

Matias Travieso-Diaz 1 day ago

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Fiction: A Walk on David Lane by Matias Travieso-Diaz



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*Then somewhere near Salinas, Lord, I let her slip away,
She was lookin' for the home I hope she'll find,
Well I'd trade all my tomorrows for a single yesterday,
Holdin' Bobby's body close to mine.*
Kris Kristofferson, "Me and Bobby McGee"

When Giselle went away Puffy and I expressed our sorrow in different ways. I became self-contained, isolated from the uncaring world, wasting away days listening to Bruckner and Mahler and watching those old movies that my wife and I had enjoyed together. Puffy spent a couple of days trying to get into Giselle's now vacant office but ultimately recognized that Giselle's absence was permanent and, being a practical animal, adopted me.

Puffy and I had been friends before, but Giselle had been the main human in Puffy's life since we purchased her as a puppy. Giselle combed and groomed her, fed her choice dog biscuits, held Puffy on her lap as they sat on the porch or around the dining room table. Giselle took the dog to the vet, gave her pills and nutritional supplements, bought her toys, watched tv with her, and laughed when Puffy would bark at any dog that showed up on the screen. Giselle hated having her picture taken but did not protest when I would snap shot after shot of her holding Puffy as the dog displayed her camera-ready poses.

For Puffy is terminally cute. A small bichon with curly white hair, she captures the attention of any human that crosses her path. She will jump at the leg of a person, rubbing against the trousers of a male or the bare legs of a female, barking happily and demanding to be petted, a ploy that invariably succeeds. When we had company at home, we had to lock Puffy in her cage. She was of course no threat to anyone – she even loved children – but her boisterous behavior could continue past the point of greeting everyone and ultimately become disruptive.

Things have changed since Giselle went away. I hardly ever entertain, and the only visitors to my now empty house were the cleaning lady, repairmen, and Puffy's groomer. It is only when I take her out on the street that Puffy has an opportunity of inflicting herself coquettishly on any passerby.

In the absence of other humans, Puffy has clung to me almost symbiotically. She will lie by my feet when I sit at the computer and, if I linger too long, will rise and paw my knee, demanding both attention and a treat. If I am busy for a stretch of time, she will go to sleep on the gray swivel chair by my desk and remain there, apparently lost to the world, until I get up. She will then snap back to life and follow me wherever I go.

I feed her morsels at the table, something Giselle would never have allowed. She laps up whatever scraps I hand her, and keeps demanding more. The quality of what she gets is often not very good, given that my diet has turned towards fast food, but she has her regular Fresh Pet meals, so she does not go without nourishment.

I spend more time in bed these days than I used to. Whether I am playing games on my iPad or watching science-fiction serials on tv, Puffy is always lying right next to me, sometimes crawling on the pillow above my head and attempting to lick my hair. We play catch and tug-of-war, or just do nothing in silent, amiable company. When I go to sleep at night, she will start by lying under the bed but after midnight will come up and position herself in direct contact with some part of my body: chest, arm, the space between my legs. Sometimes, as I am dozing off, I feel as if Puffy is talking to me, saying in a mournful tone: "I love you, Papa, but I miss Mommy very much and wish she were here." All I can bring myself to say is "me too, baby," as I fall asleep.

Right after Giselle went away Puffy and I started a new activity together that soon became our favorite. Each morning, right after breakfast, I would put on my overcoat. This would be the sign of good things to come, and Puffy would start circling excitedly around me. After dropping some treats on my pocket, I would put Puffy's leash on and take her out for our constitutional.

Our route was always the same: a one-mile stroll up and down David Lane, a nearby street ending in a cul-de-sac. There are a couple of gentle hills along the way, but the view is nothing to write home about: suburban homes with manicured lawns and ornamental trees and bushes hovering over the sidewalks. We would proceed in fits and starts, a feeble old man fighting to control a fifteen-pound dog intent on swerving in all directions but forward. However, we would always make it home in under thirty minutes, in time to put seed on the bird feeder and sit for a few minutes to watch the woodpeckers, cardinals and sparrows swarm in search of breakfast.

We took that stroll, rain or shine, warm or cold, every morning so that it became the focal point of our day together. Puffy would jump onto our bed when we return, and I would join her to get my breath back. It was a ritual that I cherished, not only for the exercise, but for the connection between us that I hoped was growing stronger, out of necessity, with each passing day.

The early months of winter had been dry and warm, so that it was early February before there was a substantial snowfall. The morning after the storm hit, I debated with myself over whether to take Puffy out for a walk. She looked at me with pleading eyes; I put on my snow boots, and off we went.

It had gotten a bit warmer after the snowfall and then colder again, and frozen patches had developed along the way. The fog had not lifted yet so finding our way was difficult, though we knew the course by heart. However, out of precaution, I decided not to go on the icy sidewalks but proceed on the street itself, which was covered with snow but less likely to be slippery.

The first half of the walk took longer than usual but went on without incident. We were two-thirds through David Lane when out of a house emerged a woman leading a tiny chihuahua bundled up like a hot dog out of a vendor stand. Puffy began barking loudly, for she is incapable of letting a dog go by unvisited; her friendly disposition extends to those of her same persuasion as much as to humans.

The chihuahua cowered and started yelping. Puffy made a forceful lunge in his direction. The sudden thrust and the slippery ground surface combined to make me lose balance and I dropped to the ground on my knees, letting go of the leash as I fell.

Everything remained at a standstill for a moment. Then, I began frantically to try to get on my feet, slipping and sliding as I could not find purchase.

At the same time, Puffy started running towards the chihuahua, stopped – perhaps realizing she was now on her own – and took off in the direction of the corner. As she was turning away into the connecting street, she looked into my eyes apologetically.

The chihuahua owner helped me to my feet and I began running as fast as my eighty-year body allowed, screaming at the same time: “Puffy! Puffy! Come back!!” By the time I rounded the corner Puffy had disappeared into the gloom.

Miraculously, I did not fall and break my neck as I dashed back home and got into the car. Just as miraculously, I navigated the icy roads without going into a skid. I drove around for the better part of an hour, scouring the neighborhood and the main highway several blocks away. Nothing.

I returned home shaking like a leaf, the loss of my friend aggravated by a sense of betrayal and utter hopelessness. One of my neighbors was kind enough to volunteer to drive around looking for Puffy, as I was paralyzed by anxiety and in no condition to move one inch more. He came back empty handed sometime later, but tried to cheer me up. “She has an ID in her collar” he offered. “Someone is bound to spot a fancy stray dog and pick her up.”

Later that day I went out again looking for the fugitive. I made multiple copies of a lost dog notice with a picture of Puffy and a promise of a reward to anyone finding her, and affixed the poster to all available surfaces. As I returned home, night was falling and I was chilled to the bone.

I intended to launch another search the following day, but had little hope I would find Puffy alive, if at all. She could have been run over by a car on the highway, or preyed upon by the human and animal predators that roam after dark, or fallen into a ditch. A dog raised to be a human companion has no survival skills to protect it in the wild.

I did not know what to do. I fixed myself a cup of soup and got ready for a sleepless night of worry and pain.

I was getting into my pajamas when I heard a faint scratching at the front door and an almost inaudible bark. I ran down the staircase four steps at a time and reached the front door, my heart beating wildly almost out of my chest.

Puffy was there, covered from head to toe in muck, shivering and panting breathlessly. I picked her up in my arms, began crying like a baby, and took her to the bathroom so we could take a bath together. The rest of the evening was spent cleaning her up, drying and feeding her, and covering her body with a blanket. Emergency meetings with her vet and a groomer would have to take place in the morning.

Much later that night, as we finally got into bed, I took her in my arms and remonstrated gently: "Why did you run away? Why were you going to leave me?" There was no answer but, as I was falling into a profound sleep, I may have heard her say: "I was going to look for Mommy. But then I realized that I want to be with you just as much."

I guess we have finally bonded.

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over seventy of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies and paying magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. Some of his unpublished works have also received "honorable mentions" from a number of paying publications. A first collection of his stories, "The Satchel and Other Terrors," was published in February 2023 and is available from Amazon and other book retailers (You can find it on Amazon [here](#)).

If you would like to learn more about Matias, you can find his site [here](#), his Twitter [here](#), and his Instagram [here](#).

