

Mr. Cuddles and the Pet Sitter

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A short play

by Rom Watson

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## Cast

RUTH, sister to Miriam

MIRIAM, sister to Ruth

GRANDMA, their grandmother

MR. CUDDLES, non-speaking role

The location: Grandma's house.

The time: the present.

The lights rise. MIRIAM enters carrying a purse, followed by RUTH. There is a bowl on the floor.

RUTH

I'm surprised you have your own key.

MIRIAM

She gave me one in case of emergencies. (Handing the key to Ruth.) Here.

RUTH

It's really nice of you to take her to the funeral.

MIRIAM

Hazel was her only sister. And she can't drive herself, not with her eyesight.

RUTH

Has it gotten worse?

MIRIAM

You have no idea.

RUTH

Miriam, you're a braver woman than I am. I don't think I could stand being in a car with Grandma for seven hours. Much less two nights in a motel room.

MIRIAM

You haven't seen her in a long time. She's not "Grandma the Grinch" anymore.

RUTH

I'd forgotten we used to call her that.

MIRIAM

Taking in a stray animal made her a lot nicer (Calling offstage.) Grandma?

GRANDMA

(From offstage.)

Be right there.

MIRIAM

Ruth . . . I'm going to have to let you in on a little family secret.

GRANDMA enters. She is genuinely sweet.

GRANDMA

Here I am. (Hugging Miriam.) Ruthie Anne, it's been ages.

MIRIAM

I'm Miriam.

GRANDMA

Sorry. I don't see well anymore. (Hugging Ruth.) I've said this to Miriam, but I want to apologize to you for being such a bitch when you kids were growing up.

RUTH

Grandma.

GRANDMA

If I had known how much love a cat could bring into my life, my house would have been full of them.

MIRIAM

I think Mr. Cuddles is all you can handle.

GRANDMA

You're right about that. Thank you, Ruth, for agreeing to look after my precious little kitty.

RUTH

I'm happy to do it.

GRANDMA

(Gesturing to the bowl on the floor.)

I keep his bowl right here, because he likes to eat while we're watching TV. Fill it twice a day.

MIRIAM

I gave her instructions on the way over.

GRANDMA

Good. I'll find him and bring him out so you can meet.

MIRIAM

Grandma, I'll find Mr. Cuddles. You finish packing. We need to get on the road.

GRANDMA

Did you fill up the car with gas?

MIRIAM

Yes, Grandma, and I bought us coffee and snacks for the trip. Go pack.

GRANDMA

Alright then.

Grandma exits.

RUTH

You're right. She's way sweeter than she used to be.

MIRIAM

She's a different person now.

RUTH

So what's the family secret?

MIRIAM

You should stand on that table.

RUTH

Why?

MIRIAM

You'll feel safer.

RUTH

Safe from what?

MIRIAM

Just do it.

RUTH

I am not going to stand on Grandma's table.

MIRIAM

Please. (Forcefully.) Stand on the table!

RUTH

Okay okay.

Ruth stands on a table.

MIRIAM

Thank you. And try not to scream.

Miriam crosses to the bowl and takes a Babybel cheese wheel from her purse.

RUTH

Why would I scream?

Miriam removes the red wax casing from the cheese and puts it in the bowl.

MIRIAM

Because Mr. Cuddles . . . is not a cat.

RUTH

Not a cat? Grandma thinks he's a cat.

MIRIAM

Grandma has macular degeneration.

RUTH

I know but,-- (staring at Miriam's face.) You're not joking, are you. (Gasps.) Is it a raccoon?

MIRIAM

I wish.

MR. CUDDLES enters. He is a giant rat. He is played by an adult male actor in a rat costume, crawling on his hands and knees. He sees Ruth's backpack, crosses to it and cautiously sniffs it.

RUTH

It's a giant rat!

Startled, Mr. Cuddles cowers in fear.

MIRIAM

Be quiet! (To Mr. Cuddles.) Don't be frightened Mr. Cuddles. Eat your cheese. Good boy.

His fear overcome by his hunger, he crosses to his bowl and eats the cheese.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Keep your voice down. We don't want Grandma to hear you.

RUTH

(Loudly whispering.)

It's a rat!

MIRIAM

Don't ever use that word in this house! Grandma must never know.

RUTH

We have to tell her. For her own safety.

MIRIAM

No! She would be devastated if she found out. She loves that animal.

RUTH

He's hideous.

Mr. Cuddles rises up on his haunches as he eats.

MIRIAM

I know, but he's all she has. Besides, without him, she might revert to being a bitch.

Grandma enters with an overnight bag. Ruth steps down off the table.

GRANDMA

I'm all set. I see you've met Mr. Cuddles. Isn't he the sweetest thing?

RUTH

He's . . .very big.

GRANDMA

He's hungry all the time, and I just can't say "no" to Mr. Cuddles.

RUTH

I'm not going to be able to say "no" either.

GRANDMA

Then you'll get along just fine. And he's not finicky like most cats. He'll eat anything. (She crosses to Mr. Cuddles and pets him.) You be a good kitty for Ruthie Anne. Grandma will be back soon.

MIRIAM

Keep the doors locked, Ruth. The last thing we want is for him to get loose.

GRANDMA

I'd die if anything happened to Mr. Cuddles.

RUTH

I'll take good care of him.

MIRIAM

Time to go, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Bye now.

RUTH

Have a good trip.

Grandma exits. Ruth stops Miriam from exiting.

RUTH (CONT'D)

How am I going to survive with this beast?

MIRIAM

You are not in any danger as long as you feed him. (She reaches into her purse, takes out a handful of Babybel cheese wheels and hands them to Ruth.) Take these. He gets cranky when he's hungry.

RUTH

Cranky? This thing gets cranky?!

MIRIAM

Keep Mr. Cuddles happy. If he's happy, then Grandma's happy. So do whatever it takes.

RUTH

Why is it so important to keep Grandma happy?

MIRIAM

She's giving me and Dave money every month to pay our mortgage. Okay bye.

Miriam exits. Ruth turns to Mr. Cuddles. He gets his toy and places it on the table. He waits for Ruth to play but she does nothing. Mr. Cuddles pushes the toy in her direction and looks up expectantly. Realizing he wants to play, Ruth reluctantly gives in and pushes it back to him.

Delighted, he pounces on the toy, puts it in his mouth and chews on it. Blackout. End of play.