

THE WHISPERING GENTLEMEN
by Sherry Cassells

ACT I, SCENE I

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

11-year-old CLAIRE lies in bed watching her father fold a shirt he picked up from the floor. Moonlight falls through the window onto his busy white hands.

CLAIRE

Do promises wear out?

EDDY stares at her. He has been thinking the same thing.

EDDY

(slowly)

I don't know.

He backs out of the room, exhales loudly, does not say anything more.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Headlights slide over Eddy in the darkness causing him to recoil. He snaps on the TV, sits quickly down on the couch, and tries to look comfortable.

EDDY

(sings)

Heellooooo

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

KATE comes in, peers through the hallway at her husband, and clouds over. She walks into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

KATE

(indicating Eddy's lap)

What's *that*?

Claire's shirt, twisted. Wrung. Fuck.

INT. KATE AND EDDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eddy wakes up gasping violently. Kate, already awake, turns to him. Waits.

KATE

Go back. Write it all down. It might save you.

We get the sense this is an ultimatum.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Kate and Claire hand Eddy things which he carefully places in the truck of the car. Pistachios, a jar of olives, the first bright clementines of the season, three bags of coffee.

KATE

(runs off)

Hang on...

Eddy notices a small fold of camo fabric (is that a hand?) poking out of a suitcase and fixes it before Kate sees the puppet's tiny sleeve. She returns, hands Eddy a prescription, watches him fold it and put into his wallet.

Claire disappears between the houses.

KATE

She thinks we're breaking up.

EDDY

No. I told her what's happening.

KATE

I know. She still thinks we're breaking up.

Claire rushes from between the houses like a pole vaulter and hands her father a tube. His fishing rod.

EDDY

That's my girl.

INT. CAR - DAY

Eddy drives along an empty two-lane highway. It's raining. Slamming down. The sudden silence when he goes under a bridge is shocking. Clouds bloom along the dark horizon, the occasional bright star of a maple leaf sticks to the windshield until the wiper finally peels it away.

CLOSE-UP OF LAPTOP ON PASSENGER'S SEAT

CLAIRE

(text)

I LOVE THE DARK CLOUDS!

CUT TO: EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Eddy's car rolls beneath willow branches so heavy with rain it's like a carwash, and stops.

CUT TO: INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Neon buzzes through the window and falls onto Eddy's sleeping form. He wakes, gasping, turns and stares out the window. Neon all over his sweaty face.

FLASHBACK: EXT. - RIVER - DUSK

Pan to a single house, large and unsettling, a riotous river behind it. Pan behind house reveals three big rocks standing in the river.

BACK TO PRESENT: INT. - DIFFERENT HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Same as previous night, but more intense. Staring out the window, neon-soaked, Eddy he sees the image a young girl - flash of lightening - image is now Claire. Same eyes.

EXT. LEAVING HOTEL - MORNING

EDDY

(over his shoulder to rumbling storm clouds)
Come on, let's go.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The rain is hard like before. Slamming can get on your nerves. Eddy is tired, edgy, driving slowly and searches the side of the road.

Rain stops suddenly. It's finally over. Right on time.

He finds the spot he is looking for and pulls over, gets out and walks straight into a forest until suddenly the ocean is revealed. Stacks of waves glow in the moonlight.

EDDY (OS)

This is where I grew up and everything means something.

He stands still here for a long time, gathering something.

This is going to be difficult. Finally he turns back to the forest, the car, gets in, picks up his phone.

EDDY

(text)

No more texts, darlings

CLAIRE

(heart)

KATE

(clenched teeth emoji)

He pulls away and a few minutes later, there's the bridge. He turns left and follows the river home.

FLASHBACK: EXT. RIVER - DAY

Two boys, obviously brothers, try to budge a huge rock down a hill. Pan to the river in which two rocks of similar size have been recently placed. The older boy, exhausted, collapses on the grassy hill and looks up at the sky. The younger follows suit.

OLDER BOY

Probably isn't a God 'cept in people's minds. I mean how could he a done the whole world in six days?

BACK TO PRESENT: EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Pan around house. Is that rain again? No. We hear a crescendo of typing as narration begins.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eddy's clenched face as he types. He is still wearing his jacket. Bags by the door.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Pan with narration: along the river / a highway / bush / a span of rock / and finally linger on eye-shaped deep blue quarry lake.

EDDY (OS)

We put the three big rocks in the river when we were kids. I remember how strange they looked at first, the way they intruded into the familiar curves, introduced new waterbraids and whirlpools.

My mother thought they looked like tombstones but they became *The Whispering Gentlemen* because that's what my sister JANE said the year before KRIKEY MACILROY killed her.

Now the three rocks belong as much as any other. The banks have adapted to them and the river has accepted them, widened around them, and their bare heads rest easy on my eye.

I have come back to the house by the river to write this book and make good on a promise I made to five young men more than forty years ago. This is their story.

Quick pan back to *The Whispering Gentlemen* in the river. The typing has slowed now. Tic toc.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Close-up on Eddy looking out at the river, the rocks.

EDDY

The *Whispering Gentlemen* lean together in the cold, fast river as the night gathers round them and for all the times I watched them before, I watch them again, interpret their congregation as a fine acquiescence, and with their blessing, I begin.

FADE OUT