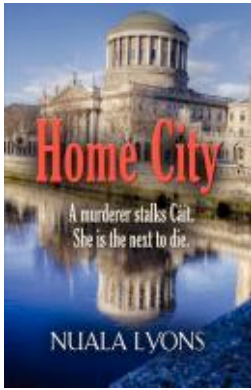




# Home City

A murderer stalks Cáit.  
She is the next to die.

NUALA LYONS



*A woman has her heart stabbed in a Dublin hotel. Mark Callaghan is at the top of Detective Byrne's list of suspects. Cait Roche agrees to help him find the murderer. The woman's husband is in Bulgaria but her brother, her business partner, is in Dublin, and inherits her shares after her death. Cait fights for her life when a burglar breaks into her apartment. Only the killer knows why she is next to be killed.*

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# Home City

**Nuala Lyons**

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First Edition

# 1

Mark Callaghan strode across the foyer of the Manhattan Gallaghan, stepped into the lift and pushed the button for the fifth floor. His deep blue eyes followed the smart business suit of a tall dark-haired lady with long legs that seemed to go – “Damn,” he muttered as the doors closed.

Moments later, the lift door opened onto his suite. His brain held the afterimage of the elegant brunette, but his glance was keen as it automatically checked that housekeeping had done their job keeping his suite of rooms in good order; this was his hotel, and he was ever vigilant that the standard be kept high. He stripped off and showered.

Half an hour later, he was at Lora’s apartment on Lexington Ave.

“I’m not ready yet, hon,” she drawled.

“Babe, you’re perfect,” he said, his Irish accent giving an edge to his voice. Her rich chestnut hair flowed around her perfectly made up face, blusher highlighted cheekbones and her bee-stung lips were painted a deep red. The dark ruby silk of her bra and panties showed her pure white skin to advantage. All she had to do was to step into her dress and shoes.

She brushed her lips over his lightly. “Hon, the table’s booked for eight.”

“We could cancel.”

“Now hon. Philippe won’t understand if we cancel for the second time in a week.” She eased out from his embrace.

Lora, a clever model in the fashion business, needed to mix with the right people; Philippe’s restaurant was the place to be seen. Handsome, six foot two, Irish Mark Callaghan, a powerful

new name in the New York hotel business, was the man to be seen with.

Lora was perfect for him: a wonderful date, a beautiful sophisticated lady. Mark waited impatiently as she finished getting dressed.

“OK, I’m ready hon.”

“Let’s go babe; let’s keep Philippe happy.”

He put his arm around her and escorted her into the bright lights of a New York City night.

Mark’s mobile rang. He pulled the pillow over his head.

The jingle clicked into voice mail. It was five am; he’d left Lora’s bed only an hour ago.

The strident tone jarred his eardrums again. He ignored it again. It rang again.

“Christ, Eoughan, I’ll kill you if you need your hand held,” he muttered, answering the phone with one hand and turning the light on with the other. “Aoife can’t be in labour. She’s only seven months gone.”

“Mark, Diane’s been trying to reach you.” It was Aoife.

“It’s five am, Aoife,. What’s wrong with Diane?”

“Dad’s had a heart attack. He’s being operated on. Before he went into theatre he asked for you.”

“Oh God! Dad.”

“Eoughan’s getting the plane ready.”

“I’ll be with you in fifteen minutes.”

An hour later they were in the sky. Eoughan was given emergency clearance for take off and piloted his private jet, as he’d done many times before, over the Atlantic towards Dublin.

“Who’s caring for Michael and Deirmuid?” Mark asked.

“Rose. Last month she agreed to live in. Thank God.” Aoife caressed her big stomach.

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“You shouldn’t have come,” Eoughan said, throwing her a concerned glance. “It can’t be good for you or the babies to fly to Ireland at this stage in your pregnancy.”

“OK. Maybe, but I’d be so anxious about Dad that staying would be just as bad.”

“Oh my God! What’ll we do if you go into labour when we’re in the air?” Mark’s voice went decibels higher.

“Mark, will you shut up? Just shut up. I won’t be nagged all the way to Dublin.”

“She gets crotchety every time she’s pregnant, doesn’t she?” Mark asked Eoughan.

“Yeah but it must be hard carrying their weight twenty-four seven,” he replied putting his hand over his wife’s.

“Yes! It’s tough but I’m happy.”

“Doesn’t make it any easier to carry.”

“Sorry, sis.”

“That’s OK, Mark. You can hold my hand when I’m delivering these kids.”

“Oh no, please no,” he begged. “I held Eoughan’s for the last two.”

Aoife laughed. Mark had driven them to the hospital and had sat in the waiting area while Eoughan had fallen apart in the delivery room.

“Are you sure she’s all right? She’s in pain doctor,” he’d said. “Do something! Oh God give her a painkiller! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Why did we ever say we’d have a baby?”

When Michael was born Eoughan had fallen into an ecstatic silence. He couldn’t speak for two hours. The second time around he was much better but now with the twins it was as if he’d never seen her give birth. She was lucky her lady specialist had a way of organising fathers as their wives or partners gave birth.

After an interminable seven hours, the small jet landed at Dublin airport. Mark appeared in the customs clearance doorway nearly carrying Aoife.

Ciara their young sister was waiting for them.

“Oh help!” She ran over. “Mark, what’s happened? Aoife, what’s wrong? Why did you let her travel in her condition? Eoughan you ought to know better.”

Aoife put her hand on her sister’s arm, leaned in and kissed her.

“I’m just stiff from sitting.”

“And I have no control over your sister when she digs her heels in. You know that.”

Ciara narrowed her eyes as she looked at him.

“Losing your touch, huh?” she lifted eyebrows the same burnished red as her hair.

Eoughan put his arms around Ciara, lifting her off her feet. He hugged her long and hard before kissing her.

“It’s great to see you.”

Mark squeezed her until she squealed with pleasure and happiness.

“Dad came through surgery fine. The surgeon’s pleased with him.”

“We gathered as much when the first thing you did was to complain about us guys,” Mark remarked.

“What do you mean?” Ciara asked.

“Ciara, you always burst out if there’s anything new,” Mark replied, “so I knew Dad was getting better.”

“Hum!” Ciara exclaimed, delighted they’d come and her father was going to make it. She led them to the car.

After they’d exited the airport and were onto the dual carriageway, Mark’s thoughts turned to the unlikely image of his father in a hospital bed.

“How’s Dad taking it?”



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“He’s had a dreadful fright – thought he was invincible. He got this terrible pain in his chest and fell to the floor. Just as well Diane was with him or... Anyway, she called the ambulance – the cardiac one – medics worked on him all the way to Blackrock Clinic. Professor Williams says Dad’s fortunate he was on duty and was able to operate on Dad immediately.”

“What did Dad say afterwards?”

“I popped my head around the door. He looks very pale with all sorts of electronic gadgets monitoring him. Uncle Edward was there. Anyway the first thing he said when he woke up was that he needed to talk to Mark.”

“I bet that’s because he knew Eoughan would fly us here,” Aoife said.

“Yeah, well I tell you it was scary for a while there.”

## 2

Cáit brought the cup of coffee to her lips and inhaled the wonderful aroma. She'd walked from the Four Courts, crossed the Liffey and on up the hill to High St and was perched on a high stool at a tall table in the lobby of The Gallaghan. The rich smell of the coffee helped to calm her nerves somewhat. Although nothing could fully counteract the deflation she felt since the judge had found against her. She'd never been able to make a sound case from the material she had. There'd been a chance, a slim one but a chance for all that. She'd warned her client, but Eileen had insisted 'she'd have her day' in court.

"My parents lived in this house all their lives," Eileen had said. "They never missed a week's rent. I took over from them and paid rent all my life. I never missed a payment. He can't put me out on the street. The judge will see how wrong that is."

Charles O'Dowd, the head of the firm, had accepted this pro bono case. Due to Cáit's negotiation, the new owner, who'd renovated the old three-story city house, had offered the small upstairs modern studio at the same low rent. Eileen said she would *never* live in the attic of the house she'd once claimed as her home. When Cáit pointed out that the owner could get twice the rate he'd offered Eileen, she said she'd more pride than to accept charity.

*A sudden pain sliced through Cáit.*

A backpacker had turned about near her table, unaware of the bulky rucksack jutting out behind her. Cáit gasped as hot coffee from her cup spilled on her stockinged legs. The table

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crashed against her, knocking her to the floor and dumping the whole pot of scalding coffee down the front of her blouse.

Agony stole her breath.

From a distance she heard a male voice call for the medical box. Careful hands eased her jacket open. Cooling moisture soaked through her cotton shirt calming the screaming nerves. Her breath whispered through tight lips. The searing pain eased into a mind-boggling throb. She lifted her eyelids and looked into a pair of solemn dark blue eyes.

“Don’t move,” he ordered. “I’ve sent for a doctor. With your permission I’ll carry you to a room where you’ll have some privacy.”

Cáit nodded. She was overwhelmed by the number of people who’d gathered around, silently watching. She was grateful he lifted her in his arms, carrying her away from the curious gaze of the casual onlookers.

“I’m all right,” she whispered.

“I beg your pardon. What did you say?”

“I’m fine,” she repeated; had she been able to move out of his arms, she would have vanished in an instant. Her emotions were all over the place. How embarrassing to be carried in a man’s arms in the café, yet how wonderful to be taken away from the stares of those rubbernecks.

God, would the pain never end! Would she be scarred for life? Would she need plastic surgery? Someone please give me a pain-killer.

“The doctor will be here soon. Don’t you worry. It’s my job to look after our customers,” he explained in a quiet assured voice.

Mark had been sitting in the hotel café trying to come to terms with his father’s wishes that he remain in Dublin to

manage The Gallaghan. His life was in New York and he'd no intention of changing that but his father's illness was a concern.

He always watched the ladies. He loved everything about them, their bodies, their hair, their eyes, their legs, the sound and smell of them, but most of all their laughter.

With a single passing glance he'd seen her as a quiet nobody without sex appeal in an understated suit and flat, serviceable shoes. Yet his eyes had returned: stayed.

He'd checked her out. Her hands had short unpainted nails and, when she'd opened the buttons of her jacket, he noted her blouse was a professional business shirt. The shapeless clothes hid her figure, yet as her skirt rode up when she'd moved, the curve of her legs held his attention.

"Watch out! Stop!" he'd shouted at the backpackers as they spun around beside the woman's table, oblivious to the damage they were about to cause. He'd sprung to his feet, trying to catch the coffee pot, but there was nothing he could have done to prevent the accident.

Now he sat at the end of the bed on which the woman rested as they waited for Dr. Farrell. She never made a sound nor uttered a word of complaint.

"Mr. Callaghan," a voice intruded.

"Yes, Angela."

"Dr. Farrell's here," his receptionist informed him from the doorway to the room.

Dr. Farrell was ushered into the room and Mark returned to the front desk with the receptionist. People inquired about the lady who'd had the accident.

"We have a doctor with her now. I'm sure she's grateful for your support," Angela reported.

"Are these the young ladies who caused the accident?" Mark asked.

"Yes. We're very sorry," they apologised in unison.

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They looked about seventeen years old. “Is the lady all right?”

“We’ll have to wait until the doctor tells us. Do you see that notice over there?” he pointed to the entrance of the hotel.

“Yes.”

“Could you read it to me please?”

“All luggage has to be left at reception and not taken beyond this point,” they said quietly.

“But we only wanted to see the menu.”

“The reason for that notice is obvious is it not?” Mark asked sternly.

“Yes. We’re sorry.” They hung their heads.

Dr. Farrell appeared. Cáit limped behind her. Her shirt was still wet with coffee stains and beneath her skirt her legs were bare except for bandages, which went from her thighs to below her knees. Medical dressing made her breasts huge. Her damp one size too large jacket barely met in front.

“We’re so sorry,” both girls said.

“How is she?” Mark asked Dr. Farrell.

A hush crept over the foyer. People waited for the doctor’s reply.

But the young girls couldn’t stop themselves. “We didn’t realise how close we were to the table...”

“She’s had a bad scald but I don’t think she’ll scar,” Dr. Farrell was explaining to Mark. “The dressings will have to be changed for the next few days but she shouldn’t blister. The redness will take a little longer to fade. The pain-killer will work for a few hours but she will need more. Over the counter ones will work. She was lucky she had her jacket on and that the coffee had been sitting for a while on the table...”

“I’m fine, thank you. It was an unfortunate accident. Don’t worry about it. It was an accident. No you don’t have to take me

home. I'm fine, I'm really fine. I'd like to go now." Cáit turned to Angela. "Could you call a taxi please?"

"Jimmy," she spoke to the young bellboy. "Call a taxi for Ms..."

"Roche," Cáit said. "Cáit Roche."

"Hold that Jimmy," Mark ordered. "Angela call Mike and ask him to bring the car round. I'll take Ms. Roche home. That is unless you'd like to stay the night in The Gallaghan. It's the least we can do seeing you had the accident here."

"Oh please, a taxi will do fine," Cáit protested.

"We'll pay for the taxi," the young girls offered.

"A drop of medicinal brandy wouldn't go astray," said Dr. Farrell.

"Mr. Callaghan, will I call Mike for the car?" Angela asked.

"Poor lady needs a bit of help," murmured someone in the crowd.

"I'd like to go home," Cáit pleaded with Mr Callaghan, who appeared to be the person in charge.

"Call Mike," Mark said to Angela taking a look at Cáit's white face. He put his arm around her shoulders, bringing her to the relative quiet of the sofa beneath the window. "The car'll be here in a few moments. We'll have you home in no time."

Cáit turned to Mark. "What happened to my briefcase and bag?" she said suddenly.

"Angela has them. We'll pick them up when Mike gets here. Ah, there he is," Mark added. "Will you be able to walk or will I carry you out to the car?"

Cáit gave a nervous laugh. "I'll walk, thanks."

But the tightness in her legs caused her to stumble. Mark caught her and lifted her into his arms.

"I don't bite. Well not unless I'm asked nicely," he grinned into her eyes.

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Her astonished heart jolted with the immense pleasure his smile generated. His face was close; his kissable lips were inches from hers. She closed her eyes wishing it all away. This man shrieked danger to her carefully ordered life. She could not have any interaction with him. He was too exciting even when he was merely being polite.

Oh hell, it didn't matter. He wouldn't look at her twice. She didn't move in his sphere. The ladies he mixed with were most likely socialites with big money, rich parents and high earners in glamour jobs.

He'd have no problem getting girlfriends; in fact, he might need help keeping them away.

She winced at the pain in her chest when he gently laid her in the back of the luxurious black car. A smell of leather permeated the interior.

Angela put the case and her bag on the floor behind the driver's seat.

"That'll be all thanks, Angela," Mark gently closed the passenger door and got in beside the driver.

"You don't have to come," Cáit said, panicking that he might pay her more attention. She lived below the radar of the social life in Dublin, way below. "I'm sure you've work to do and I'm fine, really I am. Your driver can take me home. Thanks for all your help."

"I'm taking you home, Ms. Roche," Mark smiled at her. "So be good. Where do you live?"

A sudden April shower lashed the car.

"I live in Terenure," she told him, "just past the girl's school on the right hand side of the road."

"Would that be Terenure Road West?" Mike asked.

"Yes." Cáit returned from the back seat, longing to be alone in her own apartment. What had happened to her? She had only wanted a cup of good coffee. Why had those girls come into the

café when she was there? Oh hell. Now two men in a car were taking her home. People would notice. Please let it be quick, she fretted.

A large garden sat behind high walls. Mature trees stood guard over beds of yellow and red tulips. The flowers splashed colour on a freshly mown lawn. The driveway curved back on itself until it came to a stop at the resident's only car park at the front entrance.

Mark lifted Cáit out of the car and carried her to the main doorway to the apartment complex, Mike following behind. Up in the lift and down the hall he carried her. Cáit blushed with embarrassment as she turned the key in the lock of her apartment. And yet she had to stifle a giggle that threatened to burst from her as she thought how ridiculous this would look to any of her neighbours who might chance upon them.

Mark eased the door open with his foot, moved through the doorway being careful not to knock her feet against the jam, walked down the small hall, turned into her sitting room and lowered her onto the white leather couch that looked over the balcony beyond the small glass coffee table.

Boy he was strong. He didn't seem to be at all out of breath with the exertion.

"Put the briefcase and bag beside the sofa, Mike," Mark said. "Thanks. I'll see you downstairs."

He sat on the arm of the sofa looking down at her smiling his long slow smile.

"Do you have a friend who can help?"

"Yes thanks," she returned his smile with real pleasure, safe in the knowledge that he'd be gone in a few more minutes.

Her face lit up. Tiny specks in her eyes shone like miniature stars turning their brown into gold. Mark had never seen anything like it but her face crumbled as the effect of the



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pain-killers wore off allowing the distress of the scald to force its way in.

“Where’s your medicine cabinet?”

“Over the sink in the bathroom.”

He gave her two tablets with a tumbler of water and waited until they took effect.

“I have to go, but I’ll ring later on to see how you are.”

“Thank you.”

Mark closed the door firmly behind him when he left.

# 3

Cáit sighed in relief. Her apartment was her oasis of peace in Dublin. She took a deep breath, testing the burn on her chest while inhaling the lavender from the plant in the tiny hall.

The modern kitchen contained everything she needed. Her bedroom had a double bed with posts at each corner. On the duvet cover, the whitest she could find, she'd embroidered scattered miniature yellow rose buds sitting on a green leaf. She'd also crocheted the throw from white lamb's wool. The pillows and shams matched the duvet.

Her floor was covered in white carpet. Only her own feet had walked these quiet soft floors until today when the sexy Mr. Callaghan – strange how no one had mentioned his first name - had carried her in.

She'd watched as he'd gone to her bathroom and also when he'd walked out of her small home. Through the darting pain she'd appreciated how he moved. Every inch of him spelt big money and sex.

Her brain had screamed panic but every cell in her body leaped in excitement at his nearness. But he was not for her. Mr. Callaghan was way out of her league. They were life styles apart. What a pity! She could have enjoyed a short fling with that sexy man.

Cáit found comfort in her home. Her chest and legs appeared to be recovering.

She rested on the sofa for half an hour before ringing the office.

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“Take a couple of days at home,” Charles O’Dowd said. “Make sure you’ve completely recovered before you come back. Work from home. Your car’ll be safe enough here unless you’d like one of us to run it over tomorrow.”

“No thanks, Charles,” she told her boss. He was about fifty-five and treated Cáit as a daughter. “I won’t need it. Thanks. I’ll let you know what happens with Eileen Murphy’s case.”

“You told me you lost it. But you’d always said you didn’t have much of a brief to take in front of a judge.”

“But Ms. Murphy doesn’t understand about deeds, and the selling of property.”

“Would you like me to explain it to her?”

“I’ll get back to her when she’s had a few days to recover. Thanks all the same.”

“Take care of yourself, Cáit.”

“Thanks, Charles.”

Her home office consisted of a table with her laptop, scanner and printer.

Time passed as she made an effort to focus on catching up with a plethora of work emails. She didn’t notice the time until the house phone rang. It was late, after nine o’clock. Maybe it was Stephen. It would be about seven am in Sydney– he got up at six and walked the dog.

Nobody ever rang her on the landline – except her brother Stephen who always called once a month on a Sunday for a chat and the Nursing Home. Instinctively, she prepared herself for bad news.

“Good evening, Cáit Roche speaking,” she answered in her best professional voice.

“Good evening, Ms. Roche. Mark Callaghan here. I’m sorry it’s late but I wanted to know how you are.”

Relief that the sister in the Nursing Home was not calling with a fresh negative development about her mum flooded her

system. This was replaced with a new tension that she understood immediately and caused her to straighten up.

Mark; his name was Mark!

“I’m fine. Thanks for ringing.”

“Will you be able to dress the scalds or would you like me to send a nurse?”

“Oh no thanks,” Cáit replied quickly, alarmed that she might have a nurse knocking on her door in the morning. “I’ve got the ointment. I’ll be well able to manage.” Then in case he thought of some other reason to send medical aid, she lied, “My friend will drop by in the morning to see if I’m all right.”

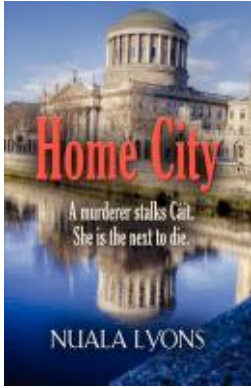
“Please ring me at The Gallagher if you need anything.”

“I will,” she lied again. “Thank you once again.”

“Not at all. It was the least I could do. Goodbye, Ms Roche.”

It would take something like an earthquake or a fire to get her to ring him. Mark Callaghan exerted too much sexual pull on her for her to afford to have any contact with him. Even his voice over the phone set her blood racing. He oozed both charm and masculine elegance. She had to stay away, to stay well away from him and his hotel.

Which was a nuisance. She’d have to find another place to have lunch or coffee when she was working at the Four Courts. She liked The Gallagher and she’d never seen him there before. She could have missed him, of course, with the amount of people going in and out; no, he’d never been there before now. She would have taken note of his walk. The way he held himself and his voice.



*A woman has her heart stabbed in a Dublin hotel. Mark Callaghan is at the top of Detective Byrne's list of suspects. Cait Roche agrees to help him find the murderer. The woman's husband is in Bulgaria but her brother, her business partner, is in Dublin, and inherits her shares after her death. Cait fights for her life when a burglar breaks into her apartment. Only the killer knows why she is next to be killed.*

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