

Mr. Cuddles

A 10-minute play

by Rom Watson

Contact:
Rom Watson
836 Westbourne Dr Apt 106
West Hollywood, CA 90069
romwatsonwriter@gmail.com
310.625.7374
www.romwatson.com

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Cast

DAVE, male, 30's to 40's, Miriam's husband

MIRIAM, female, 30's to 40's

GRANDMA, female, 60's to 80's, Miriam's grandmother

MR. CUDDLES, male, age open (non-speaking role)

The location: a home in Los Angeles.

The time: the present.

A man and a woman stand in a parlor.

DAVE

I hate coming here.

MIRIAM

The only way we're going to avoid foreclosure is if she gives us the money.

DAVE

We should have stopped for a drink first.

MIRIAM

She's much nicer than she used to be.

DAVE

Did she get a lobotomy?

MIRIAM

No, she got a cat.

DAVE

And that suddenly made her nicer?

MIRIAM

You should hear her on the phone. She's like a different person.

Grandma enters. It is obvious from her dress,
hair and jewelry that she has money.

GRANDMA

There you are.

MIRIAM

Hi Grandma.

DAVE

Hi.

GRANDMA

(Sincerely and sweetly.)

I'm so glad you're both here. Thanks for letting yourselves in.

(Perhaps she hugs Miriam, then Dave.)

Make yourselves at home.

(Dave and Miriam sit.)

Grandma sits in her chair.)

I wish I could see you better, but my eyesight has gotten even worse since the last time you saw me.

MIRIAM

There must be something the doctors can do.

GRANDMA

No, it's macular degeneration.

DAVE

You seem in good spirits though.

GRANDMA

I am. Who knew that taking in a stray cat would turn my life around?

(Slight pause.)

Dave, I owe you an apology. I've been selfish and mean and, so focused on what was wrong with my life that I couldn't see all the things I have to be grateful for. Like the two of you.

DAVE

Thank you.

GRANDMA

Having something to love has made all the difference in the world. I hope I never take my family for granted again. In fact, I'd like you to visit once a month.

MIRIAM

I think we can do that- -

DAVE

Once a month?- -

MIRIAM

(Firmly.)

Can't we Dave.

DAVE

Sure.

GRANDMA

Oh good. I don't get many visitors, so it means a lot to me.

MIRIAM

So, do we get to meet this cat?

GRANDMA

He's shy around strangers, but I think I can coax him out.

MIRIAM

What's his name?

GRANDMA

I call him Mr. Cuddles.

DAVE

(Disgusted.)

Cute.

GRANDMA

Miriam, remember how you used to love my shortbread cookies? I baked a batch. I'll go get them, and once he gets a whiff, I'm sure he'll come out of hiding.

Grandma exits to the kitchen.

DAVE

She's like a different person.

MIRIAM

It's nice to know people can change, even at her age.

DAVE

We should have no problem getting the money now.

Grandma enters with a plate of six cookies, which she hands to Miriam.

GRANDMA

Have as many as you like; I have more in the kitchen.

Grandma takes a cookie and sits in her chair. Miriam and Dave each take a cookie and begin to eat. Mr. Cuddles peeks his head into the room and sniffs the air. Mr. Cuddles is a giant rat. He is played by a male actor in a rat costume, crawling on his hands and knees. He cautiously enters the room. Dave freezes in fear.

Miriam pulls her feet up under her and stifles a small scream with her hand. Grandma is startled by the scream and looks around. Seeing Mr. Cuddles, she immediately relaxes.

GRANDMA

Don't be frightened. Mr. Cuddles won't hurt you.

DAVE

That's . . . your pet?

GRANDMA

Come here Mr. Cuddles. Don't be shy.

Mr. Cuddles crouches next to Grandma's chair.

DAVE

Grandma, we don't want you to panic, but that animal is a rat--
 (Miriam nudges him and gives him a look
 that conveys "shut up.")
 --radically big.

GRANDMA

(Stroking the top of Mr. Cuddle's head)

I probably overfeed him, but I like spoiling him. He's always hungry and I just hate to say no. Fortunately, he'll eat anything. He's not at all finicky like most cats.

DAVE

I hate to be the one to tell you this, but he's not a cat.

GRANDMA

What do you mean? Of course he's a cat.

Miriam nudges Dave and shakes her head "no."

DAVE

Have you ever heard him purr?

GRANDMA

Come to think of it . . .no. But he's too big to sit on my lap, which is where he would purr.

MIRIAM

Not all cats purr.

DAVE

Have you ever heard him meow?

GRANDMA

. . .No . . .but I'm sure he can. Can you meow for me, Mr. Cuddles? "Meow?"
"Meow?"

Mr. Cuddles tries to imitate Grandma's
"meow," but it turns into a raspy hiss.

MIRIAM

He must have a hair ball.

DAVE

I don't think a hair ball is his problem. He needs to go to the vet to get his shots.

GRANDMA

Oh I don't think that's necessary . . .

DAVE

You could get rabies!

GRANDMA

Rabies? Mr. Cuddles would never bite me. He eats out of my hand all the time. I have nothing to fear from Mr. Cuddles.

DAVE

What about the rest of us?

MIRIAM

Dave, there's no need to get upset over an ordinary house cat.

DAVE

Ordinary? It is not ordinary.

GRANDMA

Well I'm glad you think he's special. Let me show you what I've taught Mr. Cuddles.
(She stands and holds the cookie up.)

Sit up.

(Mr. Cuddles sits on his haunches.)

Good kitty. For some reason I can't get him to use the litter box, so I've taught him to
"eliminate" on command. I won't show you that of course.

(Having heard "eliminate", Mr. Cuddles
squats to take a dump.)

NO. Not now. NO.

(He stops.)

I'm teaching him to balance on his hind legs and do the hula. Mr. Cuddles, can you do the hula?

(She holds the cookie above her head and moves it back and forth. He rears up on his hind legs and sways.)

By the time you visit next month I'll have made him a little grass skirt. Won't that be cute?

MIRIAM

Charming.

DAVE

(Resigned to his fate of monthly visits.)

I can't wait.

GRANDMA

(Moving the cookie to and fro.)

Look at kitty do the hula. Hula, Mr. Cuddles, hula. Now, take a bow.

(He bows.)

Good kitty.

(She lowers the cookie into his paws and he eagerly devours it.)

Mr. Cuddles is such a good boy.

MIRIAM

Grandma, where did you find Mr. Cuddles?

GRANDMA

One night I woke up thirsty, so I went into the kitchen. When I turned on the light . . . there he was. I think I scared him as much as he scared me.

MIRIAM

I find that hard to believe.

GRANDMA

He was so hungry, poor thing. You know what he was doing when I found him? Going through my garbage.

DAVE

What a shock.

GRANDMA

I fixed him a plate of leftovers and we've been fast friends ever since.

DAVE

Haven't you noticed anything odd?

GRANDMA

Once there was a tiny mouse in the kitchen, but instead of pouncing, Mr. Cuddles let him scurry away. But that just proves he's a gentle soul.

MIRIAM

Anything else?

GRANDMA

I bought him a cat toy filled with catnip, and he ignored it. Perhaps he's an exotic breed that doesn't respond to catnip.

DAVE

Very exotic. Gigan--

MIRIAM

Grandma! These cookies are delicious! Would you please wrap some up for me to take home?

GRANDMA

That's a wonderful idea!

Grandma exits.

DAVE

We gotta get Animal Services in here.

MIRIAM

Dave, I've been thinking. If Grandma loves Mr. Cuddles, who are we to stop her?

DAVE

What?!

MIRIAM

You said yourself you've noticed the change in Grandma, . . .

DAVE

Yes but--

MIRIAM

. . .and just because we would never choose a giant rat for a pet, . . .

DAVE

It's a monster!

MIRIAM

. . .we have to respect her wishes. Besides, if she realizes *we* had him taken away, she'll never give us the money.

DAVE

What do we do?

MIRIAM

Let nature take it's course.

DAVE

What does that mean? Let him eat Grandma?

MIRIAM

No! Rats don't live that long, and that is not a young rat. It means we wait for Mr. Cuddles to die.

DAVE

And let her live with a giant rat for a roommate?

MIRIAM

Do you want the money or not?

GRANDMA

(From offstage.)

Miriam? Can you give me a hand?

MIRIAM

Be right there!

(To Dave as she starts to exit.)

Without Mr. Cuddles, she may turn nasty again. Besides, we only have to visit once a month.

DAVE

The way she feeds him, next month he'll be the size of Godzilla!

Miriam exits to the kitchen. Dave and Mr. Cuddles eye each other warily. Dave reaches for another cookie, but Mr. Cuddles snarls and blocks his way. Dave backs away and Mr. Cuddles advances on him. Dave runs around the seating and grabs the plate. Mr. Cuddles grabs Dave's leg and tries to bite him. Dave pulls away and the cookies fall to the floor.

Mr. Cuddles picks them up and moves away from Dave. Dave advances and Mr. Cuddles licks each cookie in turn. Dave starts to throw the plate at him but then thinks better of it and sets the plate down and walks away. Mr. Cuddles puts the cookies on the plate and crouches next to Grandma's chair. Miriam enters holding a foil packet of cookies, followed by Grandma.

MIRIAM

Dave, I asked Grandma for the money and she said yes!

DAVE

That's great! Thank you so much.

Miriam picks up the plate of cookies and takes one, but Dave grabs it from her and puts it back on the plate, shaking his head "no." Thinking he's alluding to her weight, she gets angry and shoves a cookie into his mouth. His face and body language conveys repulsion.

GRANDMA

Don't you like my cookies?

Not wanting to spit it out in front of her, he reluctantly eats it. Mr. Cuddles gloats.

MIRIAM

Grandma, do you want us to bring you anything next month?

GRANDMA

Next month? Mr. Cuddles and I want you to visit once a week. Every Sunday.

DAVE

What? Why?

GRANDMA

None of my other relatives will come near me. You're all I have left. Even though you're only interested in my money.

MIRIAM

Grandma, how can you say that?

GRANDMA

I'm losing my eyesight, not my ability to judge character.

DAVE

You can't force us to visit you.

GRANDMA

Oh I think I can. Just because I'm sweeter doesn't mean I'm stupid. Without my money, you'll lose your house. Won't you.

Angry, Dave takes a step toward Grandma. Mr. Cuddles rears up and moves between Dave and Grandma, taking a defensive stance.

GRANDMA

I should have warned you not to make any sudden moves. Mr. Cuddles is very protective of me. Mr. Cuddles, show Grandma how you do the hula.

(She takes a cookie and moves it back and forth. Mr. Cuddles sways.)

Look at kitty do the hula. Dave, Miriam, why don't you hula like Mr. Cuddles.

They don't move. Grandma gives them a look. They begin to dance the hula. She gives the rat the cookie and pets him as he eats.

GRANDMA

Good kitty.

The lights fade to black as Dave and Miriam dance the hula. End of play.