



VR Sibeko
Bludgeon

Ball

Genesis

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Chapter 1

Good genes, that was what they used to call it. What they used to call people who were just a little stronger than the others. People who ran a little further. Those talented souls who ran a little faster and worked a little harder than the rest. It was all a very simple method of acknowledging them, those ‘talented’ few.

But geniuses were getting smarter, athletes were getting more and more skilled, the rate of which had never been seen before.

That was until what would later be called the Final Crash caused the world to pause, break apart. Many died, billions upon billions starved before being blown to shreds in war. The resources spent, the whole of nature’s wrath descended and left so few to rebuild but those who would work, worked. Those who would build, built. The stronger were ever still the stronger. Border lines were built anew, nations built anew, the skies became homes for the wealthy until they themselves disappeared, nature would not allow any to escape and the heavens became death incarnate.

The super rich had thought themselves clever by trying to run away from the enemy. The enemy being the very soil itself, which had turned. Altering to-

“Nati!”

Nati looked up from the book she had buried herself into. In front of her stood old man Raditz, a remnant of the borderless White Heart Tribe. The man had bronzed skin, once a pale white that had been lost to the heat of the African sun. His long hair, turned silver by time and age, were pushed away from his face and warm green eyes fell upon her. She put the book down and an impishly sly smile formed on her lips.

“It never crossed your mind that it just may be dangerous for you to stop a Xhosa girl with a book? We are a proud and dangerous breed.”

The old man laughed, giving a grizzly chuckle before he extended a gnarled hand. Nati grabbed his wrist and was launched up to her feet with an ease that made her feel as though she weighed little more than a gnat. She beamed up at him when he winked.

“You Xhosa women are already a proud and dangerous breed with or without a book in your hand.”

Nati laughed and pulled back the old man’s silver dreadlocks to stare into his eyes. It was impossible to do anything but smile back with a lighter heart when one looked into them and she would not be cheated of the experience. Well aged and gnarled fingers reached up and touched her cheek, her own dark cocoa skin coming naturally. His other hand lifted up past her head and her smile deepened before he pulled the that tied her bun and her own mountain of thick jet black dreads tumbled down to her waist in a land slide of hair.

She sighed. “I will never understand you old man Raditz”

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He kissed her forehead like she were still a toddler. “You will understand soon enough, you grow so fast.”

Nati crossed her arms, her shoulders relaxing as she took a heavy breath. “It’s not enough. It is never enough. Your entire tribe was destroyed by the surrounding chieftains, what wasn’t destroyed of their lands shared amongst them-”

“You’re what now? Sixteen years old? It all happened fifty years before you were born. It is beyond you.” Old man Raditz sighed but Nati didn’t ease up.

“If I can still feel its effects then how can it be beyond me? It has to do with me because it is a part of you, your history. And you’re the closest thing to a father I have. You’re it for me.” Nati stopped when she saw the old man’s eyes widen and his brow furrow.

“Shut up girl.” The old man snapped before he sighed, letting out a deep and heavy breath. “Just shut up. Okay? You never, ever listen but this time you will listen. I am not *all*. This world, this life, is not all.”

Nati uncrossed her arms before crossing them, her fingers reaching out for her sides before she uncrossed and re-crossed them again. Unsure of what she was trying to grasp. Her fingers dug into her hair and she covered her face with her pitch black locks. Her fingers twitched and she turned away from him.

“I hate it when you do that. There’s only the two of us but still, with the way you act. You act like I would judge you if I ever saw you cry. Fine, come. We have a long road ahead.” The old man scratched his head looking at her. She hadn’t looked back and still looked to be using her strength to fight back what emotions held her so tightly. “Hey, do you know what part of the world we’d be in if it weren’t for the Final Collapse?”

Nati, with her back still aimed at Raditz walked away. Her bare feet sank into the desert sand, burning her toes as black shards of glass, once sand themselves, cracked and shattered beneath her toes. Her fingers dug into the sand and a rusted iron signpost was dragged out with little protest.

“Bloemfontein, South Africa” She said, some of her voice still shaky.

The old man grinned, “You’re a smart girl.”

Nati didn’t look up, instead pulling two straps made from over a dozen pieces of string and wool from the sand. The cling and clang of iron chain just audible over the howling winds as she wrapped both straps around her fists.

The old man rested his hands deep into the pockets of his coat after pulling up the sleeves of his collar. He walked past her and climbed into a once pearl white eighteen wheeler.

The large truck had long begun to lose its colour, even the steel below had long lost its own silver sheen only to be coated with rust and held together by meter long steel strips. Bandages which kept the shape of its two rust coated containers. All wheels were a meter deep in sand.

Nati threw off her own coat bundling it up into a ball before unbuttoning her jeans and adding them to her mix, leaving her in just shorts and a tank top. She hurled the ball at the old man just as he opened the door and a leather and wool mesh satchel was thrown back to her.

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The satchel had a cork at the top which she popped open before putting on the strap over her back and drank, taking in its contents before pouring more over her head. Almost immediately steam poured out her every pore, the water evaporating fast. The edge of her dreadlocks melted and burst into flame before being stubbed out between her bare fingers.

The doors of the front cab opened and the old man stuck his head out, the windows long ago replaced with steel sheets.

“You decide how you want to do it.” He yelled to her.

“I hate it when you do this. Just pick. Open armed or to the chest?”

“To the chest” He yelled.

She nodded and turned away from the truck. She lifted the straps and opened her arms as though to accept the warmest of embraces.

Her arms still spread, she took a step forwards and then forwards again.

The clank of the anchor chains grew more pronounced as more were pulled up from the sand until they grew taunt and her footsteps became more strained. Her arms pulled back and she pushed forwards, both feet digging deep into the sand before moving her forwards along with the eighteen wheeler which dragged across the sand to reveal that the wheels were set upon steel tracks which acted as a ski as the truck slid.

“I’m a rebel,” she laughed as she picked up speed.

“There had once been a time when an African sunrise wasn’t a warning to hide but rather something to look forward to.” Came the voice of Raditz through a radio in Nati’s ear. She did little more than grunt back. “I am one hundred and ninety five years old, not as old as you’ll one day grow but I’ve lived life enough to believe whole heartedly that knowledge of ‘what was’ would define ‘what is’. How things on this part of the world, no, the whole world still amaze me. But maybe, maybe it had all happened before. Perhaps it had happened and some smart historian could have found the answer. Maybe realized the connection between the Final Crash and some civilisation that had fallen before and with that knowledge warned someone. Told someone.”

The truck stopped moving and Nati took a deep breath, waves of steam radiated out of her flesh like a coal sprayed with water.

“Old man, are you drinking again?”

“What makes you say that?” He asked.

“Because the only time you remind me that you are a hundred and seventy nine years older than me is when you drink.”

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“I couldn’t help it. I just feel bad whenever I upset you.”

“Well please do not finish it all. You promised me you’d let me taste it when I got to the ocean. You said you’d make me stronger than I am now.”

“I am positive I can, at the very least make you the strongest the world has ever seen. But it is up to you to know the reason why.”

“You raised a Xhosa woman as your own without saying why. It’s only fair-”

“Is there a reason we’ve stopped?” The old man said before she could say another word.

Nati sighed shrugging her shoulders and pressing the chains to her chest before pushing forwards once again.

“I’ll make a deal with you. I will pick up the speed if you tell me about super heroes once more” Nati sighed.

“They weren’t real.” He returned,

The girl nodded, “True, but they still count as history.”

Raditz laughed at this loudly enough hurt her ears through the earpiece. “You are by far my favourite. Fine then, you win but I want a speed of eighty kilometres per hour and keep it by nightfall.”

Nati took a deep breath through her nostrils, her eyes scanning the horizon. There wasn’t much left in the day but enough to leave her frustrated and exasperated at just the thought of it. It wouldn’t be eighty she’d be chasing, she would have to get a higher number, such as ninety or a hundred just to be safe because of she got tired, or even a little weary and she dropped to a speed of even seventy nine point nine, nine, nine, nine she’d lose her story.

Her teeth clenched and her toes dug deeper into the soil. “Fine, you win.”

The hole the truck had been churning into the earth grew lighter. The sound became a light hiss as it sailed across the oceans of sand. All only ever broken when the metal behemoth hit a dune and took to the skies before smashing back down.

The desert underfoot darkened becoming crystallized coals in the oppressive heat, burning up and bursting and sparkling. Eventually the light of the sun started to ease and the cooling air pushed upon her flesh, her hair whirling in the wind as she drew to a stop. Parting her feet she pulled the truck up a dune and held it there while the old man, using rope, dragged logs beneath the tyres.

There it held.

Nati sighed, watching the world as it twisted and reformed right before her eyes. A violent medley of colour that made up for every piece of her piece of her reality, from the stars to the soil beneath her feet, tans, purples, browns, olives, shades so light they hurt the eye and pools of black, endless pits of night where sand had had the misfortune of bearing the sun’s fury.

As she watched, the old man put on round goggles and fussed around the truck, placing funnel after funnel upon the base of the vehicle. It almost seemed funny how the old man would move. Clearly he was not having too easy a time of things and yet pride would not allow her a chance to help. The old

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geyser stretched his limbs, arching his back as he moved as if caught in slow motion, his face contorting with pain.

“If you’ve got time to watch me, you’ve got time to get in the lab.” He growled.

“You always say the nicest things. I’ll be going.” Nati said with a smile.

“Don’t actually press anything until I’m there.” He yelled after her.

She rolled her eyes and unhooked her bra before taking her clothes off. With one hand on her clothes she opened the door to the rear container. Milky white steam washed over her, making her shiver against the unnatural cool that hit her skin. White layers of crystal formed and flaked off as she scrubbed with a steel brush. In front of her was a wall of glass and from it green light washed over her bare skin.

“Approved” spoke a mechanic device before the glass sheet pulled open, opening a path to a science facility.

There were two tables, one chair and one a work desk that no one ever used. There was also a slab of white iron topped with a thick layer of clear pristine glass. On both sides were thick leather straps to hold down whomever was to lay open it. She sat herself on what she called the dentist’s chair and placed electrodes upon her wrists, ankles, thighs, chest and forehead. Her every action felt blocky, mechanical as her body ran on automatic, this being something she’d done over a thousand times. By the time she was done the old man was in his own segment of raised earth and looking down on her from the platform. It was a meter high, separated from the main room by yet another even thicker sheet of clear glass with a sphere of flashing lights and figures dancing around the old man. He watched with critical eyes. Nati shivered at the examination of her person before laying further back into the dentist’s chair and staring at the roof. Of all chores, of all tasks, these were by far the most difficult. Her body had a knack of putting up a fight where one wasn’t needed, when cautionary sensations, feelings thoughts would attempt to interrupt her only to be beaten and pushed back. But never did her body fight or rally against her more than when she was in the lab.

Electric currents flowed through the electrodes and courses through her body. Her lungs cried out in protest when her diaphragm threatened to fold in half but on the outside, to the naked eye, her only reaction was a thumb twitch.

“Good news, it looks like you’re looking good. Still in good health but you shouldn’t be.”

She burst out laughing, “What is that supposed to mean?”

The old man grinned. “Exactly what I said. The body learns and gets smarter from exercises and real life actions you put it through. A good example being how to tie a knot for the chains we use. You practice and practice until you can tie a knot without thinking. But strength is different Nati. With strength, you have to put in work that your body isn’t used to or even understands to be good, when your muscles burn and hurt, when your head is telling you to stop. It’s up to you to let your body hurt, make your muscles feel like they’re going to stretch, snap and break because when it’s over, you’re going to be stronger than when you started. So hurt and burning is good even if your body disagrees. Only, I’m not detecting the hurt and burning rate you need to grow stronger, especially considering how fast you recover. At this rate you’re not actually getting stronger. I’m going to use both the anchor and the sails to see how much of a difference that makes.”

“I thought the sails burned up in the sun?” she asked.

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Raditz's fingers were a blur of activity and the entire container flickered on and off. Nati gritted her teeth and her fingers closed on their own.

"See, you still cannot handle the external stamina of the testing systems which proves it. If it were up to me you'd be pulling while I drove the truck backwards. We don't have the fuel though and the Xhosa territories are a long way away. The San territories are the closest thing to a calm and quiet enough location to get any fuel or at the very least use the carbon converter in the front container without attracting trouble. We likely should not have gone through the Zulu territories but you wanted to see the beach so badly."

"Are you trying to guilt me?" She asked. Nati ripped off each individual electrode which left patches of purple but throwing them to the ground. Never once did her back turn to him while she picked up her clothes as she hurriedly threw them on. Her coat, top and left sock still in her hand, she slammed the door and the truck slid, trembling violently as the sand shifted to accommodate.

It didn't take for the old man to climb out of his own little exit before he started yelling from the top of the container. "Hey, watch your moods okay? This tool has decades of work still to complete. I can't have you causing me to lose all my hard work."

Nati glared back at him and scowled. "What for? What's it all for? We walk through the harshest most secluded part of all the wastelands and for what? My development? What's the point?" she was screaming now. "What are we doing here that can't be in the cities, with other people? You said I could be everything you told me I could be, a super hero. I could have lived as happy as you did. Done more than all the people in those books you give me! Done more than you. But instead I'm here."

The old man glared back at her and turned away as if to pick something up between the two containers that she couldn't make out from her side of the container. Just as quickly as he'd turned away he turned back only to see Nati walking away. "Don't walk away, you are."

His words died in his mouth when the entire dune started to shake. Violent rumbling made her heart skip a beat. The truck started to react in a manner she'd never seen before. It took up life as lights started flashing on the upper edges. At first a blinding white light dotted the top before it turned red and then a shade of purple that pointed down towards the rest of the truck, illuminating the truck in an eerie midnight glow. The whole time the sound of buzzing and beeping assaulted her ears before it was replaced by a slow and continuous hiss and multicoloured smoke poured down from the top. Her heart, which had yet to start beating since the first flash of light disappeared into a black hole in awe as the whole truck grew fuzzy. This wasn't mist as she'd seen it in pictures, this mist had colour, light in its infinite abundance flowed through it and a living canvas of the world on the other side of the truck could be seen. It was disappearing right before her eyes!

Old man Raditz appeared holding the biggest piece of electronic tubing she had ever seen. A solid stream of light burst out of the tube and into the inky night sky. There was an explosion and a heavy object fell with a crash into the sand.

"What is that?" she yelled, pointing at him.

"It's a type of gun, a plasma missile launcher to be more exact. But that over there is a scouting vessel. We don't have long until we're surrounded, I'm gonna start the truck, Nati wait! Nati!"

There was no point, he was already talking to her back.

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She was all the way down the dune and making good time as she raced towards the crashed object. She'd only seen pictures, videos and dreams of modern structures other than the truck and what she had been lucky enough to keep from being swallowed by the desert. Bursts of sand shot up from her bare heel as she sprinted to the two meter high mound of flaming steel. She picked it up with both hands without slowing and screamed dropping the heap.

There was a blue fiery liquid dripping from the drone where she could only guess the old man had struck. Was this what guns did? Why did this gun burn where flame could not? With gritted teeth he lifted it up over her shoulder where it was safest and sprinted back.

Her calves ached as she ran, the roar of the truck could be heard but it was nowhere to be seen, only the trail of where she'd last caught sight of it. Her sprint was desperate. As she ran she saw the truck. It was making great time, the skis now acting as tank wheels as they tore through the open desert at a speed she didn't know the metal behemoth had. Out of the exhaust she saw bursts of bright green flame, giving it a rocket like effect. The whole time the mist and light show managed to stay in tune with it. It hid it so perfectly against the naked eye as it sped on. It would have been jaw dropping, awe inspiring and simply amazing were it for the fact that it was leaving. And leaving fast. She screamed for him to wait.

The sound of rumbling caught her attention once more. This time it was heavier, more pronounced. She sprinted faster, her grip tightening on the vessel drone. Red light shone on the truck followed by a multicoloured burst which made her ears ache and the front cab of the eighteen wheeler explode.

The blast sunk the cab into itself, pushing down as the two containers were engulfed in flame. She, along with her new toy were launched into the air, back over the dune she'd just run down from and into the crevasse below. The sheer force throwing her into a world of black

Nati wasn't sure how much time had passed when her eyes popped open but the rumbling was more pronounced than ever. The drone sat over her head pressing her face into the sand acting as accidental cover. The rumbling was near, too near to allow her to stand up but restlessness could not allow her to stand still either. Her fingers dug into the drone, most of the sand around her face had turned muddy, sticking to her cheek. Unable to stand and on her stomach she screamed, throwing herself up to her feet with such force, one would have thought a bomb had just exploded under her.

Her fingers gripped tight to the drone. It's alloy crushing in against the sheer weight of the hold, her body trembling with effort.

The same light shone upon her. Long lines of tear stains layered with sand glistened brightly like glitter on her face. The same multicoloured burst that had fired before flew at her. Fiery death fell, only to smash and shoot right back its original flight path when it was wrapped around the drone's melted body. There was a burst of white liquid flame and then an orange and red explosion filled that sky.

White fabric glinted off the red sky to show what looked to be a parachute descending. Looking left then right, her eyes searched and scanned through the flickering light the flame provided for something, anything to throw. There was nothing but sand, sand and more sand. The white billowing sheets turned, moving in the direction of the truck and what was left of the old man.

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The idea, the thought, the flashing image of Raditz being touched by the same man who shot him made her howl, literally. A visceral roar gargling free from her throat rang until her lungs ached. She clenched her fists, her arms trembling with effort as she broke into a head long sprint.

Chapter 2

Nati had never been a heavy human being, what weight she had without anchor chains was likely below that of any sixteen year old girl attached but she surprised herself when she literally smashed through the top of the dune in a sandy explosion of speed. Her eyes darted like those of a mad man looking for their sense of sanity when she caught sight of the man in the parachute. At first it was nothing more than a dark figure moving away from the light as the chute came down. Nati was a missile, tearing across the sand as though on wings and caught the dropping soldier a moment before he touched ground.

Nati screamed as she struck upon the man covered from head to toe in metal with a clothesline hook that dropped him on his back. His time sprawled on the ground didn't last as he was lifted by his wrist and flung into the air like a discus. The armoured being flailed his arms and legs before slamming into the sand a distance away.

Nati chased after, cutting the distance to nothing quickly. Her head hurt, her biceps, calves, diaphragm, throat, even her tears burned her eyes. Her stomach hurt so much she was sure it had folded into itself as a recoiling action. In the night the sand which swallowed her feet with every step became its very own fog as Nati punched her feet through, blasting sand both in front and behind her.

The armoured man was on his feet by the time she could make him out. Nati's fist cocked back and she fired a right handed haymaker only to have it caught by nimble fingers. A metal boot swung into her retreating leg in mid run, her fist was dragged down and her leg launched up too high, she flipped. Her open mouth chewed on sand before she spluttered and screamed.

She was in a fight, an actual fight!

In a moment she was on her feet, a right hook aimed for her enemy's chin, he had more range, catching her three times in the chin and cheek with jabs before her own swung and caught nothing but air.

Nati gritted her teeth as she took two hits to the stomach. She screamed bloody murder only to be caught in the chin and throat while getting nothing but air. She'd seen movies about fighting, she'd been told stuff by the old man so then why? Why was she getting hit alone?

Never once did Nati so much as try to block. Metal coated fingers peppered her entire body but that was all, they stung, they burned, they were confusing and that was it.

Time passed on with same repetitive motions, her aching and panting heavily but still swinging at the man of metal was getting more efficient, ducking and diving, side stepping, parrying.

More time passed, the desert chill took away the flame's light on the moonless night, leaving two dark forms swinging wildly each other with Nati hitting nothing.

Until she didn't.

Metal alloy bent and folded over the man's abdomen and he doubled over. Nati did the same to draw in as much fresh air as possible only to look up and see the metal figure running. "No!" she screamed and chased after, overtaking the man before aiming a haymaker at his skull. He ducked by throwing himself at the ground only to be dragged to his feet, her fingers digging deep into the shoulder and neck armour, punching holes to the other sides. His torso dangled and crunched when another fist connected with his stomach, the man flailed but it meant nothing. No amount of physical pain could take away the empty

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aching sat inside of her, it burned, it ached, it hurt, it needed to go away, it needed to stop but didn't. Face armour tore as bloodied fists connected once more. Long red hair could be seen from the tear. Nati struck again and all flailing, eye raking, throat stabbing, nose punching drew to an instant halt and he lay limp in her arms.

Her grip changed, moving from his collar to his neck where she began to squeeze. The man was weak, weak without his armour, weak without some weapon, weak. Just plain weak.

She squeezed harder, her bare fingers pushing away flesh to latch on to the bone. His skin was a creamy soft and a pale white, like the light of the moon, which made the flaming red of his hair shine brighter in contrast. It wouldn't take anything to pop his head off his shoulders. It would be nothing, nothing at all. Nati just held on and the soldier woke up quickly, flailing his arms and poking at her but he was nothing but an ant fighting a wall.

Who knew others out there came so soft, so weak but so murderous. The light of the beam that had shone on her, it had been so bright. The shot of liquid flame that had struck the front cab of the truck, how the front of the truck had burst apart. How it had exploded with the old man inside.

Both hands gripped his neck and Nati's teeth gritted, she'd never killed another human being before. She had no idea how it was to kill, even the old man wouldn't let her finish off a hunt. But that wasn't a person. People weren't supposed to just kill.

The soldier grabbed at her neck, jumping up and twisting until he got enough height to crash both feet into her liver and diaphragm. It was enough to get Nati to loosen her grip enough for him to gargle and gasp for air.

She let go as if she were burned. That cry wasn't male. Grabbing what was left of the mask she ripped it off. Behind the mask was a fiery red hair, bright baby blue eyes gaped at Nati, pale white skin that looked as though someone had created it out of milk, flared nostrils, trimmed eyebrows reddish pink and small pouty lips. This was no man, Nati pounced upon her, ripping her armour off to reveal a silver under suit that did nothing to hide her feminine shape.

A girl, she's a girl, screamed her head, leaving her cheated of some sense of dominance like a bear standing over a lion only to realise it was a kitten the whole time. The girl got up only to have her ankle dragged up and her body flipped with a childish ease. She screamed. There were words in her scream but they were not of a language the girl knew.

"Xhosa?" Nati tried, cooling down enough to simply talk but she got nothing back. "Zulu then?" there was still nothing. "San, do you speak of the San's words?" babbling followed her attempt to get a word in edgeways. There were only six tribes left in the entire southern part of Africa but somehow her babbling had nothing to do with all of them. She sighed, by now the girl should have known one of them if she was from these lands.

Unless she wasn't.

"What about English? The old slaver's English?"

The flailing and the kicking almost instantly stopped and Nati sighed in resignation. "I won't lie, I don't know much of it, it is not the common tongue on this side of the planet anymore. The fact that you don't know any of the languages of this land, these territories. It says a great deal of your purpose here. It says," She stopped there, her face was burning up again. She just couldn't banish the vision of the old man caught in the explosion once more. She couldn't banish a single part of the thought, nothing. "It tells

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me that you didn't come here to talk." Nati was blinking fast, gasping for air that wouldn't come, "Put your tongue in your mouth or you'll bite it off."

With calm and deliberate aim she stepped on the girl's neck and pressed down hard, twisting as her head was pushed into the sand up to her neck. She'd once seen an ostrich do it, it had been funny at the time but that wasn't the only time she'd seen anything with its head in the sand. She remembered the skeletons, the remains of those who'd tried to survive the desert and not make it. People who'd been buried up to their necks unable to move, unable to escape and those who'd been left behind till death took them and the sands started their slow burial process. This wasn't the story of the ostrich, this red head would get a burial that even the desert would find, 'unique'. The panicked swings began again until they died out and only twitching remained and then, eventually, nothing. Nati let go falling to her knees and wailed, sobbing as loudly as she possibly could, clutching her stomach, digging her fingers into her blistered palm just so she could sob and cry louder.

Pain.

Her body ached with it. She was engulfed in it but still she held onto it clinging on for dear life not allowing it the chance to be numb or to go away. She would not let it go, it would not run away. Not without her.

