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Silhouette

Miriam
Sivan

I began writing Silhouette soon after I moved to a kibbutz in northern Israel with my family. I had 'escaped', I thought, to a

pastoral environment after decades of living with the harshness of New York City. It was the rockets and the dogs which got me thinking.

What lies behind Silhouette is a critique of fundamentalism and violence — whether it's god inspired, as in Hizbullah's rocket attacks against northern Israel, or ideological, as in the rigid socialism which prevailed on most Israeli kibbutzim until the 1980s. On both sides of the border there is as well a rabid political fundamentalism which gives carte blanche to careless and often heinous actions. Yet thoughtlessness and violence are not monopolised by national agendas. The random violence Kika experiences in New York, the sadism of the kibbutz children at the story's end, are examples not of fundamentalism, but of people's beliefs in their right to cruelty. This belief is what binds all layers of the story. The dogs are martyred for to me they represent utter powerlessness in an increasingly ruthless world. To be pampered, to be stray — all a matter of human whim. And not only for dogs.

The dog was white and unkempt. He kept his head low while his brown eyes engaged in surveillance. Kika saw him when she stood in the small traffic circle by the kibbutz dining room, waiting to catch an early morning ride to Tel Aviv. With his long snout he had knocked off a garbage can lid and retreated while it rattled. He looked back and forth, between the lid and Kika, waiting for her body to shift. When it didn't, he moved slowly into place. Propping his two front legs on the edge of the can, he began foraging for food. Kika thought his behaviour strange. Kibbutz members put their meat scraps into bowls next to the dishwasher conveyer belt. More than enough food accumulated each day for the community's pets. When the car going to Tel Aviv arrived, the dog jumped down off the garbage can and vanished.

Kika intended to ask the other passengers about the dog. About his scavenging. But it was six o'clock and after four months of living in this hilltop community, the orange fissures that bled up through the grey morning silhouettes of the Galilean hills still silenced her with their beauty. She breathed in the sun rising. The air that accompanied it was clean, it was quiet.

*

A week later Kika was reading in bed, falling asleep and waking, struggling to finish one more paragraph, one more page, when the rain began. At first, it was timid, almost a soft shower. All at once it became a furious loud storm. And then suddenly, once again, everything was soft. The pattern continued, rain – soft and furious – then no rain, until midnight. She was fast asleep when the storm raised its pitch. An immense crack of lightning struck close by. Her eyes opened from the flash and the blue display on her clock disappeared. The kibbutz had lost two faxes and a brand new copy machine the previous winter during such lightning storms. But before she could leave the bed to unplug her few electrical appliances, the thunder began.

She waited for the silence that would inevitably follow the low angry rumble, but it never came. She lay still, pulled the covers up to her neck, shifted onto her side, balled her fists against her chest and waited for the silence. But the thunder kept coming, it kept coming, louder and louder as it approached the small concrete structure she was calling home these days. Like a boulder gaining momentum, the thunder rolled overhead and the firmaments shook with its weight. Kika shuddered and waited.

After many minutes, how many for sure she couldn't say since the clock had died, a relative silence and soft rain returned. Kika fell asleep. She woke again, maybe an hour later, to another violent roll up from the Mediterranean, along the Galilee hills, over her house and into Lebanon. This time

though, she was not frightened. She was awed. Once rolling thunder meant Bob Dylan, or the American bombing of North Vietnam, or a tepid cliché about nature. Now she knew it was just a plain, precise description. The way things were.

The immensity, the proximity of the cracks of lightning, dwarfed car bombs. The thunder entered into antiphonal song with the region's violence, aftershocks, a *responsa* to Katyusha rockets, to low-flying helicopters and roaming tanks. That very morning rockets had fallen in banana fields less than a kilometre away from where Kika now lay, trembling before the power and fury of the heavens.

At ten in the morning, around fifteen hours earlier, Kika had been sitting in front of her little house reading *War and Peace* for the second time in her life. (Packing quickly when she left New York, she grabbed the thickest book on her shelf to last longest.) The civil defence jeep had come round. The driver spoke into the megaphone instructing people to move into the bunkers. The children were in the children's houses. Most adults were at work. Kika had done this to-the-bunker manoeuvre four times already in the past few months and so was able to calmly lock her door, keep the book with her in case she could not return to her room for some hours, and walk quickly to the nearby shelter. From experience she knew that at least two or three kibbutz members would be there. Often an elderly person was accompanied by a middle aged child. The children here were very protective of their parents though most of the old people were hardly in need of such solicitation. Many were founders of the kibbutz and had lived through much harder times. Some were concentration camp survivors. Others had walked from Russia, from Belarus and the Ukraine, to get to Palestine in the late teens and early 1920s. Many had already lost children, spouses and siblings to the wars, both before independence and certainly after.

Kika pulled open the heavy door of the bomb shelter and felt the coolness of the interior. The lights were on which was a good sign: someone had entered before her. Though she felt immunised to panic, she still experienced fear and did not want to go through a rocket attack alone. Her first had occurred about one month after she arrived in Israel. It was evening and she was in her room watching a movie on the VCR. She could not even understand what was being announced outdoors, though it seemed obvious that someone addressing the public via megaphone meant menace. She strained to understand the Hebrew when her neighbour opened her door. They were coming under attack from Hizbullah in Lebanon. The army was ordering everyone into the bunkers. She had to come right away.

Her body turned liquid. She heard or actually felt the booms of the rockets jabbing their snouts into the ground and saw herself close the door and run. People were carrying children and others were accompanying the elderly. She had no one to help but herself. Which was enough at that moment for she, unlike them, was inexperienced at these sorts of attacks. Coming from New York she had some familiarity

with muggings, with knives, guns. Rockets – large metal bullets that fell from the sky and destroyed buildings and people upon impact – were not in her repertoire. And she was scared shitless, as her best colloquial American allowed her to say, once she was safely seated in the shelter, surrounded by her neighbours, everyone chatting, juice and biscuits passed around. That attack didn't last very long. 'Just a slight drizzle,' her neighbour reassured her when the all-clear signal was given. Within half an hour she was back in her room, the movie in the VCR was on play, and the remote control was once again in her hand.

When Kika stepped into the shelter this morning, she indeed saw a few of her elderly neighbours sitting around a table. They were knitting and chatting to one another in Romanian. They said hello to her and asked her if she wanted some water. She said no and opened her book. Natasha and Peter's romance was heating up. Napoleon and his army were on the march. She heard or was it felt, or was it both, the impact of one katyusha and could tell already that it was not that close, meaning the rocket hadn't hit the residential part of the kibbutz. More banana trees were decapitated. An unfamiliar young man was lying on one of the bunk beds. His hands were folded under his head, and he was whistling softly to himself.

Kika assumed he was one of the few volunteers still living on the kibbutz. The intifada and the atmosphere of criticism had steered away many of the young Europeans who for decades had come to experience the kibbutz and through that, Israel and the Middle East.

'Hello,' she said in English.

He turned his head towards her and said hello back.

'Are you okay?' she asked, thinking that if he were like her, and relatively new to this game, then talk would be good.

'I'm fine,' he answered and kept his eyes on the underside of the bed above him.

'You sure?'

'Yeah, sure. I'm from Belfast. I'm used to this kind of thing,' he laughed.

'Oh.'

'Not so different from home, I assure you.' He made knots in a string hanging from the mattress above him. 'I live in a mixed section of Belfast. Some violence, but for the most part, pretty quiet. But when things get hot, you know, the flags go up. Israeli, Palestinian.'

'What?'

'Protestants fly Israeli colours. Catholics Palestinian. Then all hell breaks loose. Few days later soldiers come in and put everyone back in their place.'

Kika said nothing and another rocket fell, this one not far from where they sat mourning Belfast and the Galilee. He rolled over on his side and closed his eyes. Kika moved over to the table of old women.

When the all-clear signal was given two hours later, she stumbled to her room and opened a beer and the news. Eight rockets had fallen in the northwestern section of the

country. Five in banana fields. One on the road not far from the kibbutz. Two on the beach. Club Med's Sous Chef was killed sleeping in his bed in a thatch hut.

*

That was the morning before. On the morning after the rocket attack, the morning after the thunder, there was sun and stillness. A truce with the world. Kika walked up towards the dining room, marvelling at the tranquillity. Foliage was saturated dark green. Paths were littered with petals and small branches.

As if the storm had been an endeavour, hunger filled her belly. In New York, breakfast had been a cup of coffee and bagel quickly purchased and stuffed into a bag at a cart either before she went down into the subway, or when she re-emerged. But this morning, in typical kibbutz fashion, Kika filled her tray with a salad of diced cucumber and tomato, a fried egg, toast, white cheese, olives and coffee. She ate slowly, luxuriously, and considered the storm.

Afterwards, she went to her mailbox to fetch the *Jerusalem Post*. Her routine was to return to her apartment after breakfast and to sit in the sun while reading the news. Force of habit more than anything. What was going on did not really interest her. Some mornings, usually when she was nearly through reading, she was visited by Uriel, a 'son' of the farming settlement. He worked in the banana fields but often came up to the kibbutz proper during the morning hours to meet one of the members of the Secretariat, or to get a tool to fix a tractor or buggy. And for the last two months he also included morning visits to Kika's little house. He taught her Hebrew as he made love to her body: nouns, adjectives, verbs.

Uriel looked like one of those stereotypical Israeli men that women who read Leon Uris's *Exodus* coveted. An Ari Ben-Canaan. Paul Newman as a leonine rugged farmer and fighter, son of the ancient modern homeland of Judea. Exactly the kind of man Hitler was referring to when he said his worst enemy was a Jew with a gun.

Kika met Uriel during her second trip to the bomb shelter. It was late afternoon and he was visiting his mother whose house was near hers. Uriel lived with his wife on the far side of the kibbutz, in the newer larger apartments by the pool. She could not help but notice him. First of all he had a head full of thick wavy grey hair which came down to his shoulders. In a country where many men shaved their heads, this silver mane stood out. Second, the face framed by this hair was simply beautiful. Not just attractive. This was a *GQ*, Dirty Harry, face: chiselled jaw, shapely lips, light brown skin, and large grey eyes framed by long black lashes. Third, the body to which this face and head were attached was muscular and visibly hospitable, even, or especially, through the faded blue work clothing of a typical Israeli farmer. And fourth, he didn't take his eyes off Kika from the moment she ran into the shelter. How could she not respond to the drilling power of his eyes? The man had the rapacious stare of a tracking

wolf. And she did respond. Negatively. She deliberately turned her back to him.

But if she wanted to sit, Kika had to be at his table. All other chairs were taken. So she sat stiffly, properly, and accepted a cup of soda from one of the women and looked everywhere but at him and waited for the rockets. She could feel him watching her and the heat of anger rose in her. How rude he was. How crude.

And suddenly his mother was addressing her kindly in simple English and she had no choice but to answer. She told her she was fine, still getting used to the attacks. While his eyes were like radar screens, he kept his arm around his mother's curved shoulders. Kika met his eyes unintentionally and when he smiled warmly she returned the favour.

And so they began a three-way discussion. His mother asked Kika questions about her life. Kika gave short polite answers. Uriel asked more questions with his eyes, with the shifts in his body. She responded unwittingly in the pauses between sentences, in the fey sweep of glances.

She was only a little surprised when he arrived at her house two days later, a package of freshly made cheese in one hand, and a bag of pecans in the other. She was both put off by his offensive approach and flattered. And she was vulnerable. Cooper had sent only one letter and that was soon after she arrived. He wanted her to know he was leaving the States himself. He had taken a photographic assignment in South Korea, or somewhere far east of New York. In case she returned to the City before he did, she would know why he wasn't there.

Uriel held out the gifts to her and she invited him in. She had no idea she would invite him into her bed within the next fifteen minutes though this is precisely what she did and hadn't regretted it since. When Uriel held her in his arms, she felt safer than she had in years. They spoke a little broken Hebrew, a little broken English. In his native tongue, he called her by her full Hebrew name: *Rivka*. Rebekah. In his native tongue, he tasted her foreignness. His grey eyes glinted like the sun on the sea when he watched her face closely, enchanted by what his body was able to do to hers. She wrapped herself around his thick limbs and leaned her head against his hard chest. In this pose, this skin against skin, she sensed a future.

Not specifically with him. No, Uriel's place was on this kibbutz where he was born, where his father and older brother were buried, where his aged mother still doted on him, and his lovely wife and handsome children relied on him. But being naked with him for a few hours on certain mornings reminded Kika that she might be okay again.

But on this morning, the morning after the rocket attack, the morning after the rolling thunder, Kika did not return to the isolation of her little house. Uriel was in town with one of his children and she wanted, if only indirectly, to have contact with others. Maybe it was the humbling, tranquillising effect of the storm. Maybe it was that enough time had passed since her arrival and the need for intense quiet and solitude was beginning to fade. Maybe it was the effect of

Uriel's giving and the way he approached her: a solid, animal-like appreciation of her female body. Something undefined in her that was broken was beginning to mend.

She had also made a friend, a woman originally from Brighton. In Rachel's house over tall glasses of ice coffee and freshly baked cakes, Kika was filled in on the history of the kibbutz and its gossip, hard currency in any small community. Rachel narrated how years earlier, when she first arrived, children still slept in the communal houses and adults spent their evenings attending meetings — necessary in a life ruled by committee. Bed-hopping was epidemic. As were divorces. And the swapping of partners, parents and children. One woman married two brothers, had children with both. Their offspring were siblings and cousins. One man married and then had a whole other family with his wife's niece in a nearby town. A decade-long extra-marital affair which was recognised by everyone, including the 'cuckolded' spouses, ended when the woman decided to dump both her husband and her lover. Her husband remarried. Her lover remained with his affectionate wife. She remained alone. And they all remain friends, sort of. 'Open marriages, the likes of which sociologists and sex counsellors of the sixties and seventies would only be proud and envious of were and remain prolifically in evidence here,' Rachel laughed. 'In short, a sexual free-for-all, with the teenagers in their unsupervised houses joining in early on.'

When Rachel began recounting details of Uriel Spitzer's incorrigible philandering, Kika only listened. Uriel made good copy in the world of hardcore gossip. Kika was not alarmed to learn details of his notorious past. It was her apathy which surprised her. It was simply enough to know that when they were together something genuine, something good transpired. That many women had come before her and many would no doubt follow, just made sense. It didn't make her crazy.

Kika went to sit in the small olive grove by the dining room. As she lay among the silver-leaved trees, noting the animation of the twisted trunks, sedated by the simplicity of their ancient fruit, she thought of Uriel's embrace and then she returned as if by instinct to the place she was desperate to leave. New York in all its glory filled the blue screen of her mind. The Empire State Building. Carnegie. Zabar's. It seemed to her at that moment that the Metropolitan Museum of Art could not fit in all of Israel. It would simply be too large a structure, utterly out of place among the small garden paths she had become accustomed to. She imagined herself, almost against her will, running up the long flight of stairs of the museum's Fifth Avenue entrance, eager to walk inside and feel the din and hush of the main hall. There she stopped, surveying the list of new exhibits, noting the exquisite flower arrangements, wondering whether to go right into ancient Egypt, or left into Greece, or up to Japan, or through the back to America's art. Central Park seemed so appealing now. People there would be rollerblading, jogging, bicycle riding. They would be strolling through the lanes and over the arched stone bridges. Gone were the dangers and the garbage.

Kika had to remind herself how she had felt caught — daily, and with increasing ferocity — in the forest of tall buildings, in the endless grid of concrete, in the chaos of millions crushed into the too-finite number of Manhattan's miles. She had been possessed by island fever. She needed to remember how more than anything, she had wanted out. Required it. She told her boss, her family, her closest friends, her lover Cooper, that she had to experience the grace of nature and reliable kindness.

She chose the kibbutz in spite of the news reports and the war. For she had lived on one in the desert when she was a teenager and beauty and kindness were the qualities she most remembered. And so far, despite katyusha rocket assaults from Lebanon, aside from the low-flying helicopters that filled the air with their version of rolling thunder, her time was as calm and bucolic as she imagined it would be.

As she continued to draw images against the sky blue patches, Kika fastidiously tried not to remember how a little over a year ago, it was a mild winter morning, she was mugged at gunpoint in Central Park. She and Lotte, her dog, were walking not far from the playground where she often met her sister and three-year-old niece. The young man, a boy really, appeared like a tree nymph out of nowhere. Pointing a gun at her face he asked for her wallet. Even after she handed over her cash, her watch, her pearl earrings and the amethyst bracelet Cooper had just given her, he threatened to shoot her. Lotte was growling but Kika held the collar tight against her leg and wouldn't let the dog follow her instinct to defend, to attack. Then the boy turned as if to leave but reconsidered. He turned his gun on Lotte and shot her in the rear leg, and in the belly. These bullets were designed not to kill the dog right away, but to inflict maximum pain. Lotte yelped and fell to the ground, her blood spread out of her black body like water into an irrigation canal. When Kika began to cry, unable to bend down to comfort her beloved animal for fear she would be shot next, the boy began to laugh uproariously. Kika then screamed at him to go to hell and he pistol-whipped her across the face before disappearing among the trees.

She was remembering how winter infiltrated the city. She could almost feel the piercing cold wind tunnels on the streets perpendicular to the river. From her apartment window she could see jagged plates of ice cover the Hudson; on warmer days rats ran along the water's edge searching for food. On the day she left New York, frost covered the airport runway, delaying her departure by a few hours. The city would not let go so easily. On cold days such as these, the glass of the museum's atriums was opaque with condensation.

A hot eastern sun hovered over the trees and found her. A red dog ran by and Kika was returned to the kibbutz, to the green hills and view of the Mediterranean Sea. Dogs and children ran through these grounds unsupervised. Her neighbour's three-year-old son rode his tricycle alone to friends down the lane. Dogs were never leashed. Kika watched herself becoming attached to this degree of safety.

But then she might dream of Lotte and their last hours together. By the time Kika carried the dog to Central Park West and persuaded a taxicab driver to take her to the Animal Medical Centre on the east side, Lotte had lost a great deal of blood. The operation to dislodge the bullet in her abdomen came too late and her beloved companion of seven years died in anguish, in vain.

Kika stood and decided to return to her room to straighten up her few possessions: bed, end table, yesterday's newspaper. In New York at nine-thirty on any given morning, she would be at her desk, supervising the magazine's layout, fending off her boss's volcanic temper, wondering where in the world Cooper was cavorting and with whom, and lamenting that another day was about to go by where she wouldn't have done anything but work. There would be the hope that she'd leave the office before seven to meet a friend for a movie and a quick bite. Or maybe catch an off-Broadway show in Chelsea and have some beers at a local bar. Or maybe, just maybe, she could squeeze in a trip to the museum, the Met or even MOMA, because it too was open late one night a week, and she was always hungry to see a new exhibit or re-visit an old one. But as usual, she would probably not leave before nine. Exhausted. Wasted. Another day obliterated. Lotte waiting patiently to be walked.

As Kika began to leave the grove, she was thrown against one of the olive trees by the large unkempt white dog from the week before. He was running hard and fast. Not the usual casual, friendly saunter of kibbutz dogs. He was being chased by a large German Shepherd whose teeth were bared in preparation. She was stunned by the ferocity.

A few moments later, when Kika hung the damp towel from her morning shower on the clothes line, she saw the Shepherd trotting back up the hill. She recognised him as belonging to someone who lived on the other side of the kibbutz, not far from Uriel. She looked around for the white dog and was quick to realise that she had been slow to recognise the signs of a stray: nervous, wary, and dirty; defensive, vulnerable and preyed upon.

Her neighbour came out to hang bed linen when the white dog appeared. His tail was between his shaky back legs. He quickly surveyed the area, head moving in all directions, nose raised slightly, trying to pick up the Shepherd's scent. Kika saw a bald spot on his rump and what might be a scar near his ear. She wanted to call out to him.

'Shh! Get out of here!' her neighbour yelled.

He ran back down the hill.

'Whose dog is he?'

'That's the problem,' was the neighbour's answer. 'No one's. And he's filthy and ugly and unwanted.'

'How do the other dogs know he's a stray?'

'This is a small community,' she said matter-of-factly. 'Everything is known.'

Kika looked in the direction of the dog.

'Unless you're willing to take him in today, and you've got to let the secretary know, he's a goner. Strays are poisoned.' The young woman finished with her linen and leaned the

empty basket on her hip. She watched Kika's face. 'There really is no choice.'

'I don't believe that.'

'That's because you haven't lived here very long. People dump dogs here all the time. City people think that if the dog shows up on a kibbutz, that somehow he'll find a home. But there are more dogs than there are homes. And packs of dogs are dangerous.'

Kika knew this but couldn't help but remember how she fought with her parents to keep every stray she dragged in from outside.

'About eight years ago a pack of dogs attacked two children who were having a picnic by the pool. Not to mention the threat of rabies.'

What could Kika say? Did she want to adopt him? Didn't she walk away from the homeless in New York? But the white dog's eyes haunted her. A longing: claim this pawn ticket, give me ground, something to defend. Hadn't she found Lotte in the woods of upstate New York? What then was the difference? Who wasn't a stray?

*

Kika was restless. She decided to stroll through the children's section. Once, Rachel told her, the children spent years of their lives in this area of the kibbutz. Exceptions were the late afternoon hours in their parents' rooms and the traditional Friday night dinner in the main dining room. They slept here, went to school here, played here, took their meals and baths here. As orthodox to their pedagogical dictum as any religious Jew could be to rabbinical law, children were also not allowed to leave the kibbutz grounds without special permission. A casual visit to relatives in the city was rare. Travel abroad almost unheard of. The integrity of the 'group' which had been raised together since birth was the highest value and nothing was allowed to compromise it.

'Since those days of heady, self-righteous orthodoxy,' Rachel explained to Kika over an exquisite homemade apple strudel, 'lots has changed. Children only spend school days there. They leave the kibbutz grounds as much as their parents want and of course the outside world is inside, here, like everywhere. Television and computers rule.' Rachel's teenage sons stopped by the table and with nary a hello to their mum or a nod in Kika's direction, they sliced off enormous pieces of cake, grunted some sort of acknowledgement, and made off with their friends.

'The idea of the group lives on though,' Rachel continued. 'Amos and Yoel can't conceive of their lives apart from it. Strange for me, but I've come to terms with it. But I've come to terms with lots of things, like spending my life becoming an expert on stains in the communal laundry. And cleaning my mother-in-law's house every Friday despite her protests.' Then she explained to Kika how the socialist structures of many kibbutzim were being dismantled. The communities were becoming micro capitalistic enterprises. 'It's called *hافرata*,' she said as her husband Ziv came in, said a quick hello, and

went straight to the shower to rid himself of the dirt and smell of the fish ponds. 'The supermarket effect: every item, every activity its bar code. Traumatic but necessary. Community's in debt. The system broke down.'

As Kika walked among the children's homes, admiring the modesty and modern design of the two storey buildings, some with faded murals, others with old wooden windows and shutters, she thought of her niece, Oona, and how she would love the many playgrounds. And the freedom. She missed her niece, she missed her sister, and so far, including Lotte, that was all she was willing to admit she missed.

Kika heard some children and swung in their direction. More than the anthropologist observing, she was thinking about the child she might have had with Cooper the year before and how Lotte's death eclipsed the pain of the miscarriage. That was the beginning of the end of New York for her. The fights with Cooper who hated that she had gotten pregnant accidentally overwhelmed her. And then his rage that she lost it. As if this too were deliberate. Cooper wanted the child he said in explanation, but he also wanted to be consulted. He drove her home from hospital and then took off for Oceania, someplace where with his camera and enough material to shoot, he could forget that his life had just almost changed forever.

A cluster of children filled the entrance to a bomb shelter. Fifth and sixth graders had recently painted a rainbow and sailboats on a calm sea on the walls and door. But it was a concrete bunker nevertheless, part of the language human beings employed to express the stasis of violence.

Kika recalled the air-raid drills in grammar school thirty years earlier. The siren would sound and all the children would crawl under their wooden desks and place hands over heads as instructed. This was the pose they were to assume when the Russians attacked American shores. This was the place they were to seek shelter when missiles from Cuba, or launched from an enemy submarine which somehow made

its way into the New York harbour, spread radioactive poison over Manhattan, the capital of the capitalist enterprise, the US of A.

The kibbutz children were whooping and shrieking. It seemed to Kika that some were even crying. She wedged her way through the compact group of small bodies and saw the white dog lying against the steel entrance. His front leg was crooked. There were small rocks on his back. She looked down at the children who seemed to be taunting the dog to get up and run away. From somewhere in the back another shower of pebbles descended.

The dog lowered his head beside his twisted limb, helpless before the torture. She was at a momentary loss, her Hebrew not proficient enough to reprimand the children. She was stunned by their sadism. Suddenly the Shepherd returned. He wove his way through the crowd and stood in front of them, snarling at his trapped prey.

Kika's heart was racing. She began yelling, 'Go away, go away, leave him alone,' and when the children ignored her, she started pushing them back. She grabbed one boy's arm, not caring if it hurt, and pushed hard. The children backed away, frightened. 'Can't you see the dog is hurt?' she knelt down beside him. She screamed out in English. 'What are you doing? What are you ...'

The Shepherd came at her. Her arm was in his mouth, and he jerked it up and down as if it were a dead tree limb. Numbly, Kika watched his teeth emerge from her flesh and sink in again. The children screamed and ran in all directions. She heard the white dog's whimper evolve into a growl. She had become his ground, his to defend. The flags went up. The two dogs prepared to fight. Starting low the thunder rolled in their throats, the rumble of their growling swelled, threatening to crash down on her. As if to taunt the white dog, the Shepherd bit down harder on Kika's arm, working on a tighter grip. Kika saw her blood paint the concrete bunker red and then all was black.