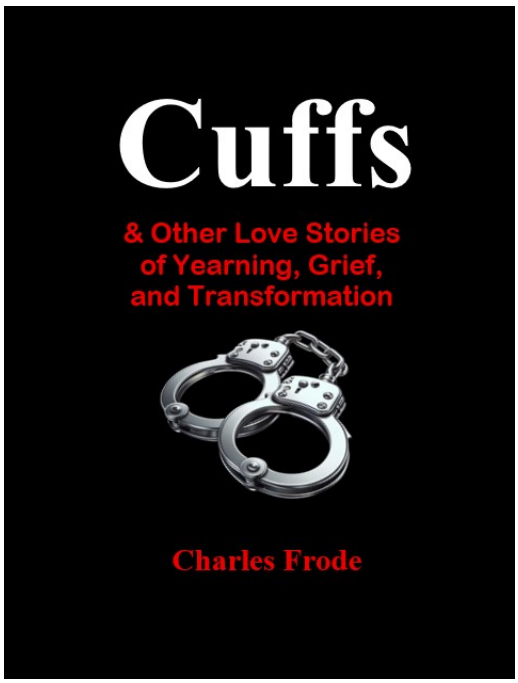
Cuffs & Other Love Stories

of Yearning, Grief, and Transformation



Synopsis of the short story collection

By Charles Frode

1. "Cuffs"

- Bounty hunter, Tonna Bröda, has been chasing Benita Wakefield through Mexico and California with the intention of arresting her for murdering her abusive boyfriend, but instead Tonna falls under Benita's spell, and as she closes in on Benita to take her into custody, she weighs whether she will cuff Benita or return the charmed silver bracelets to Benita's arms.
- **Read this entire title story by clicking the 2nd link in the Read menu**

2. "A Cowboy Shirt"

- A cowboy shirt is the metaphoric elegy—both wistful and hilarious—for the narrator and his erotic love affair with his inamorata, Faleen, fifty years ago when her sewing and love-making lessons could not hold on to the narrator and keep him from following the call to the archetypical path of experience in the world of art and other women precisely like Hermann Hesse's Goldmund.

3. "A Murmuration of Starlings"

- A baroque and introspective Spanish love story of two women, Starling and Swallow, that uncovers the mystery of two ancient objects of power--a 13th century silver onyx and quartz hairpin and an otherworldly scorched split oak Druid birdcage. Swallow visits a Mexican curandero for guidance about Sparrow's disappearance, and then returns to Jerez de la Frontera to find the shocking supernatural cause of her lover's death.

4. “Upon The Convoluted Surface Of Itself”

- Gutiérre returns from Tholos de Montelirio archeological dig to Jemille’s Sevilla apartment and grand piano where he listens to her playing the Spanish and Russian composers. When she’s touring, Gutiérre frequents Bar Santa Ana in Triana where Margarita “La Huracán” dances and sings the fandango lament, and he works the dig where they found the rock crystal dagger, the magnificent slabs of bright cinnabar slate, the shell beads and ostrich egg, the ivory comb, and the poison discovered in the remains of twelve women buried there, but his love for Jemille is not strong enough to banish his troubling realizations that something’s just not right.

5. “The Fragrance of Bitter Oranges”

- The intimate tale of an anonymous Valenciano’s attempt to reconcile the paradox of his Spanish history and his personal tragedies through four vicarious fellow Valencianos—a stone mason, tapas bar owner, president of a neighborhood *fallas* house, and a beautiful flamenco dancer from Sevilla he saw dancing on a corner with whom he imagines making love in the old Albaicín neighborhood of Granada where Sultan Abu Abdallah Muhammad XII visited the most exquisite women in all of Andalucia, and where the Valenciano recalls the box with pictures he must see from times with his dearest love, free spirit Aránzazu Carreña de Gijón from Asturias.

6. “By Which The One Appears To Be Many”

- The enchanting sounds of names of composers and musicians sets the tone of the passionate story of two women, one a cellist, Esclarmónde de Forcalquier, and her trobairitz lover, Viviénne de Cavaillón, who run away and arrive by chance in Espalión, France, where they spend two glorious days making love and singing the troubadour songs, songs that draw them around France for seven years to sing Viviénne’s songs accompanied by Esclarmónde’s cello before Viviénne passes from cystic fibrosis after which Esclarmónde returns to her home Clermont-Ferrand to recount this story.

7. “They’s Things Disappearing”

- In 1862 Everson Moyer flees the Missouri war years for the early days of Boise and begins the five generation Moyer family farmhouse saga which ends 160 years later with Farris Moyer isolated and a recluse in the rundown farmhouse and unable to open the front door to his longtime neighbor, Mason, who tries to dislodge Farris from the dilapidated house before California developers demolish it—and the sweet secret memories of Mason and Marguerite’s welcoming and loving hollyhocks—as they buy up all the 40 acre alfalfa parcels to construct the subdivisions in Idaho’s booming Treasure Valley.

8. “Medicine Bag”

- After tending to his southeast Idaho congregation for years, preacher Creedence Ellmaker, is pulled suddenly into the dark night of his soul and disappears into the Teton mountains in the dead of winter, and after his faithful and loving wife, Civil, has a dream of a spirit woman with a golden chain glowing with golden lights that she is pulling from a mystical medicine bag, Civil returns to her Shoshone reservation and the peyote ceremony where she tries to find the spirit woman’s golden light.

9. “Acid”

- Two forestry resource engineers arrive at the trail crest summit in Dolly Sods West Virginia where lysergic acid diethylamide opens their hearts and minds to the intensity and yearning for their individual pasts—Delphinium, for the tragic sawmill death of her childhood sweetheart, and the narrator, Cosmo, for his psychedelic passion in Old Monterey, and although the narrator returns to the rich sea of memories from his enchanted times in Monterey, he is unable to forget the last thing he heard Delphinium say.

10. “About Watering”

- Language Arts teacher, Sophie, is mourning her miscarriage and the suicide of her Stanton, and she is plagued by—as she realizes—“A Persistent And Uncomfortable Sense of Insecurity,” and when she seeks the help of spiritual teacher, Chime Khandro, who sets Sophie to water chime’s garden for that summer, autumn, and winter, she finds her insecurity dissolving in the water flowing out of the “God damn hose!”

11. “Open Heart Surgery”

- The charm and wonder of butterflies and hummingbirds materializes in a magical old blue oak abandoned at the back of Ramon and Sylvia’s property and in two Tibetan dungchen trumpets bellowing on the steps of the Shrine of Unchanging Spontaneous Presence monastery where suffering and grief in both sanctuaries is healed invisibly and mysteriously.

12. “Pilgrimage”

- Madrid fashion designer, Viviana Elitxét, loves fabric, garments, and her Tiano, but something is missing in Viviana, and even though she has visited countless countries on fabric buying trips, she feels something absent, something spiritual. A chance encounter with an old man on a family pilgrimage on the Camino Primitivo in Oviedo sends her with a copy of the *Upanishads* to the holy Ganges River where the sacred water of the river and one sentence in the *Upanishads* cleanse her mind so she can return to Valencia and her passion for Tiano.

13. “Jazz And Cocktails”

- A light aperitif of a story about John Coltrane, guitars, guitar music, Spanish food at La Mesón de la Parrilla, and Migñonette Addiena de Alcañiz, whose musicality and beauty is accentuated by her innocence and passion, and when she returns from a short trip Zaragoza to buy a new guitar her parents gifted her, both have died of Covid, and after a week in seclusion Migñonette presents a small concert in honor of her parents and friends, and readers discover the identify and intentions of the story’s narrator.

14. “We Planted A Garden”

- Planting a garden is the mystical and timeless metaphor that colors this portrait of the narrator’s enduring love for the stunningly beautiful Faleen whom he encounters in the most unlikely of places as this often erotic and philosophical tale captures the historical colors of the 60s and asks the question, “What happened to the love, hope and enthusiasm of the 60s?”

15. “The Tang of Seaweed and Kelp”

- The enchantment of watching two seals cavorting as they surf a wave together is the metaphor for the narrator’s memory of his love for the woman he abandoned long ago where two phantom notes in a bottle washed up on the ocean shore and a recurring dream of flying do not banish the narrator’s grief at the loss of his Faleen.

16. “Where Water Goes”

- An anguished time-travelling narrator recalls poignantly the years he spent wandering the primeval Northern California redwood forests with an enchanting medicine woman in this mystical tale of a special enduring love, the healing power of tourmaline crystals, ancient old-growth redwood groves, and a man hopelessly exiled by time but searching still for the one magnificent love of his life. “Faleen…Where are you? Faleen…”

17. “Say The Names, Light The Darkness”

- San Francisco packaging engineer, Chiare Giasone, stops at a Big Sur hippy bakery on his trip to Morrow Bay to buy shells, and he would like to get to get to know the baker, Jalilah, and she would like him to ask her more questions, but a month later on his trip south to buy a special order Nautilus shell and to visit Jalilah again, he pulls off the windy and dangerous coast highway and parks at the small lookout, Hurricane Point, to peer out to the Pacific Ocean, and a freak collision cleaves Chiare and Jalilah’s destiny into two diverging dimensions.