. Anyway, enough about me. How did your run go today? Was you time okay?"

"I didn't check. You know how I never see anyone on my morning run?"

"Uh huh!"

"Well, today I met another runner. We raced to the car park."

"And?"

"It was a friend from our childhood, Ian."

Bride stared at her for a few moments with a look of puzzlement, before the tiny frown between her eyes vanished suddenly.

"Not brown eyed, curly haired Ian Moore from number twenty seven?"

"Exactly."

"Did you win?"

"No. He got there ahead of me."

"I bet he did, to let you know he can run faster than you now."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't tell me you can't remember he told everyone he'd keep on running until he'd beat you. And he never did, while we were in primary school."

"Ah we were only kids. We said lots of foolish things back then."

"Well, I remember. He wasn't nice to you when we were in third year in Secondary."

"I don't recall him ever being unkind."

"Because you were too occupied with Michael Farrell. You had eyes for no one else."

"Ah, Michael! He was such a heartthrob, when I was fifteen," Aggie grinned.

The door opened.

## **Aggie's Place**

"Hello, Mrs Kildare. Can I help you?" Aggie greeted a middle aged, dark-haired lady who looked about thirty-five years old.

"Yes, please. I need a good read for tonight. I'm baby sitting for my daughter and her husband."

"You're lucky. I've put out the latest published. Take a look to see if there's anything you like."

The door opened again.

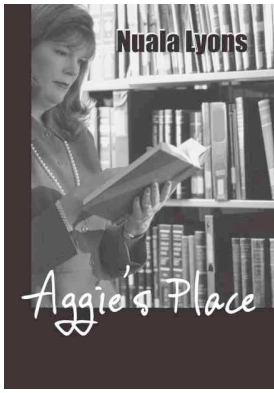
"Hello, Steve. Can I help you?"

"No, thanks. I need the book we have to review on Thursday. I'm staying in tonight. You could give me a coffee, if you not busy."

"Sit with Bride. I'll be with you in a moment, when I've served Mrs Kildare."

For the next few hours it was hectic. At four pm when she was sitting down resting her feet, the door pinged open again.

"Hi there. Told you I'd drop in. How's it going?" Ian smiled down at her.



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