

# Cuffed Frays

By Grace Cavalieri

©2012 Grace Cavalieri  
©2012 Publication Scene4 Magazine

**Published as formatted by the author in the April 2012 issue of *SCENE4 Magazine*  
([www.scene4.com](http://www.scene4.com)) and provided as a free PDF download.  
Permission is granted to print one copy of this version for personal reading purposes.  
All Rights Reserved by the Author**

©2012 Grace Cavalieri. ©2012 Publication Scene4 Magazine.

*Cuffed Frays* is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and international copyright laws. All rights, including the rights of translation into foreign languages, adaptations in motion pictures, television, video, radio, various other electronic media, recitation, public reading, and any other adaptations and are strictly reserved. Performances of any kind require the payment of royalty. You may display this book for your personal, non-commercial use. But you may not otherwise reproduce or distribute copies of this book or any part thereof in any form (including by email or other electronic means), without the prior written consent of the owner. All inquiries should be directed to the author, Grace Cavalieri at: [gracecav@comcast.net](mailto:gracecav@comcast.net).

Cuffed Frays

By Grace Cavalieri

**Synopsis**

**Cuffed Frays** is about relationships, communication, aging, hope, longing, loss and acceptance. It occurs in the surreal “present” in a rural setting. The play is a fable featuring a late middle aged (to old) couple who stay together in a gnarled love. Time has braided them together though their choice of words, familiar rituals and daily practice. The physical flesh is abhorrent, so they manage by jokes and projecting their love onto a pet animal. However, this cat is dying too. The play’s action shows the couple, Mickey and Shadduck, having tea and then taking a walk in the late afternoon sun. They meet Millie, a woman in distress. Mickey avoids her. Millie passes a note to Shadduck which he misunderstands to be a personal message to him. The day ends with the death of the hope for physical connection; and the death of the pet animal they shared.

.+++++

Characters: Mickey, a middle aged woman  
Shadduck, her husband (middle aged)  
Millie, a slightly younger woman  
Reverend, parish priest, mature

\* \* \* \* \*

*We hear cats meowing, and Mickey’s voice coming in close, as if from across the room.  
Meowing stops.*

*Mick*

The sudden coolness in here around the house. It has to do with a lack of greenery you never understood. *(close) (sounds of sitting)* When you had your stroke and fell out of your chair, didn’t I catch you? And after thinking, somehow, it was my fault. That’s what a person gets for doing a good deed for a friend.

*Shad*  
Husband

*Mick*  
Well, I was thinking friend was more to the way of saying something better than husband. Didn't I catch you? Well, then, why do I think it was my fault? I get nervous every time you sit.

*Shad*  
I can't keep standing.

*Mick*  
That's not the point at all.

*Shad*  
I think it's jealousy on your part, Mick, your way of helping me. Like when I fell out. I don't connect it all but I think somehow you're jealous that I had something first for a change.

*Mick*  
Now I know your artery's closed on you all the way to talk like that.

*Shad*  
I never heard you give a complaint that wasn't in jealousy. It's your failing. Your biggest failing – besides being vicious the way you are.

*Mick*  
Come on old man. Because you're lonely and for no other reason you talk like that. When I go to the grocer's you get lonely and I have to pay my way when I get back – alright, I'm doing it right now, aren't I? Taking your complaints in my stride, in my uncomplaining way.

*Shad*  
They don't call it "grocer's" anymore, and they haven't for years. They haven't since, maybe World War II.

*Mick*  
A grocer's a grocer. You try to sidetrack me with information, you do. Logistics. You're the one with all the facts just when I'm hot to the heat of the matter like that. The grocer.

*Shad*  
Or that next war after. They don't name them now. Nothing has a name on it. You have to remember the whole bloody globe, and places who weren't there when you were a child, in the first place.

*Mick*

This loneliness of yours makes you accusatory to me. Like our own one-eyed cat there. If he's got mucous, he's seeing mice out of every corner, alright.

*Shad*

You were the one who wanted him for the streaks in his fur.

*Mick*

I admit it.

*Shad*

Well admit it then.

*Mick*

I do. I admit I loved the yellow, circular like it is.

*Shad*

You like to be different all the time. Always have liked that. Thank God you're out of the bloody costumes you used to wear down the street. Beads and lace. You looked like something out of Old Arsenic. Things have changed, Mick. And you with it, to the better. To the better. I'll admit that much.

*Mick*

Thank you.

*Shad*

Remember the farmer story from up in New Hampshire where...

*Mick*

Get on with it.

*Shad*

He said, "I've felt so much for you all these years..."

*Mick*

Okay. Come out with it. Don't make a career over everything you say.

*Shad*

"...felt so much for you all these years, it's been all I could do to keep from telling you?"

*Mick*

I do – I remember.

*Shad*

There's a message in it for you, from me.

*Mick*

And back to you.

*Shad*

Thanks, Mick, but that's your form of aggression, Mickey. There we have a perfect example.

*Mick*

Nothing's perfect, Shad.

*Shad*

Putting your emotions inside someone else the way you do – occupying their territory like that. Sitting in ownership on their brain - - rocking on it like a seesaw. A perfect example here. We can see it. You telling me what I'm feeling.

*Mick*

I didn't say two words about how you're feeling. I'm getting us some hot water and sugar with a lemon slice in it at this very moment. That'll clear the air.

*Shad*

Acts as a cathartic. Mickey, you turn my head like a faucet.

*Mick*

Hmm. A wedge of lemon will do you good. Suck it after it's been floating hot. It cleans the mouth – acid – kills germs.

*Shad*

Are you proposing I wipe myself with it too then?

*Mick*

No need to get huffy like you do. I'm serving you a lovely cup of tea – without the tea. It gets you agitated. No tea.

*Shad*

It's my agitation. I'm allowed. I'm the one has to live with it.

*Mick*

You? Up all night, telling me I begrudge you your sleep . . . putting on earphones and making body sounds you think nobody else can hear. You can't hear your own self when you have wind, and you think no one else in the universe can. Self deception. There's a lining proof, right there.

*Shad*

Am I really so much different than anyone else, Mickey? To hear you reading off my dimensions makes me feel like the first man on the moon.

*Mick*

You couldn't be the first man, Shad. Not the first.

*Shad*

No, no – not the first. History's done that for us. But I'm speaking of how you make me feel. The inTENSity of how you make me feel – of trying to live up there, trying to grow something on the moon in the cold. That's just the way of saying how cut off I feel – even when you're in this very room.

*Mick*

Have your cup, Shad. Let the lemon float first.

*Shad*

It's as if you say I should straighten up. Straighten up. Straighten up or you won't love me. Straighten up and you won't hold my actions against me.

*Mick*

Jesus. You got a mouth on you would have made a senator cry.

*Shad*

Can you direct your address a little more accurately to me, Mickey? Am I really so different?

*Mick*

No, no, no, no, no Shad, you're not. You're not. Stir the bottom there. You're just very much more so than the others. You have a round brain or something. It's like a ball I could drop off.

*Shad*

I like your language today, Mick my love. You have a penchant today, Mick, and I must say the hot water's just tasty and hot. Just right. Delicious.

*Mick*

Hmm.

*Shad*

Flat language's the one thing I won't tolerate. "Round Brain". Now that's nice.

*Mick*

Um

*Shad*

You create an aura, you do, when you get on to it, Mick. You can hold your own with the best.

*Mick*

Dripping there.

*Shad*

Oh sorry. Purity, intensity and unity, I always say.

*Mick*

Purity, intensity and unity. Sounds like a beer ad.

*Shad*

It's my saying. Meaning when you have this – I could tell you everything I think, you know.

*Mick*

Hm.

*Shad*

My fantasies

*Mick*

Um. Your fantasies now.

*Shad*

I once thought how it'd be if someone took a cigarette and held it right to that cat's one good eye.

*Mick*

*(Silence. Clears throat)*

*Shad*

I often wondered if it'd make a sizzle – being that it's so moist and if it'd smell like anything burning. Or if he'd have pain. You know. Serious thoughts like that.

*Mick*

Shadduck. You are the world's longest tape recorder. I'd like to put some earphones on me.

*Shad*

What? What? *(Laughs)* Stomach pain? *(Laughs uproariously)*.

*Mick*

You're a disgusting old me.

*Shad*

*(Stops laughing)*

*Mick*

People should never laugh at their own humor. That means it's really not funny at all. Perverse.



*Shad*

I wouldn't call me perverse if I were you.

*Mick*

Well, you're not.

*Shad*

I didn't say I'd ever take a cigarette and do it. Why do you not separate what I say from what I am?

*Mick*

Blind cats indeed.

*Shad*

I wasn't half serious.

*Mick*

You know he matters to me.

*Shad*

Oh now, look at you getting glum. I know. He matters to me too.

*Mick*

Twelve years we've had him. That's as old as they get. He sleeps in the cellar, not even bothering you. One day he'll go down the steps and just not come back up, and that'll be that.

*Shad*

I wish to apologize for that – what I said. And him with one eye leaking and bleeding, hanging on so with the luster still in his round fur, well, fur's not round – the colors in it, yes.

*Mick*

Logistics again, is it?

*Shad*

I care for him too. I do. I'm used to him from A to Z.

*Mick*

Hm.

*Shad*

Well now.

*Mick*

You're done.

*Shad*

And a fine cup it was.

*Mick*

Give it here (*sounds of china*)

*Shad*

Delicious and sweet toward the bottom.

*Mick*

You want to dip the rind in the sugar?

*Shad*

I scraped it out with my finger and sucked it already.

*Mick*

Well, to each his own. Just that the tart and the sweet are good together – but it's my taste, not yours.

*Shad*

Yup. I'm going for a walk in the sun now.

*Mick*

This time of day?

*Shad*

So?

*Mick*

Naptime.

*Shad*

Can't we do something now?

*Mick*

Sure we can., but late afternoon – the light is weak – not warm for walking.

*Shad*

Naptime is sad. I wake – then I get depressed when it's late day. Then it's dinner by the stove. Then, night I'm up and down all night. So that's why I thought I'd walk.

*Mick*

I'm coming along.

*Shad*

Suit yourself.

*Mick*

I'm getting the sweater here. We'll carry a supper of sorts and sit down and have it together.

*Shad*

Where at?

*Mick*

Where you going for this walk?

*Shad*

Well, I don't know. This is becoming special now, isn't it?

*Mick*

This one time, do you suppose the cat could come?

*Shad*

I could suppose all I want, Mick. Cats do not wish to accompany folks on their walks.

*(The sound of "Victrola" music)*

No, Mick. You're not going through the dance with the cat now, or I'll go outside and . . .

*Mick*

If you do – it'll be the last time you relieve yourself in my garden.

*Shad*

There's nothing I can do otherwise to get you to know I'm serious about my contentions.

*Mick*

Relieving yourself. Streaming the stone wall. No. It won't do.

*(Cat meows)*

*Shad*

He hates it when you pick up his front paws.

*Mick*

He loves it.

*Shad*

He's too old

*Mick*

*(Winded)* He could always hop on his back feet.

*Shad*

He don't want to dance anymore.

*Mick*

*(Sounds of sitting, plopping)* You do it. I'll watch.

*Shad*

I promise you this – the cat will know we're coming back even if you don't waltz him.

*Mick*

How? How will he know?

*Shad*

Well, he just will. You can't lose a cat. It's been often said . . .

*(Door opening. Music off)*

*Mick*

It's been often said . . . it's been often said . . . I suppose that's to satisfy me, like when I point out your inferior traits *(mimics him)* "That may be true" like it's supposed to make everything acceptable. They're still inferior.

*(Door slams)*

*Shad*

I'm inside.

*Mick*

*(Door opens)* I'm out.

*Shad*

No lunch then in the woods?

*Mick*

No. No time for us now. The cat'll be ready for her beef liver. We can't push everything together to the end.

*(Door closes)*

*Shad*

I'm out.

*Mick*

I see.

*(Sounds of walking on leaves) (Steps approaching their own)*

*Mill*

Mr. Henry! Mr. Henry!

*Mick*

Millie, whatever . . .

*Mill*

I ran all the way.

*Mick*

For God's sake. I've never even seen you walk fast, what with your weight.

*Mill*

*(Breaks into sobs)* I cannot tell you what just happened.

*Shad*

Well, don't then.

*Mick*

Shadduck!

*Mill*

*(Wails)* I was strolling.

*Shad*

*(Snorts)* I'm going, Mick.

*Mill*

With this man.

*Shad*

*(Impatient throat noise)*

*Mill*

And he said . . .

*Shad*

I'm going over by the wall.

*Mill*

And he said the worst thing

*(Walking) (Sounds)*

*(Shad walks off)*

*Mick*

Don't you dare, Shad. My zucchini's growing.

*Mill*

He said something I could never repeat in a million years.

*Mick*

*(Calls)* You do, Shad and it'll be the last time.

*(Steps closer)*

*Shad*

I'm just looking at the garden.

*Mick*

You were out an hour ago looking.

*Mill*

He said something so awful, I can't . . . I can't . . .

*Mick*

Shaddock cannot countenance, and he knows it irritates me.

*(Sounds of rummaging, small item drops)*

*Mick*

Whatever are you . . . ?

*Mill*

My pencil – a pencil. I'll . . . I'll write down what he said.

*Mick*

I'm sorry Millie, you're so upset. But I'll bet I'll be on my way if you are writing me a note. I have my limits.

*(Walks away)*

*Mill*

Mrs. Henry. *(Paper rattles)* He said, "I" *(sob)* 'want.....to" *(breaking down to agonized wail)* *(sniffs)* "you".

Here. .

*Shad*

*(Coming in close)* Millie, what now . . .

*Millie*

I can't say it. I – I can't. Here, read it.

*(Steps running away) (Paper sounds)*

*Shad*

"I want to *(coughs)* VIOLATE you". Why, I never! That girl! And ME! I – had no idea she cared for me at all.

*Mick*

*(Approaching)* What are you putting in your pocket?

*Shad*

It's personal. Just a request for me.

*Mick*

Let's walk along now. That Millie's crazy. They put her away and gave her head shocks. What are you doing wasting the last of the day. I'm going.

*Shad*

I'm sorry, Mickey. It's something rather sensitive that she wrote me. I can't share it. It's something rather – special. I'm flattered in an odd way.

*Mick*

Hm. *(Walking sounds)*

*Shad*

Look who's following.

*(Meows)*

*Mick*

I knew he would. "The only animal God couldn't harness", Humph. But if you dance 'em . . .

*Shad*

They follow

*Mick*

Yes Shad.

*Shad*

I hope he never dies.

*Mick*

We all leave our bodies. Twelve years is old for a cat.

*Shad*

You always lecture when I say what I hope.

*Mick*

Where you going now?

*Shad*

Millie . . . I've GOT to answer her note.

*Mick*

She's off crying someplace telling her latest hysterical complaint.

*Shad*

*(Disappointed)* Oh.

*Mick*

You can find her later on the way back. Oh...no.

*(Sounds of man's steps approaching)*

*Shad*

Too late.

*Rev*

*(Unctuous)* Mickey and Shaddock. Out for a walk?

*Mick*

You don't need to be any genius, Father, to see that.

*Shad*

Excuse us, we . . .

*Rev*

I myself am - -

*Mick*

If we stop now, Father, we won't get back to cut the beef liver.

*Rev*

*(Gently)* Stop. Stop.

*Shad*

No, not now Reverend. Not this late.

*Rev*



Do we ever really hear the other? What they say?

*Mick*

Millie's up ahead. Why not catch up with her?

*Shad*

She thinks I turned her down by now, I guess.

*Mick*

Somebody wants Millie to do something . . . *(pause)* upsetting.

*Rev*

*(Rattled)* My children . . . being a person is upsetting, but God in his mercy. . . What did she tell you?

*Mick*

She wrote a note saying somebody said something awful.

*(Overlap above and below)*

*Shad*

*(Paper sounds)* She has a wish I can not share. It's personal.

*Mick*

Imagine with her shape running away from *anybody*.

*Shad*

I thought – I thought . . . I know I'm a bit short for my height, but I thought - I thought for a moment she was trying to tell me something.

*Mick*

She was, Shad. She was trying to tell us what happened.

*(Meowing)*

*Shad*

No, I mean . . . tell me something.

*Rev*

Give me the note, Shaddock. It'll do us no good to carry trash *(voice rises)* She's a tart – always was and always will be – wiggling her rear when she walks, disgracing the church – it's a sin alright. Someone ought to stop her, alright. *(Prayer intonation)* if God had wanted parts of our body to move, he'd have put . . . put motors on them *(getting upset)*. Her and her chicken cooking contests, getting the county all excited. Proposing such art forms. Have we ever gotten a taste of it yet? Any of us? Have we?

*Mick*

Caraway seeds.

*Shad*

Shh. Don't interrupt at a time like this, Mick.

*Mick*

Chicken and caraway seeds. It's been her dream. That's why she wants to promote this cooking contest of hers; to show off, I'll wager.

*Rev*

Don't wager, child, compounding our fallacies.

*Shad*

Compounding our fallacies?

*Rev*

Don't doubt, son.

*Shad*

I won't, Father.

*Rev*

Now (*deep breath*) I'll be on my way. Shadduck.

*Shad*

Yes?

*Rev*

Shadduck and Mickey, let us not be too hard on Millie. Love is an important commodity. She is confused. Don't judge her. She is not what one calls an easy lady. She takes to bed with amnesia this time every fall. We must protect her self-respect. Her self-respect (*Importantly*). It's a bird that comes to call and flies on (*sternly*). Give me the note.

(*Paper tears*)

*Shad*

(*Coughing and gulping, choking*) I don't have it. There. I swallowed it. It was personal.

*Mick*

Are you stark raving? Swallowing paper that way! You know what roughage does to you! Tears you up. You won't even eat greens. Paper indeed! And pencil on it too. Lead poisoning is what you'll get.

*Rev*

Your cat. That eye blinks on and off like a diamond, hiding like that – or glass blinking on and off (hurries away) Ugly animal, hiding in the bush.

*Mick*

Humph. Caraway seeds on her chicken. That woman's daft. (*Pausing*) Why Shad, you're crying.

*Shad*

It just got stuck midway down, that's all.

*Mick*

No Shad. You're trembling all over.

*Shad*

Mick, I know how you feel about body contact but would you . . . could you hold me in your arms for a minute?

*Mick*

Right here and now? Outside the way we are?

*Shad*

We are where we are, Mick.

*Mick*

That's precisely what I mean.

*Shad*

I think he's got a grasshopper over there, or an ant.

*Mick*

There are no ants out on Sunday. They're workers.

*Shad*

Grasshopper then.

*Mick*

We should be getting back now. We were to feed him the liver.

*Shad*

Right here and now, Mickey. We could spread the blanket and lie on it. Look. I could make a bed of leaves. (*Sounds of leaves*)

*Mick*

Damp leaves.

*Shad*

Leaves nonetheless.

*Mick*

I . . . I don't know. You're confusing me, acting like this.

*Shad*

What are we waiting for, Mickey. Death? Is that what? Are we waiting for death before we appreciate . . .

*Mick*

Well it's not that. It's – you want me to lie here? And hold you in my arms? I'm embarrassed. Someone could be coming by.

*Shad*

*(Groans)* oh.

*Mick*

What in the world.

*Shad*

My stomach.

*Mick*

Gas?

*Shad*

Pain

*Mick*

The note.

*Shad*

Phew. I'm sweating. Got stuck midcenter, it did.

*Mick*

No blueberries on your cheesecake tonight. None, whatsoever. And don't beg, hear me?

*Shad*

I guess it was a poor idea.

*Mick*

Which one?

*Shad*

Lying down here, chilly and all, lying down so close to the ground.  
(*Long meow like a howl in the distance, like a dog howling*)  
The cold could come through any blanket or table cloth.

*Mick*  
I never brought the cloth, Shad.

*Shad*  
No? Nor the supper.

*Mick*  
Never did.

*Shad*  
Well that settles it then. Let's get the cat and go home to feed him.

*Mick*  
Shad!

*Shad*  
Coming.

*Mick*  
Shad.

*Shad*  
(*Distance*) God in his mercy!

*Mick*  
Not asleep, is he?

*Shad*  
Not asleep. Not outside like this, Mickey. They don't go to sleep outside, especially when they're taking a walk.

*Mick*  
Dead then.

*Shad*  
Dead as his blood.

*Mick*  
Oh OOOOOOOh-oooooh-ooooo, Ahhhh ahhhh (*moans in agony as if rocking with the sounds*)

*Shad*  
Something he ate, likely.

*Mick*  
(Screaming muted, as if through hands)

*Shad*  
Come along now, Mickey. We'll get a plastic bag and come back for him.

*Mick*  
Uh-uh-uh (short grunts of pain)

*Shad*  
We could pretend we dreamed him.

*Mick*  
(Sniffing)

*Shad*  
We could pretend he dreamed us, if it'll be a comfort to you.

*Mick*  
(Deep sigh) I'm better, Shad.

*Shad*  
Good now. Good, Lady. Up-Up on your feet, Lady. I'll fix our supper.

*Mick*  
Wash your hands first, Shad.

*Shad*  
I will. Of course I will, being outside and all.

*Mick*  
It's too much responsibility, having a cat.

*Shad*  
It's a constant worry.

*Mick*  
He's like a sound like a siren, you know, that goes off.

*Shad*  
It'll be queer in the yard.

*Mick*  
We could call each other from across the yard and meow (*getting excited*). Just for a time, just for a time, not for always.

*Shad*

Well now, I don't know if I could.

*Mick*

Not loud, nothing so splendid as loud.

*Shad*

But even still . . .

*Mick*

Just for a time. Just til we get used to being without him.

*Shad*

Oh my God, here's Millie coming, and us in our grief . . . down, down behind the hedge (*sounds of greenery rustling*)

(*Steps approaching. Steps rushing by*)

*Mick*

That was close. (*Snorts*) Her and her chicken and caraway seeds.

*Shad*

(*Groans*)

*Mick*

Sorry – I forgot your tum tum. Up and off we go. He won't be in the black chair, you know, ever again; or on the stairs, or on the desk.

*Shad*

(*Meows*)

*Mick*

Or (*voice fades with steps as they walk away*) on the cushions. He used to sniff my breath, the cat did. Especially after cinnamon toast. I think he had a secret craving (*Shad meows*) for sweets. I always thought (*Shad meows*) (*winding up*) it cried for me. In the garden, in the rain, it'll want to be let up, but what can we do? The house will feel larger. A needless worry, cats (*meows*). We can keep each other cheerful. Living people can (*Voice and meow are heard from further away*) be an asset to one another . . . (*barely heard*)

(*Wind, sound of leaves*)

The End

---

**Grace Cavalieri** is a poet and playwright. Her recent books on kindle are *Anna Nicole: Poems*, *Millie's Sunshine Tiki Villa*; and *Sounds Like Something I Would Say*. She celebrates 35 years on-air with "The Poet and the Poem" recorded at the Library of Congress for public radio via NPR distribution.