

Author Bio

PAMELA GWYN KRIPKE PROMENADE



The milk runs out at night. This is the worst time.

No, late afternoon is the worst time. You have the option, then, to go outside and walk to the store, so you dwell on the decision, choosing not to go and feeling more annoyed about it in the morning than you would have had the milk run out at night. The milk presents a personal dilemma, one that can affect your sense of productivity and purpose. It can make you think about other choices, all of your choices, ever, since birth. It can make you think about your capacity to act in a beneficial way.

In Manhattan, dogs cannot enter stores with milk in them, even small stores, neighborhood stores, bodegas. The signs are clear. No dogs. We love your dogs. But no dogs. So, if you fail to get the milk in the late afternoon, you will have to make two trips in the morning. You will have to walk your dog in the manner to which he's accustomed, return him to the apartment and leave once again, retracing your steps to the store. You will do this all without coffee or tea, because you didn't have the milk.

On one such day, Caleb woke up and took Marvin on his preferred route past the mayor's house and down the hill to the promenade where he enjoyed watching the tugs churn up the East River. Marvin, a strangely hirsute Labrador of questionable origin, stopped to view a barge slide by, earlier in the day than one would typically sail. Marvin liked boats, and there was no hurrying him, not that Caleb would, even on a day requiring the two outings. Caleb indulged Marvin's predilections, believing that human companions had a duty to respond to their dogs' requests so as not to frustrate them. All creatures need to be understood, Caleb believed. The barge was huge, blocks long. Marvin watched its entire passage, sitting down at one point, unaware that Caleb had yet to make the second trip for milk. Caleb hadn't mentioned it.

When Marvin could no longer see the barge, he stood up from the pavement and resumed his walk.

"That was a long one," Caleb said to him.

Marvin glanced at Caleb, equally impressed.

They passed the grassy patch where the woman did Chinese dance routines to music from a cassette player. She had excellent technique, and Caleb thought that she must have been in a troupe when she was younger. He imagined her moves done in unison, multiplied by hundreds, ribbons, scarves, parasols flying about.

issue #101

fiction

Carribeana Fragoza
Tortillas Burning

Kathrin Schmidt
Vaspersky's *Flattriols*

Sara Ray
The Digging Method

Patrick Strickland
Ice Man

Pamela Gwyn Kripke
Promenade

picks from back issues

Molly Giles
Mose in the Morning

Niall Griffiths
Coming of Age

quiz

Contemporary Cuban Writers

answers to
Contemporary Puerto Rican Writers

book review

Last Words on Earth
by **Javier Serena**

Barcelona Dreaming
by **Rupert Thomson**

regular features

Book Reviews

TBR Archives
(authors listed
alphabetically)

TBR Archives
(by issue)

The Barcelona
Review



A bit farther down, they passed the curvy steps. Some dogs enjoyed climbing the retaining wall, making many S shapes. Marvin never attempted. Not one for ramps.

The morning traipse was a trance for Caleb and Marvin. Their six feet fell into a cadence. Their chests floated identically through space, still and solid. Their thoughts meandered and grew, transcending the daily concerns, becoming more profound in the air than they were at home.

Marvin chose the route past the apartment buildings beyond the southern end of the park, which would keep them along the river. When it was gustier, he turned west for the trees, seeking protection. People installed mirrors on their terraces so they could see the water even from their sofas. Some decorated their railings with shells and starfish, even though it was a river they lived on and not a sea. One porch had an imitation anchor hanging on the brick wall. Okay, that could make sense.

Just as Caleb and Marvin passed the imitation anchor, a shoe slapped onto the pavement in front of them. Marvin startled and looked to the sky. Caleb checked left, then right. Seeing no one, let alone someone with only one shoe, he turned and looked behind them. No foot in sight. It was a woman's shoe of average size, a loafer, thin-soled. Tan, with a gold chain. Marvin sniffed the instep and returned his gaze toward the building, several stories up. He tapped his front feet on the stone beside the shoe and barked. Clipped, stern barks. Warnings. He paced, forward and back, now whining. He picked up the shoe in his mouth and threw his head back, like a horse, unsettled.

"What, Marvin?" asked Caleb.

Sirens.

Caleb crouched, following Marvin's line of sight, shielding his eyes from the sun smacking the windows.

Marvin placed the shoe down and barked again. Quick, high-pitched barks.

Affirmation.

Louder sirens, slamming of doors.

Marvin grabbed the shoe, bucked his front legs, eyes trained on a terrace three floors up. A foot stuck through the railing. A foot with no shoe. A mirror revealed its calf, a knee, a skirt.

People gathered on the promenade. A policeman appeared at the terrace door. Marvin clenched the loafer, breathing heavily, whimpering. Caleb bent and held him, stroked his head. The chain on the shoe trembled. They would have to return it, somehow. The woman would want it back. It was a new shoe. Maybe she tripped or fainted, watering plants before work.

"She'll be okay, Marvin."

Emergency medical people appeared in the mirror and squatted down, forming dark humps in the glass.

"The dog has the shoe," said a person by the river, pointing.

Caleb heard and turned his head toward the man.

A second policeman appeared in the terrace doorway. The emergency people stood and sank again. The exposed foot did not move.

Caleb's knees hurt, and he stretched to a stand. "Let's go home now," he said to Marvin.

Marvin extended his front legs, pressing his belly onto the pavement.

“The dog has the shoe,” the person by the river said again.

Marvin looked up at the foot.

The entrance to the building was around the corner off the promenade, and Caleb and Marvin had gone by it many times, typically during their evening walk. Just a few buildings flanked the walkway, and the one in question was the newest, squeezed in between two elegant pre-wars sometime in the 70s.

“Let’s go, Marvin. Got things today.”

Caleb had lived in New York for twenty years and had seen plenty of police tape. Though curious about what happened in his neighborhood, he was not an ogler. Marvin, though...he was some ogler. A professional. “Let’s give that back,” Caleb told him. “You’ve seen enough.”

Marvin’s body remained taut. Saliva dripped down the instep of the shoe.

“He’s not budging,” said the man by the river, his leg tucked up under him on the wall.

Caleb, sufficiently diverted from the morning routine, did not respond. Participants, now, he bemoaned. Ten years earlier, when he was forty-five, Caleb's wife left him for a high school classmate, deciding after a weekend reunion to move to western Massachusetts and live on his hydroponic farm. She couldn’t make a salad with bagged lettuce, but she went to live on a hydroponic farm. Their one child, now twenty-eight, adopted Marvin for her father, concerned that he had become isolated. Treacherously isolated, in a way that could make him sad and tip him over. An accountant, Caleb worked from the apartment, communicating, commiserating and commingling with numerals, to the exclusion of most human beings. He did well with people; he just didn’t choose to interact with them on a regular basis, and his daughter interpreted this preference as an emotional liability. Marvin, as she had hoped, drew her father out of the house, though he could not persuade Caleb to engage with anyone, and truly, he did not want to. Engaging was to be done with Marvin.

The man by the railing was right. Marvin was not budging. His eyes fixed on the terrace, where the authorities made their way inside, leaving the woman prone on the floor.

“I saw it,” the man said to someone else. “Like a rag doll. Horrifying.”

Caleb overheard and waited.

“Who knows, jumped, probably. Or pushed, though I doubt it.”

What the man said confused Caleb.

“From the top floor,” he heard the man say, turning to see him pointing to the roof of the building. Caleb counted the stories. Nine. He took Marvin’s face in his hands and stared at him. Saw his skin pleat above his eyes.

“Jesus,” he said, realizing that the woman had fallen and become tangled up in the terrace on her way down. He shuddered and sat on the pavement next to Marvin, grabbing him around his chest.

Marvin pressed his torso into Caleb’s thigh and released his grip on the shoe, placing it on the cement in between his legs. He kept his gaze on the woman. They sat for two hours, one lump of a body, in the middle of the promenade. They sat until the policemen took the woman inside, at which time Marvin rose up. Caleb followed, patting down his pants, taking his hat off and putting it on again. Marvin picked up the

shoe and began walking, back the way they came, toward the front of the building.

“Maybe leave it now?” said Caleb, pressing his hand into his cheek.

Marvin held the shoe and continued to walk, eyes trained. He led Caleb to the corner and turned a sharp left toward the building’s entrance, stopping and sitting at the door, the gold chain lit up in the sun like a flare.

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Author Bio



Pamela Gwyn Kripke's fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Folio*, *The Woven Tale Press*, *The Concrete Desert Review*, *Underwired*, *The New York Times (Sunday Review, National)*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *New York Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Medium* and other venues. Her essays have been published by *Creators Syndicate*, *Gannett Newspapers*, *McClatchy* and *The Huffington Post*. Kripke holds an AB in English from Brown University and an MS from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. She has taught journalism at DePaul University and Columbia College in Chicago.

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[page top](#) [home](#) [spanish](#) [catalan](#) [tbr info](#) [submission info](#) [e-m@il](#)