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'Can-Can' takes shape on Cape

By [Rebecca M. Alvin](#)

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Arturo Vivante's short story "Can-Can" is a small, intimate story told in a subtle, restrained manner. The story is over quicker than you can put together its meaning and there is almost no dialogue. Yet, when young filmmaker Lulu Wang read it, she knew right away she wanted to make it into a film.

"I like stories where there's no bad person ... In this story, he's simply a man who -- marriage wasn't the right path for him," she explains, "He's not a bad person but he's obviously doing something that's hurting other people, so you almost have three victims."

The story itself consists primarily of a married man who is about to leave his wife and children to meet his lover for a rendezvous. As he is about to leave, his wife jokingly does the can-can dance (hence the title), and he begins to re-think his affair. He then meets his lover and has a very brief but poignant conversation with her afterwards.

"I really liked the fact that it comes full circle, and visually that appealed to me," she explains over lunch at the Lighthouse Restaurant. She also liked the imagery of the can-can dance in the story. "It's very subtle and it has nothing to do with the can-can. That's such a strong visual element and yet it really is not the essence of what this story is about, and the story is actually about something that's very sad," she says.

Wang was committed to shooting the film in Wellfleet because that is where Vivante, who lives there, wrote it. Even though Wang lives in Los Angeles, movie capital of the world, she flew to Wellfleet to spend Columbus Day weekend shooting on location at local spots including the On the Creek Café on Commercial Street.

"I really wanted to capture the loneliness," she says. Especially in the fall (on the Cape) there's a certain kind of beauty that's lonely and beautiful at the same time and I think that sums up the story ... Everyone's kind of lonely and yet they're in this beautiful place, so I guess it's ironic."

She met with Vivante early in the process and she says he has been very supportive of her efforts. Predictably the writer was hesitant to have his story altered, but Wang was able to convince him that changes were needed because film is so intrinsically different from literature.

"He didn't think that we should add a whole lot of stuff that wasn't originally written, but we had to explain it's difficult to make a film out of a story that has no dialogue," she says.

Although the beginning and ending of the story remain in the film, according to the 23-year old director, there is an additional scene and some of the interior aspects of the story are brought out through dialogue.

Eventually the author came around and actually made suggestions for scenes that are not present in his original story. "It was pretty funny, he thought that the sex scene should be shown in the movie," Wang says laughing. "That was very funny and unexpected."

Wang studied film at Boston College, but she was never really a film student. She majored in English and always thought she would be a writer. But then she met a professor who encouraged her to take a filmmaking course. The class involved shooting and editing on super-8 film, rather than video or any of the larger film formats, and Wang says she fell in love with that process.

"To hold one 18th of a second in your hand - it's different," she recalls.

But economics always play some role in filmmaking and so "Can-Can" is being shot on high-definition (HD) video, a compromise between the quality of film and the cost of video. This will be Wang's first HD project, but not her first film. She has made several films that were honored at Boston College and she is also in the midst of completing a feature-length documentary love story, which she shot in Nepal and in the U.S.

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For more information about "Can-Can," which Wang hopes will be completed this year, visit www.cancanmovie.com

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