

ZINDZHI'S SANCTUARY

Friday afternoon. When the intercom on her desk buzzed, Zindzhi was working in her attic studio apartment atop the facility she administered. Living where she also worked had upsides and downsides. Without looking up from her paperwork, Zindzhi responded. “Yo, Henry!”

“John-Boy here now,” Henry reported. Zindzhi had put Henry Brown in charge of the kitchen upon discovering his talent for pie-baking. It was her first personnel decision following the mayor’s appointment of her as executive director of the Troubled Youth Half-way House and Recreation Center. After a month on the job, she’d told the mayor that renaming the facility the “Silver Lining Sanctuary” was a non-negotiable term of her continued service, because anyone who had landed on society’s trash heap of unwanted humans was a refugee and she believed all refugees were entitled to sanctuary.

Henry had lost a son to gang violence and his marriage to drink. As he recovered from alcohol-hell, he’d asked Zindzhi to let him help out at the Sanctuary. That was six years ago. Henry was the Sanctuary’s angel: he knew how to fix things, build things, plumb things, wire things. She needed him.

“Okay. Pour me a coffee, Henry.”

“You got it, Zindzhi.”

She removed the red-plaid flannel shirt from her high-back desk chair and slipped it on over her black t-shirt and forest green, cotton-jersey skirt. Hunting for her gray canvas quadrilles, she ultimately had to crawl into the well under her desk to retrieve them. Stepping into them, she drew herself up to her full five-feet-eleven-inches (six-two, counting her Afro) before heading down two steep flights of stairs to buttonhole John-Boy. Now 60, she credited traipsing up and down those stairs several times a day with keeping her fit enough to represent the name she had given herself forty-some years ago: Zindzhi [ZEEND-zee], a South African word for “warrior”.

John-Boy's real name was Marcus Aurelius Pullman. Zindzhi called him John-Boy, because he was a look-alike for the young man who played John-Boy Walton on the TV show. Hailing from Kentucky, Marcus talked like John-Boy, too.

"Bring me any checks today, John-Boy?" Zindzhi shouted as she neared the bottom of the stairs.

"Yes, ma'am!" John-Boy was the mail carrier in the Sanctuary's neighborhood. On Fridays, he took his break at the Sanctuary to chat with Zindzhi. Seated on the bench at the end of one of the long tables set up in the meal hall, John-Boy opened his mouth for a bite of pumpkin pie.

"Well, let's have a look." Waiting for John-Boy to hand her the mail, Zindzhi waved to the teenage boys seated at the other end of the table. Two were playing chess and the other three were eating pie while quietly watching and waiting their turn.

"Get a job and share your fortune, or go to school and live here for free." That was Zindzhi's first condition for residence at the Silver Lining. The boys whose families didn't want them back after their stints at the Youth Authority settled uneasily at first into Zindzhi's tough love regimen, but either they came to respect her, and obey her rules, or they found another court-approved placement. Or they went AWOL and fell through the cracks.

Henry set down two mugs of steaming hot coffee. "You want pie, Zindzhi?"

"Sure, bring me a sliver," Zindzhi replied. "But no whipping cream, hear?"

"That ain't no whipping cream," Henry said. "It Cool Whip."

"Oh," Zindzhi said. "Well, then, put a dab of Cool Whip on it, too."

Henry chuckled on his way back to the kitchen.

"Come on, John-Boy," Zindzhi said. "Don't just sit there feedin' your face. Where's the mail?"

John-Boy grinned as he reached into his leather pouch. He pulled out rubber band-wrapped batches of envelopes, then magazines, catalogs, and newsprint flyers. "I seen somethin' this morning

that stuck me between laughin' and cryin'," John-Boy told Zindzhi as he picked up his fork again.

"Two lady cops jumped out of a black-and-white and started runnin' after some kid." He took another bite of pie.

Zindzhi sorted the envelopes: short stack for the residents and a big pile of blue envelopes for the Sanctuary. At his recent fundraiser, the mayor had exhorted the well-heeled attendees to be generous as he sent them home with two sets of pre-addressed envelopes. The white ones were for contributions to his re-election campaign and the blue ones for donations to the Silver Lining Sanctuary.

"I'm listenin'," she said.

"The kid started runnin' up an alley, but he was lookin' back at the cops instead of where he was goin' and ran smack into a garbage can tipped on its side. That can rolled all around the alley, spillin' garbage ever' which way, and the kid rolled with it, landin' him in with them coffee grounds, dirty diapers, and fish guts. That's what it smelled like, leastways. Cops didn't wait for an invitation, no-oh-oh. They dived right in after him. And there they all was, rollin' around in the garbage." John-Boy stifled his laughter when he saw the concern on Zindzhi's face.

"Did they arrest him?" Zindzhi asked.

"Well, now, I don't know, 'cause I had to move on. Got a route-and-a-half today. When they first seen 'im, they might-a just wanted to talk. When he ran like that, though, they might-a got a different idea." John-Boy took a sip of coffee.

"Here you go, Zindzhi," Henry said as he set a plate down before her.

She stared at the plate before looking up. "I said a *sliver*, Henry, not a microscopic iota."

Henry grinned. "There's more where that came from," he said over his shoulder as he headed back toward the kitchen.

“I don’t know what I have to do around here to get a damn piece of pie,” Zindzhi grumbled as she loaded half the “slice” onto her fork, ignoring that Henry had brought her exactly what she’d asked for.

“That boy was Oriental,” John-Boy continued.

“You seen ‘im before?”

“Maybe. He looked kinda familiar, but I couldn’t say for sure.”

“Okay. Well, movin’ on, I want to ask you one more thing. That empty buildin’ across from the senior apartments ... that on your route?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Morrie Jones told me -- you know Morrie?”

John-Boy nodded. “He’s on my route, and we say hey sometimes, that’s all.”

“Okay. Well, Morrie told me a bunch of crackheads set up in that abandoned buildin’,” Zindzhi said. “You be careful over there, John-Boy. Don’t be a hero. You see somethin’ that don’t look right, call me. Or call Lieutenant Blakemore. You have her number?”

“Yes, ma’am. You gave it to me.”

“You want another piece of pie?” Zindzhi asked.

“Well ...”

“Henry!” Zindzhi shouted. “We need two pieces of pie in here!”

“Comin’ up!” Henry called back.

“And a pot of coffee!”

Zindzhi wet her fingertip and ran it around her plate, gathering piecrust crumbs and remnants of Cool Whip, then sucked the treats off her finger. “That’s some real good pie, ain’t it?” she said and laughed.

“Yes, ma’am,” John-Boy agreed. “I seen somethin’ else today, Zindzhi,” he added, wanting to prolong their conversation. “Somethin’ I ain’t seen since I left the hills: a coyote.”

“No!” Zindzhi exclaimed. “Where?”

“Cemetery. Saves me some time to walk through there of a morning, that’s if I don’t stop to read the markers. When I opened the gate, I saw somethin’ startle, like I waked it. And there it was a coyote.”

Charles Bunker was a burly man and all eyes stayed glued to him when he walked in, not shifting their gaze until he sat down next to John-Boy.

Henry brought out two more pieces of pumpkin pie.

“Got another slice for Charles?” Zindzhi asked. “And what about that pot of coffee?”

“It’s comin’, it’s comin’.” Henry, beaming, headed once more for the kitchen. Nothing like a surge in demand for his pie to give Henry a sense of accomplishment.

“Good to see you, Charles,” Zindzhi said. “Where you been?” She didn’t wait for Henry to bring Charles’s pie but instead tackled her extra-full-size slice right away.

“County jail,” Charles replied without inflection. Twenty-something, Charles was a Sanctuary alumnus who did odd jobs and lived with one of his sisters but still came around to see Zindzhi.

“I got some mail for you,” John-Boy said, “back at the station.”

“Keep it,” Charles said. “I don’t want the buggers to know where I am anyway.”

Zindzhi asked John-Boy to tell Charles about the cops and the kid. John-Boy’s re-telling of the story took on embellishments, as his stories had a tendency to do. The three of them gabbed and laughed together. And enjoyed their pie.

After John-Boy left, Zindzhi poured herself and Charles another cup of coffee from the pot Henry had left on the table. “Did you hear what I heard?” she asked.

“Sounds like Chan still dealin’,” Charles said.

“Obviously, he’s not afraid of the school principal. He needs a different kind of scare, I’d say.”

“Gonna give him the Zindzhi treatment?”

“Well, we know his fat cat dad can get him out of juvi as many times as he has to, so another trip to the hall likely not to make a deep enough impression. But you and I know he’ll get rolled by those bad-asses up the street -- any time now, too, with the story John-Boy’s blabbing around about Weston squealing in garbage with the pigs.”

“Got that right,” Charles said.

“You know how to find him?”

“I can ask around.”

“Let’s arrange a special gathering for Mr. Weston Chan,” Zindzhi continued. “You get him in here Friday around five o’clock, just when he’s looking to make some real hot street money. I’ll make sure the right folks are here to show him another side of what he’s getting himself into.”

Charles grinned. Himself a beneficiary of Zindzhi’s brand of come-to-Jesus meetings, he looked forward to returning the favor. “Sure,” Charles said. “I can do that.”

* * * Zindzhi went back upstairs to make a phone call.

“You’re in luck,” Mr. Anderson said. “We got two young dogs in here at the shelter a couple weeks ago. One’s a by-god puppy, and we almost never have puppies.”

“I’m all ears,” Zindzhi said.

“He’s a cute little guy. Beagle. Looks pure bred to me. Maybe three, four months old. We picked him up in Golden Gate Park. No tags, and nobody’s called for him. Friendly little cuss, though.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Other one’s a 57-varieties mutt. Female. Looks a little like a coyote. Maybe a year old, we figure; weighs close to forty pounds. Big fluffy tail, perky ears, yellow eyes. Frisky and wily; playful. Got her heart broke, though: her owner lived in a nursing home, but the son who gave his mom the pup didn’t want her after his mom died.”

“*That* one.”

“The female?” Mr. Anderson asked, just to make sure.

“Yes, yes -- the mutt, as you called her. I’ll send someone over to pick her up this afternoon.”

“She has a wild side to her, Zindzhi,” Mr. Anderson cautioned. “She got out last week and we had a hard time tracking her down. Just today, we picked her up again. I can tell you the nursing home wasn’t sorry to see her go either. But she’s headed for the chamber if nobody wants her.”

“How much we owe you?”

“Well, fifteen dollars for the paperwork, forty for the license, one-seventy-five for the shots and neutering.”

Zindzhi whistled.

“This gonna be the Silver Lining’s dog? A mascot?” Mr. Anderson asked.

“She’ll live here, but I wouldn’t say ‘mascot.’ What we really need from her is a miracle or two.”

Mr. Anderson snorted. “She’s a dog, Zindzhi. She’s smart, kind-a funny-lookin’, and *very* high-spirited, but she’s just a dog.”

“Well, we’ll take her, see what she can do. What time you close?”

“Four-thirty, on the dot.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll have the papers ready. Your man will have to sign a receipt for the dog. And don’t forget the check. Since she’s going to belong to the Sanctuary, I’ll let you take her for fifty dollars, even.”

“You’re a good man, Mr. Anderson. I’ll remember your kindness.”

* * * “Yep,” Henry replied when Zindzhi called down later to ask whether he’d found someone to run over to the pound. “This is one frisky dog, Zindzhi. She acts like a puppy, but she *big*.”

“She’s here already? Okay. Well ... we have a leash for her?”

“Yeah, the animal shelter sent one.”

“Who picked her up?” The Sanctuary owned a van, but Henry didn’t drive. He had lost his license years ago, after more DUIs than he ever should have been allowed to rack up in the first place.

“Charles’s sister came by, so she took our van and picked up the dog,” Henry replied.

“Bring the rascal up here.”

“You sure?” Henry asked. “She’s a handful.”

“This dog is going to have to get along with me. And me with her. There’s no good reason I can think of to wait.”

“Whatever you say, Zindzhi.”

While she waited, Zindzhi gave Mr. Chan another try and was relieved that this time he took her call.

“Mr. Chan, this is Zindzhi.”

“Yes, Mrs. Zindzhi, how can I help you?”

“By believing what I’m about to tell you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Mr. Chan, your boy Weston is smart and he has your entrepreneurial instincts. I know you’re proud of him, and you should be.” Zindzhi paused, then took a deep breath and forged ahead. “I heard

something about him today that got my attention. If I can get your attention too, we just might be able to save Weston from getting into a whole lot of trouble.”

“Is this an appeal for funds?” Mr. Chan inquired. “You know the bank has a policy against charitable giving, except through our foundation. And, of course, the bank doesn’t make political contributions at all. However, I’ve sent a personal check, as requested by the mayor, for support of the Silver Lining Sanctuary.”

“I’m aware of that, Mr. Chan, and I thank you. I’m sure the mayor is grateful, too. But, no, I’m not asking you for money. I need you to come over here to the Sanctuary at five o’clock Friday afternoon. Can you do that?”

“What is this about, Mrs. Zindzhi?” Mr. Chan, she knew, couldn’t imagine why he, *or* Weston, should ever need to be in the Silver Lining’s neighborhood, much less inside the Sanctuary itself.

“It’s about Weston, Mr. Chan. Somebody needs to rearrange his priorities, and that ‘somebody’ needs to be you. But I have a hunch you won’t be convinced without seeing for yourself what Weston is up to.”

“The bank doesn’t run itself, Mrs. Zindzhi,” Mr. Chan said. “I will send a car to transport my mother to your place of business on Friday. She’s been taking care of the boy the past few years since my wife died. She’s the one who should hear these stories.”

“No, Mr. Chan. It has to be you.”

“Being President of this bank is a highly responsible position, Mrs. Zindzhi. I can’t be running off to welfare offices at that hour. We are very busy here in the late afternoons, especially Friday afternoons.”

“Have you heard the expression ‘asleep at the switch,’ Mr. Chan?” Zindzhi asked.

“No. Idioms can be ... difficult, Mrs. Zindzhi.”

“Let me put it this way: next time you’re on a plane headed to New York or Singapore or wherever it is you go when you leave Weston alone with his grandmother for weeks at a time, imagine that the pilot who’s flying the plane falls asleep just at the moment he’s supposed to be releasing the landing gear. What do you think would happen in those circumstances?”

“The plane would make a very bad landing,” Mr. Chan said stiffly.

“Exactly,” Zindzhi replied. “Weston is on that plane, Mr. Chan, and *you* are the pilot. Now, you wake up and get yourself over here on Friday, five o’clock.”

Zindzhi hung up, not waiting for Mr. Chan to stop sputtering. *If he doesn’t show, she mused, not only do we have an even bigger problem than I thought, but I’m losing my touch.* She heard knocking -- plus a lot of scratching and whimpering. “Come in, Henry!”

Henry opened the door, and the very excited dog rushed in, pulling Henry behind her. When Zindzhi stood up from her desk, the dog raised up on her two hind legs and placed her long, skinny forepaws on Zindzhi’s shoulders, pushing her back down into her chair. “Whoa, girl!” Zindzhi tugged on the dog’s leash and pulled her close, stroking her head while the dog wagged her long, fluffy tail. “Well now, you’re gonna liven things up around here quite a bit. I’m glad to see you’ve got so much energy ‘cause I’ve got a great big job for you and you’ll need every ounce of it.” The dog strained to lick Zindzhi’s face. “Oh my, you’re a sweetie, you are.”

* * * “Hey, chinky ... whazzup?”

Weston heard the remark and knew it was directed at him, but he kept walking.

“I’m talking to you, motherfucker. Chinky-boy -- didn’t you know that’s your name?”

Dagmar was big. And menacing. And he wasn’t by himself, of course; he had his posse with him.

“Where you goin’ in such a hurry, fuckhead?” Dagmar and his minions followed Weston, closing the gap between them on the sidewalk.

Weston, continuing to ignore Dagmar, started walking faster, so Dagmar and company picked up their pace too.

The street was otherwise deserted, but the entire procession was only a block from the Silver Lining. If he had to, Weston judged he could outrun the punks closing in on him.

“You know whose territory you in, chinky-boy?”

Suddenly understanding that Dagmar’s accosting him on the street was no coincidence, Weston cringed.

“Your daddy gettin’ you to start up the global economy down here in ‘Poor-ville’, chinky-boy? Bankers, they like a trade balance, ain’t that right, chink-fuck? You ast your old man for a in-vestment? Buy the best, sell it for less, put the local competition out of business?”

More boys joined Dagmar’s pursuit of Weston. As they all had edged en masse closer to the Silver Lining, new volunteers had emerged from doorways and alleys to fall in with the other thugs. Most of them were laughing, having fun. One of the newcomers punched Weston’s shoulder. Another slapped the back of his head.

“Hey, chinky ... you hard-a-hearin’ or somethin’?” Dagmar’s voice was getting louder and more threatening. He rattled off a string of syllables in imitation of Chinese: a ruse his street friends found hilarious.

Weston whirled around, came to a dead stop, threw his hands up over his head, and yelled straight into Dagmar’s face: “Yeee-OWWW! Haaaaa-JEEE!” Then, taking advantage of his pursuers’ short-term surprise, Weston ran to the door of the Silver Lining and made it inside before they could catch up with him. Certain that Dagmar wouldn’t dare enter the Sanctuary, Weston stood at a standstill

inside the door and looked around for Charles, who had said he would have information about a major shipment of high-grade raw coming into the city over the weekend.

Dagmar and entourage burst through the door. Dagmar grabbed Weston in a choke hold from behind and spoke directly into his ear: “You’re a crazy motherfucker, but I ain’t scared-a you.” Dagmar’s buddies encircled the two and linked arms to prevent the astonished onlookers from trying to help the hapless Weston. Before Weston knew what was happening, Dagmar had him face down on the floor, completely incapacitated. Weston struggled to free himself, but it was no use.

“Get off me, nigger,” Weston grunted.

Dagmar laughed as he pulled both of Weston’s arms up behind his back and gave them a sharp twist that made Weston cry out. “You talk real big, chinky-boy. Just remember I know where to find you.” Then Dagmar and buddies shoved Weston across the tiled floor toward Zindzhi. Grinning and slapping each other on the back, the gang sauntered out the front door.

“That’s enough for me,” Zindzhi said to Mr. Chan, who had been standing next to her at the back of the meal hall. “You?”

Weston writhed on the floor before noticing he was being observed by his father as well as Zindzhi.

“That was brilliant, Weston,” Zindzhi said.

Weston scrambled to his feet under the angry gaze of his father.

“What is the meaning of this?” Mr. Chan asked his son.

Zindzhi stood by, not understanding the words that ensued in Chinese but fully comprehending the father’s displeasure and the son’s sullen alertness. Eventually, she spoke softly to both of them. “Mr. Chan, why don’t you and Weston join me upstairs to discuss this? We’ll let the folks down here continue their evening undisturbed.”

For the first time, Weston and Mr. Chan realized they were the center of attention amidst a gathering of amused teens and other Silver Lining regulars.

“Would you like some coffee?” Zindzhi offered.

Weston shook his head.

“No, thank you,” said Mr. Chan. “Weston and I will be leaving now. Please accept my apology for any trouble Weston has caused, Mrs. Zindzhi.”

“Frankly, Mr. Chan, making amends is Weston’s job. But we have more to talk about. We can do that down here, if you want, but it would be more productive to have that conversation in private.”

“How long do you think that will take, Mrs. Zindzhi? I must call my office.”

“You can do that upstairs, too. Henry!” she shouted. “I need coffee served upstairs!”

“Comin’,” Henry called back.

As they neared the top of the stairs, all three heard the whimpering behind the door to Zindzhi’s quarters. When Zindzhi opened the door, the dog strained against her leash, which Zindzhi had secured around the leg of her heavy oak desk. Unable to lunge, the dog bared her wolfish teeth and barked.

“It’s okay, girl,” Zindzhi said. When she had hold of the dog’s collar, she turned around and pointed to two folding chairs on which she invited Mr. Chan and Weston to sit. “She won’t hurt you,” she assured them and then laughed her big hearty laugh. “She *sounds* scary though.”

Keeping one hand on the dog’s collar, Zindzhi sat down at her desk. “You have a problem, Mr. Chan,” she said. “Weston knows his way around this part of town, because he’s a drug dealer. He’s headed for jail time. That doesn’t *have* to happen, and I doubt it would be an experience that made Weston a better member of society.”

“Weston won’t be going to jail,” Mr. Chan stated emphatically.

The dog barked and kept barking until Zindzhi muzzled her with a hand, looked into her eyes, and soothingly patted the dog's head until she settled.

"Your son is a drug dealer, Mr. Chan," Zindzhi repeated. "Drug dealers go to prison." She turned to Weston. "Are you using, too, or just dealing?" she asked him.

"Not the hard stuff," Weston said, barely a whisper.

"So you smoke dope. Anything else?" Zindzhi persisted.

"Hashish."

"You're a page out of the '60s, boy!" Zindzhi shook her head. "With the mess of stuff on the streets and the exotic crap I know you're peddling, and all *you're* doing is smoking weed and hash?"

Weston cast a glance at Zindzhi from under the long straight black hair that hung over his eyes. "I like it," he said and shrugged.

This comment sent Mr. Chan into Chinese overdrive. A long rant and emphatic hand gestures suggested Mr. Chan was threatening to throw Weston out on the street and let him fend for himself. But Zindzhi suspected, and trusted, that the grandmother would never go along with that.

"I have another idea," Zindzhi said.

Just then, Henry tapped on the door and called, "Coffee." When he walked in, the dog barked and bared her teeth again, but Henry didn't even blink; he was already used to the dog's bluffs and theatrics. "Don't worry, dog," Henry said calmly. "I baked enough of these ginger bars for you to have one, too." Having set a tray on Zindzhi's desk, he poured coffee into one of three mugs and set it in front of her, then asked Weston and Mr. Chan if they would like refreshments, pointing to tall glasses and a pitcher of ice water as an alternative to coffee. They both shook their heads, and Henry closed the door on his way out.

"You were saying, Mrs. Zindzhi?" Mr. Chan sounded almost eager.

“Hand me one of those cookies, would you, Weston? I’ve got me a hungry dog over here,” Zindzhi said. “You like dogs?”

Weston stepped to the desk and picked up two ginger bars, keeping one for himself and handing the other to Zindzhi. “Dogs are dumb,” he said.

Zindzhi threw the treat up in the air. The dog jumped up and caught it in her mouth, swallowed it, then sat back, barked, and looked at her benefactor, ready for another. Zindzhi laughed. “You see that?” she said and then asked Weston to try feeding the dog a ginger bar himself.

“Mrs. Zindzhi, may I use your telephone?” Mr. Chan’s exasperation was reaching panic.

“Help yourself,” she told him. “Weston, while your dad is on the phone, come over here and hold onto this dog so I can relax and enjoy Henry’s goodies and drink my coffee.”

Warily, Weston moved toward the dog as his father began dialing. When he got close, the dog started barking and Weston fell backward onto the floor.

“Hold your hand out to her so she can smell you,” Zindzhi instructed.

Hoping to appease an animal that frightened him, Weston did as Zindzhi suggested. When the dog sniffed Weston’s hand, she whimpered and paced in the tiny circle her leash would allow. Weston held his hand out toward her again and the dog began licking it. He smiled and looked up through his hair at Zindzhi. “Does this mean she likes me?” he asked.

“It means she’s giving you a chance to show her you won’t hurt her.”

“Something has come up,” Mr. Chan was saying into the receiver. “I can’t make it back to the bank today, Mr. Lee. Tell Mrs. LaRue to carry on and let her know I will speak with her later this evening.” He listened briefly. “No, it’s fine for you to leave when the bank closes. Just give Mrs. LaRue my message and I will see you Monday morning.”

Mr. Chan looked impatiently at Zindzhi and Weston, exasperated to see both of them engrossed in playing with the dog. “Mrs. Zindzhi,” he said, “can’t we please get down to business here?”

“If I were you, Mr. Busy Banker, I’d be looking for a fresh supply of patience,” Zindzhi chided, “because Weston needs your help, your guidance, your love ... and your time.”

“I’d say that’s for me to decide,” Mr. Chan snapped. “You mean well and I’m grateful you brought this situation to my attention, but I can take care of it myself.”

“What would you say ‘this situation’ is, Mr. Chan?”

“We’re leaving now, Weston,” Mr. Chan announced. “Mrs. Zindzhi, Weston will be in touch to make good on anything he owes you.”

Weston stood and reluctantly backed away from the dog. The dog growled when Mr. Chan grabbed Weston by the shoulder and pushed him toward the door, pointing down the stairs.

* * * Weeks later, Zindzhi and John-Boy were smacking their lips over Henry’s lemon meringue pie when Weston came into the meal hall through the Sanctuary’s back entrance -- tugged by the dog.

“She look anything like that coyote you saw?” Zindzhi asked.

John-Boy gulped. “Yes, ma’am,” he said. “What’s it doin’ in here ... on a *leash*?”

“We got her from the animal shelter. And Weston here is taking her to obedience classes. Her first one is today. Weston, this is John-Boy. John-Boy, Weston.”

John-Boy looked directly at Zindzhi and spoke quietly but urgently to her.

“Zindzhi, that ain’t no dog,” John-Boy pressed. “Can’t you see that animal’s pure coyote? You cain’t *train* a coyote.”

The dog, dragging her leash, had begun sniffing the mail pouch but then got distracted by the lemon meringue pie on John-Boy's plate. John-Boy nervously nudged his plate in her direction, and the dog wasted no time in lapping up John-Boy's half-eaten slice.

"Well, we'll see." Zindzhi held out her hand and the dog rushed over to lick it.

"What should I tell the trainer her name is?" Weston asked.

"You'll have to come up with something. You're the one looking after her."

Weston rolled his eyes as boy and dog headed out the door.

"See you back here in an hour and a half," Zindzhi called. "You hear?"

No response. She wondered how much obedience training *Weston* was going to need.

* * * Weston named the coyote-dog "Jinghua." He had to say it several times before Zindzhi could repeat the sound accurately. Henry called the dog "Harry," which was equally puzzling. Zindzhi decided to call her "Sweetie-pie." The dog impressed Zindzhi by answering to all three. *She knows who her friends are. Makes her smarter than most people I know.*