



The Most Cunning Heart

(Feature Film)

**Have you ever left everything you've ever known
to discover where you come from?**

Grieving the deaths of her parents and the sale of the family quarry, Caitlin Maharg leaves everything she knows in Canada to pursue the craft of poetry in Northern Ireland, where she enters into a love affair with Andy Evans, a famous local poet with a roguish charm, that thrusts her into a literary world—at a price.

Against the backdrop of the cold Irish Sea and an unfamiliar country's political turmoil, flung from her settled life in Ontario by the death of her mother to cancer and her father to a car accident, Caitlin has rented a cottage in Islandmagee, County Antrim, Northern Ireland to attend an M.A. program at the renowned "House of Poets."

Tethered to no one and nothing, she meets Andy Evans, a wily, locally famous poet leading an eight-week course on William Butler Yeats. And after a round of the standard post-lecture drinks at a local bar, Andy, married and with two children, offers to give Caitlin a lift home.

An affair ensues and Caitlin's romance with Andy begins to consume her: his charm becomes manipulative control and Caitlin loses her sense of self. Trapped in a dysfunctional relationship, isolated from family and friends, she can't find a way out.

As she begins to understand her mother's story through community to women and a reconnection to buried intuition, **she learns to defy Andy's abusive tactics**. Hiding this growth from Andy, she plans her escape. But will she succeed?

In The Most Cunning Heart, a woman young loses everything
but comes to discover what's left: herself.

Empowering, captivating, and perennially topical, this is a story about radical transformation from grief to self-discovery in the life of one undaunted woman.

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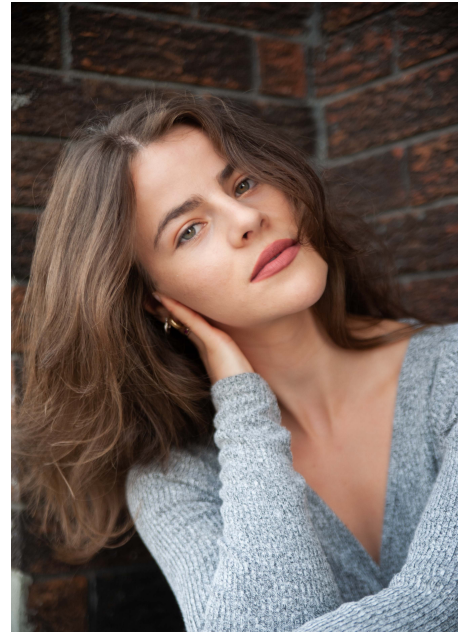
Principals

Caitlin Maharg

Highly sensitive, introverted, dealing with grief, strong inner world, sense of humour, intuitive. Visage: Lily Collins, Florence Pugh, Maya Hawke

Character Specs: Mid-twenties, 5' 7", 125 lbs, Scottish ancestry

To give you a sense of Caitlin Maharg, watch this casting trailer performed by Alexandra Floras-Matic:



Quotes

I once thought land was water. Stuck out my foot to test the cement. “You were a toddler,” said Aunt Doris. We were sipping lemonade in her backyard, squirrels running the branches. “I’d never seen a child do that,” she said. Was I being cautious or strange? Maybe both. And yet I’ve booked my ticket to Northern Ireland. “They kill each other over there, don’t they? The Troubles?” said Aunt Doris. “Your father would turn in his grave.” But I knew she understood why I had to go. She was a homebody but she understood the whatever you want to call it, creative pull. Dad would never approve of my going to a country where people killed one another. At least that’s what we’d heard happened there. But the dead can’t stop you from becoming yourself. Only you can do that.

Please note: Casting for all trailers is non-committal and for illustration purposes only.

Andy Evans

Confident, brash, charismatic storytelling poet. Fear of being alone. Avoids shame at all costs. Visage: Colin Morgan, Jamie Dornan

Character Specs: Mid-thirties, 6 foot 2", 178 lbs, Northern Irish



To give you a sense of Andy Evans, watch this character trailer performed by Michael Pearson:



Quotes:

Biggest housing estate in Northern Ireland, that. Rathcoole. Means ‘back of the ringfort.’ It’s where I grew up. Corner terrace. Windows, light. I liked to say *she glistened like a piece of fallen night sky*—well, to anyone who’d listen, o’course. Always had a touch of the poet in me. *My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense...* Mr. Nelson was the one who turned me on to poetry. English teacher, stout fellow, forty-odd when we met. I sat in the back, chuckling with my mates. But he read that ode and the room stopped. I can’t explain it better than that. It’s just the room stopped. He must’ve sensed it somehow, asked me to stay after class, said, “Here son, have a look.” Handed me *Keats’ Selected*. Notebook size. Slipped it into my back pocket so my mates wouldn’t see. And you know, I never gave it back.

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Locations

Actual: County Antrim, Northern Ireland. County Down, Northern Ireland. Dublin, Ireland. Burlington, Ontario. Limestone quarry in Ridgeway, Ontario.

Fictional: Newfoundland & Labrador (as stand-ins for locations in Ireland).

Key Scenes

ONE: SETTLING IN

REFERENCE PAGES: 13-16

PLAYERS: CAITLIN MAHARG; MRS. PETTY (Caitlin Maharg's landlady), a fifty-something widowed mother of two grown children and owner of the cottage at the back Caitlin is renting.

MOTIVATIONS: Caitlin is trying to settle into a new country; Mrs. Petty is trying to remain connected to the world after her children's departure.

SYNOPSIS: Mrs. Petty drives Caitlin from Islandmagee, Northern Ireland and to "Loyalist" Larne to get groceries, exposing Caitlin to sectarianism for the first time—murals of King Billy and red white and blue curbstones. After shopping for "toiletries" at the drugstore, Caitlin wanders down a passageway to find kiosks with locals selling crafts. She is drawn to a necklace—three hearts looped together as one—but doesn't know why. She knows she must have it and buys it on the spot. "Enjoy the trinity," says the saleslady.

TWO: AN IRISH ENCOUNTER

REFERENCE PAGES: 24-29

PLAYERS: Caitlin Maharg; Andy Evans; Ruth, Doreen, Mary, Maureen (four middle-aged female students in the W.B. Yeats Literature Class that Andy Evans teaches)

MOTIVATIONS: Reconciling with her grief and untethered identity, Caitlin is eager to delve into the art of verse.

SYNOPSIS: Caitlin attends her first class on W.B. Yeats, taught by local poet Andy Evans. She's not physically attracted to him until he speaks: it's something in his voice. The class discusses Yeats's epitaph: *Cast a cold Eye / on Life, on Death. / Horseman, pass by!* Connecting to "*limestone quarried near the spot*" in "Under Ben Bulbin," Caitlin is reminded of the quarry beside where she grew up, the home she once shared with her parents. After class, Andy offers to drive Caitlin home. Ruth offers her a lift, too, but Caitlin chooses Andy; and so their affair begins.

THREE: YOU, ME & DUBLIN

REFERENCE PAGES: 48-51

PLAYERS: CAITLIN MAHARG; ANDY EVANS

MOTIVATION: Caitlin, longing for connection in the desolation of her grief, and Andy, weary with a monotonous marriage and his familial obligations, escape from Belfast to Dublin to begin their affair.

SYNOPSIS: After an intimate night at a Dublin Bed & Breakfast, Andy gives Caitlin a tour through the places in the city he loves most. At the Grand Canal, they encounter a woman falling (intentionally?) into the water and help her out. As she disappears, Caitlin realizes that very incident had happened in a dream Andy described to her. Andy shows Caitlin the bronze statue of the poet Patrick Kavanagh, who wrote “Raglan Road,” lyrics Van Morrison adapts to a song to which the lovers listen repeatedly together.

FOUR: ROCKY ISLES

REFERENCE PAGES: 81

PLAYERS CAITLIN MAHARG; ANDY EVANS; TORNLEY, an established Northern Irish poet

MOTIVATION: To deepen and realize her connection with a craft by which she can transmute her grief, Caitlin wants to connect with Tornley in an authentic way. A jealous Andy tries to subvert their connection. Tornley has a soft spot for Caitlin in a fatherly way. He wants to protect her and see her grow.

SYNOPSIS: The two lovers attend a poetry festival, The MacNeice, with Andy as a presenter and Caitlin as a scholarship student, and struggle to keep their affair a secret. Caitlin accepts a lift from Tornley back to a new flat she’s begun renting to avoid accusations and gossip. A furious Andy accuses Caitlin of attraction to the Hemingway look-a-like. After Tornley drops her off, Caitlin waits desperately for Andy to call her.

FIVE: ALL TO MYSELF

REFERENCE PAGES: 128 to 133

PLAYERS: CAITLIN MAHARG; ANDY EVANS

MOTIVATION: Caitlin longs to be accepted as a poet and is looking forward to reading at an event. Andy, threatened by her writing and as organizer of the event, prevents her from reading.

SYNOPSIS: Caitlin is invited to participate in an arts week organized by Andy (in a last minute way). She is thrilled to share her love of poetry with the students and have her work published in an anthology with all the other Arts Week participants. Andy, as organizer and editor, tells her they have enough readers for the launch so she won’t be reading. Andy has now left his marriage and is living with Caitlin. He convinces her—*the pressure I’m under publishing the woman I’m with*—that this decision is for her own good. Caitlin, devastated by this news, tries to rip her poems out of the book but Andy grabs her arm, maintaining his grip, before letting go. Later at the launch, when Tornley

stands at the podium to read, he insists Caitlin come up to read her poems. Andy, unable to stop this, fumes at the back of the room. At the wine and cheese reception, Andy informs Caitlin that she read her poem “Black Kettles” incorrectly—changing *Grief is waiting for fifty black kettles* to *Grief is like waiting for fifty black kettles*, leaving Caitlin with the feeling of failure.

SIX: THE CHASE

REFERENCE PAGES: 173-174

PLAYERS: CAITLIN MAHARG; ANDY EVANS

MOTIVATION: Caitlin senses Andy is cheating on her and decides to confront him. In doing so, she realizes she must play the game of deceit as she works to gain her freedom back.

SYNOPSIS: After Andy’s return from a month-long residency post in America, Caitlin senses he isn’t the same. She pretends to leave for her daily run but sneaks back in the house to eavesdrop on Andy’s phonecall. She confronts him; a tussle ensues, then a chase, which ends with Caitlin locked in the bathroom and Andy pounding at the door until all grows quiet.

SEVEN: THE DEPARTURE

REFERENCE PAGES: 181-183

PLAYERS: CAITLIN MAHARG

MOTIVATION: Caitlin has to leave an abusive relationship and return to Canada to begin a new life.

SYNOPSIS: With the help of her next door neighbours and Jenny, her friend from Oxfam where Caitlin volunteers, Caitlin slowly takes her power back. When Andy leaves for America again, Caitlin obtains a restraining order and eventually escapes from a threatening Andy, empowered, wiser and ready to be the poet she’s meant to be. Upon her return to Canada, Caitlin finds the three-heart necklace she purchased at the beginning of her journey and sees that it has separated. When she looks closely, she sees that each hole in each heart is still perfect and the string looping them is intact.

Comps

Tonally Similar Films

Brooklyn. The Banshees of Inisherin. The Quiet Girl.

Tonally Similar Music

Van Morrison: Raglan Road, And it Stoned Me. Into the Mystic. The Cranberries. Don't Look Back in Anger by Oasis.

Tonally Similar Painting



Jack B Yeats: Grief.

The Palimpsest Press Team

Catherine Graham

is a novelist, poet, podcast host and creative writing instructor based in Toronto. Her debut novel *Quarry* won an IPPY gold medal for fiction and was a finalist for the Sarton Women's Book Award for Contemporary Fiction. *The Most Cunning Heart* and *Quarry* were both *Miramichi Reader* Best Books and finalists for the Fred Kerner Book Award. Her memoir, *Æther: An Out-of-Body Lyric*, was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award, Toronto Book Award, and won the Fred Kerner Book Award. *The Celery Forest* was named a CBC Best Book of the Year and was a finalist for the Fred Cogswell Award for Poetry. She teaches at the University of Toronto, leads the Toronto International Festival of Authors' Book Club and co-hosts The Hummingbird Podcast—part of the WNED PBS Amplify app, and is a judge for the CBC Poetry Prize. *Put Flowers Around Us and Pretend We're Dead: New and Selected Poems* is her latest book. Visit: www.catherinegraham.com @catgrahampoet
Catherine is prepared to assist in the development of a screenplay.

Aimée Dunn

is the owner/publisher for Palimpsest Press, a Canadian literary press based in Windsor, Ontario. The 20-year-old press is supported by Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Ontario Creates. The press publishes beautiful poetry and fresh, innovative fiction and non-fiction. Recent award wins for Palimpsest Press include the 2021 Governor General's Literary Awards for Poetry and Non-fiction (*The Junta of Happenstance*, Tolu Oloruntoba; *alfabet/alphabet*, Sadiqa de Meijer) and the 2022 Griffin Poetry Prize (*The Junta of Happenstance*, Tolu Oloruntoba).

Kevin Andrew Heslop

is an up-and-coming Canadian filmmaker whose practice connects theatre, poetry, film, art criticism, journalism, and the visual arts. In 2021, he published *the correct fury of your why is a mountain* (Gordon Hill Press, 2021); in 2022, he founded Astoria Pictures, an

independent film production and distribution company; and in 2023, he released his directorial debut, *mo(u)vements*. (Astoria Pictures, 2023), a suite of thirteen short films. In addition to active practices in the visual, literary, and performing arts, Kevin works as a producer representing titles from award-winning publishing houses towards their adaptation to the stage and screen. He is based in Montréal and artist residencies around the world.

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