

Greatest 151

Chapter 151 - An Offer From An Unexpected Party

"I need something simple, something that can blend into the crowd without attracting too much attention," Zachary replied. "I don't mind the car brand, and the price range should be around 150,000 to 250,000 NOK. Do you have any suggestions for me?"

"With that budget, you'll surely be able to get a good new machine," Ryan said, smiling at Zachary. "But you can even get a better one in second hand. Do you wish to consider used cars?"

"Nope," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "I'll go with a new one." He already had more than 700,000 NOK saved up in his bank account. At times, he was at a loss for how to make use of his savings. His monthly wages plus bonuses were already equal to the money he could use for ten years in his previous life. So, he reckoned spending a portion of it on purchasing a good car would be a good outlet for the cash from his bank account.

"Okay, then," Ryan said after a moment. "May I suggest we go with Audi, then? Since you need something that blends in with the crowd, that would be the best car for you here in Trondheim. But you may have to add about 50K NOK to your budget to get a new one from the outlets here in Trondheim. What say you?"

"An Audi is okay with me," Zachary concurred after deliberating about the issue for a moment. "Adding 50K to my budget is also not a problem. But, how long will you need to find one?"

"If you can increase your budget, there's no need to dilly-dally," Ryan said, grinning. "I've got a few comrades in the Autosport and Møller Bil car dealers. They're the outlets with a diverse collection of cars when it comes to Audi and Volkswagen. I can even call them right now, and we can go there right after. That's if you're ready, of course." He added, looking at Zachary eagerly.

Zachary smiled back at him. "I've got nothing else planned today," he said and then turned towards Emily. "What about you?" He asked her.

"I'm only in Trondheim because of you," Emily replied, beaming. "Wherever you go, I go. Don't mind me."

"Then, let's conclude this business today since I'll be resuming serious training tomorrow," Zachary said, turning towards Ryan. "I need to finish this car business quickly. I hope we won't have to spend the rest of the day looking at cars."

"Don't worry," Ryan said, his eyes glittering. "As long as you have the funds, getting a vehicle here in Trondheim is quite simple and doesn't take a lot of time. We'll have completed the whole business even before you know it. Let me first call them so that they can be ready for us." He said, standing up and moving away from the table.

"He doesn't seem like a race car driver," Zachary said to Emily once Ryan was out of earshot.

"Don't worry," Emily replied. "He's one, and I trust him, especially when it comes to cars. I'm sure he'll get you something good. You've to remember this since you're now an upcoming star. If you can get a skilled person to do your bidding by spending a little bit of cash, don't hesitate."

She smiled softly, holding Zachary's gaze before continuing. "That's why I was completely against you handling the purchase of the vehicle yourself. Just imagine spending days searching dealerships for a car when there's someone who can do it within a couple of hours at a small cost. It's not worth it as the time would be better—spent on your training or resting. That's the way of celebrities. They don't waste time on any small issues—but get people to do them for them. So, you have to get used to it. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Zachary replied. "Why do you two seem very acquainted, yet it seems he stays in Norway for extended periods of time?"

"He's originally from London," Emily replied. "I've known him for quite a long time since we lived in the same neighborhood. He only moved away to look for easier races. That's why he's here in Norway, I think."

"Oh, okay," Zachary replied.

"By the way," Emily said, leaning forward and holding Zachary's gaze once more. "The BetNet company has increased their endorsement deal offer to us. They have raised it from 6 to 8.5 million Norwegian Kroner a year."

"Oh," Zachary said, his eyes widening. "They're quite fast to respond and seem very sincere. They should be thinking that we're playing the hard-to-get card."

"But I still insist that we wait for a bit before trying to negotiate with them," Emily said, her voice lowering. "I'll first get someone to check them out."

"It's up to you," Zachary replied, smiling. "Honestly, I'm not in any immediate need of money at the moment. What I earn is enough. So, let's take our time and wait until I've established myself here in Norway. We can get a better offer, then."

"My thoughts exactly," Emily said, smiling back at Zachary. "I'm happy to wait as long as it's okay with you. Let's work on your public image first. And that reminds me. We should set up a few social media pages for you to communicate with your fanbase. But for the moment, the Twitter account should be enough."

"Oh," Zachary said, smiling wryly.

"You seem against the idea!" Emily probed, raising a brow.

"A little bit," Zachary said. "I'm a footballer, not a poet or a politician. What will I post? Match videos of myself from my performances! That seems cheesy and wrong in some way."

Emily chuckled at that. "Don't worry," she said. "You don't have to post about yourself or your personal life. You can post anything that makes you comfortable and doesn't take much of your time, even if it's the Tippeligaen table standings or the Rosenborg fixtures. That'll help you maintain a close relationship with your fans. And a close relationship with your fans translates into more money from endorsements."

"Okay," Zachary concurred, nodding.

"Do you know how to open up a Twitter account, by the way?" Emily queried, raising a brow. "Or do you need some help from me?"

"Are you joking?" Zachary said, his eyes going round. "It's a social media account, not space science!"

"Okay, okay," Emily said, raising her arm in a pacifying gesture. "I meant no offense but was only trying to be a good agent. I should be able to help my client with anything he doesn't understand. That's especially so if that client of mine may not have an active email address at the moment." She added jokingly.

"I do have an email," Zachary said, shaking his head. "I opened one when I was applying for my Schengen residence permit."

"Oh," Emily said, her face blossoming into a sunny smile. "Then I'll have to find time to thank the Norwegian immigration authorities for doing my client a favor."

Zachary shook his head and countered with another retort in a joking manner. The two of them continued making small talk for a few more minutes until Ryan Bellmore returned from making the call.

"Well, how did it go?" Emily inquired after Ryan had settled into the seat beside her once again.

"Things took a turn that I didn't expect," Ryan replied, beaming at both Emily and Zachary in turn. "You'll never guess what happened."

"Tell us," Emily said, her voice laced with impatience. "You know I hate suspense the most."

Ryan smiled at her once again. "I have talked to one of my acquaintances at the Møller Bil," he began. "I was only asking her to help me get a vehicle for a client of mine at our agreed-upon price range. She then asked for the details of the person who needed the vehicle. When I mentioned that it was a Rosenborg player, and that player was Zachary Bemba, I would never have guessed how things escalated in an instant." He grinned, pausing, maybe to build the suspense.

"Do you wish for me to pull those ears of yours?" Emily said, frowning.

"Okay, okay," Ryan intoned, his arms rising in a placating gesture. "When my acquaintance heard that it was Zachary Bemba, the Rosenborg number-33, who needed the vehicle, she called the manager of the dealership. I guess the manager of the dealership quickly called the marketing person of Audi here in

Trondheim. In only a couple of minutes, the dealership connected me to that marketing person..." He was intoning words at a pace rivaling that of Eminem, the hip-hop star, as he described his phone call.

"Can you get to the point?" Emily interrupted, breaking his verbal flow.

Ryan smiled sheepishly before continuing. "I talked to the marketing person of Audi here in Trondheim for quite a while. She says that their automobile company would like to work with Zachary to promote their brand in Norway. She asked me to request you for a meeting, and she promised that if you agree, then there's no need to bother paying for the vehicle."

"That's quite a surprise," Emily said, giving Ryan an arch look. "And I'm guessing they promised you something in return. That is if you can get Zachary to sit down with them. Isn't that right?"

"I didn't initiate anything," Ryan said, smiling wryly. "I only called asking for a vehicle in the price range of 200K to 300K NOK. The whole endorsement business came from their side."

"Don't worry," Emily said. "I understand. So, did they hint about the kind of offer they're willing to give to Zachary?"

"Nope," Ryan replied, shaking his head. "They only requested me to organize a meeting with Zachary's party. They didn't give me any details. Guys! What do you think? Are you going to consider, or should I continue looking for a vehicle in our price range?" He queried, turning his head from side to side to glance at both Emily and Zachary a couple of times.

"Zachary," Emily said after a moment. "What do you think?"

"I've got no problem with seating on the table with them," Zachary said, holding Emily's gaze. "From my understanding, Audi is one of the most popular brands here in Norway. So, there should be no harm in looking at their offer. Right?"

"Exactly, my thoughts," Emily responded, a soft smile outlining her face. "Let's meet them briefly and see what they have to say. Leave the negotiations to me."

"That's great, you guys," Ryan said, putting an arm around Emily's shoulder. "I think this is a good one. You guys will like it." He grinned from ear to ear, his blue eyes seemingly twinkling with excitement.

"Why do you appear more excited than the person receiving the endorsement offer?" Emily inquired, removing the arm from around her shoulders.

"It's a good feeling to initiate a deal," Ryan said, still beaming. "There's nothing much to it. Should we get moving? My car is—parked near Trondheim Torg if we need to use it. I can call the Audi people when we're on our way."

"Okay," Zachary said, downing the remainder of his cherry juice. "Let's get moving and see what these Audi people have to say."

Chapter 152 - Meeting A Damsel

After leaving the cafe, Zachary and co quickly pushed through the morning human traffic of Trondheim Square with all the haste they could muster. There were no available parking spaces for private cars near the Square. So, they trekked through the streets for about five minutes to get to the Trondheim Torg parking lot, where Ryan Bellmore had left his vehicle.

"Good car," Zachary said as soon as he'd set eyes on Ryan Bellmore's vehicle. He was surprised to find out it was a Mercedes Benz G-Class cross-country model, one of the most luxurious brands in the Norwegian automobile market. It was a beast of a black machine that stood out even in a place like Trondheim Torg, where many of the city's well-to-do characters often parked their vehicles.

"Thank you for your compliment," Ryan replied, grinning from ear to ear. "It cost me quite a large fraction of my annual income last year?"

"How much?" Zachary probed, slowly starting to move around the Benz to examine it.

"350K Norwegian Kroner," Ryan replied, matching Zachary's step. "But I was lucky to get it in second hand. While still new, it may even go for more than twice the price here in Norway."

"Oh, I guess that's cheap for a Benz considering the prices of luxurious items here in Norway," Zachary said after making a round around the vehicle. "Don't tell me you use this for racing coz that would be truly weird."

"Of course not," Ryan was quick to reply. "I have another machine that I use for races. It's a Ford Mustang sports car, to be more specific." He paused for a bit, moving closer to Zachary.

"If you wish," he continued, his voice lowering. "I could invite you to my next race at the end of June. You'd get a chance to see me racing in my powerful machine and also meet several socialites from the whole of Scandinavia. You'll surely like it. Whether it's hot girls, filthy-rich potential investors, plus good food and drinks—they can be all be chanced upon at these races. So, do you wish to go?"

"Guys," Emily yelled from the other side of the vehicle, interrupting them before Zachary could give a reply. "Let's get moving. Zachary has to return and rest. Remember he played a match last night."

"Aye, boss," Ryan yelled back before turning back to Zachary. "Think about it," he whispered before pulling the car door open and getting into the driver's seat.

Zachary, too, made himself comfortable in the back seat beside Emily. And off they went to the Møller Bil car dealership to meet the Audi marketing personnel. Traffic wasn't busy that morning, and they managed to arrive at the dealership in only twenty minutes.

"This is the place," Ryan announced as they pulled into one of the few empty spots in the Møller Bil parking space with a "Reserved for Customers" sign. As soon as they alighted from the vehicle, they found an elegant slim blonde lady in a suit waiting for them, only a few paces away.

"Welcome to Møller Bil," she said, extending a hand to Zachary for a greeting. "I'm Annah, and also Ryan's friend here at the dealership. We're glad to have you here." She added, smiling.

"Thank you," Zachary replied, taking her hand. "I'm Zachary Bemba. Thank you for having us." He smiled back at her.

"The pleasure is all ours," she said and then went on to greet Emily before mouthing a few words to Ryan. Her way of handling people showed she was a professional who'd long perfected the art of dealing with customers.

"The Audi person should be waiting for you in one of the conference rooms," Annah said after they'd finished exchanging greetings. "If you're ready, I can take you there right now."

"She's already here?" Ryan asked, seemingly surprised. "It has only been around 20 minutes ever since I called."

"She got here ten minutes ago," Annah replied, smiling. "She seems very eager to meet Zachary. Should we go inside now? Or would you like to first take a tour around the showroom before the meeting?" She probed again, her tone formal and professional.

"Let's head inside first," Emily replied after stealing a glance at Zachary. "We shall decide what to do from there."

"Okay, follow me," Annah said before turning to lead the way into the dealership. Ryan immediately matched her step and started conversing with her. On the other hand, Emily didn't follow them but tapped Zachary's arm before pulling him back for a small chat.

"When we get inside," she said, her tone solemn. "Leave all the negotiations to me. We're just going in to assess their offer. So, don't get enticed into any deal before we properly review it. Okay?" She queried, inclining her head slightly to hold Zachary's gaze.

"Sure, I got it," Zachary replied. "Don't worry. I'll do as you say."

Emily's face blossomed into a beautiful smile. "That puts my heart at ease. Then let's go inside." She said and trailed after Ryan and Annah.

When Zachary walked through the entrance into the dealership, he was—blinded by the diverse amount of glittering sleek machines aligned there. Parked across the showroom in neat lines were various models of Audi and Volkswagen car brands. Be it SUVs, convertibles, or Sportbacks—they were all there, waiting for eager filthy-rich customers to snatch them up.

"Can I first take a look around?" He asked Annah after taking in the sights around him. "That's if we still have time before the meeting."

"Go ahead," Annah said, smiling. "The Audi marketing manager instructed me to follow your wishes. And I'm sure that she's still discussing a few things with the manager. So, don't worry. Take your time. Would you like me to give you a tour?"

"Nope, but thanks," Zachary said, beaming back at her. "I'll move around alone and won't take long. I'll probably have completed the tour in a minute or two." He added before breaking away from the group.

He started making his way slowly around the showroom, passing by a few other customers while marveling at each of the machines with a glitter in his eyes from time to time. Since it was his first time in a dealership, he felt a bit overwhelmed but, at the same time, also excited.

He'd been a broke fellow in his previous life and couldn't have afforded even the cheapest of new cars. On many occasions, he'd often failed to raise enough money to meet his basic needs. But after playing a few matches for Rosenborg in his new life, he could manage to buy a new car that he'd only dreamed about in his previous life. He couldn't help but sigh, feeling that everything before him was so surreal.

He quickly wrapped up the tour and was about to return to his group. But, he turned around and retraced his steps after noticing that he'd missed a fine sporty machine parked on the far side of the showroom.

At first glance, it looked like any other two-door vehicle that was a common sight in Trondheim. But on taking a second glance, he felt like there was something more to it. So, he hurriedly pushed past a few other people in the showroom and approached the black vehicle while slowly admiring its bodywork, rims, and sleek curves. When he was before it and traced a hand over its smooth bonnet, cold to the touch, he instantly liked it and desired to have it.

"Do you like what you see?" A feminine voice sounded from behind him while he was still admiring the machine.

Zachary turned around, and the word "wow" was all that repeatedly kept playing through his mind. He felt a slow tingle run down his spine, his heart starting to race as his eyes refocused.

A woman, no a lady, breathtaking and hot as chili pepper, was standing behind him. Her hair was a rich shade of brown, tumbling over her shoulders in waves as if to adorn her glowing porcelain-like skin. In

her formal lady's dress suit, she was picture perfect, the epitome of perfection with all the curves in the right places.

For a slight moment, Zachary couldn't take his eyes off her as he felt an intense urge to catch her attention. For a second or two, he lost himself, studying those bright emerald-green eyes of hers that seemed to brighten the world.

But a moment later, he became conscious of the fact that he was staring a bit too much. His eyes darted from the stunning lady's face, down her legs, and finally to another nearby vehicle on sale as he tried to find something else to distract him.

"Do you like the machine?" The woman probed once again, the corners of her full lips lifting into a charming smile. She seemed to have not noticed Zachary's staring, or if she did, she just ignored it.

"Yes, of course," Zachary replied, going into poker face mode. "It is good on the eyes, and I have a feeling that it's a powerful machine."

"Yes, it's," the lady said, still smiling softly. "This is an Audi TT model, one of our latest from just last year. As you can see, it's a two-seater convertible, easy on the hands due to its highly advanced automated manual transmission system." She intoned English words with an exotic accent that Zachary couldn't place. But, to some extent, it somehow resembled that of the female actors in those old Russian movies.

"Its transmission shifts seamlessly and quickly, and you'll never feel any turbo lag while on the steering," the lady continued. "It has a powerful turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine that produces enough power for almost any situation. Overall, the car is very responsive, with a strong throttle response and a near-instant torque delivered from that engine. It's the right car for any man with style."

"Oh!" was all that Zachary could manage as he was at a loss for words after hearing several new terms within a span of a few seconds.

"Would you like to take it for a test drive," the woman queried, taking a step towards the vehicle and tracing a manicured hand over its bonnet. Her every motion was sensual but also elegant. "I can explain more about the car's excellent performance during the test drive."

"Oh, not at the moment," Zachary replied, still in poker face mode. "I have a meeting with someone here right now. Maybe some other time."

"Okay, maybe some other time," the woman said, her face blossoming into a radiant smile. "I'm Camilla, by the way. Camilla Schneider. It's nice to meet you." She added, extending her hand.

"Zachary Bemba," Zachary replied, finally smiling. "The pleasure is all mine. So, do you work here?" He queried.

"Sort of," Camilla replied. "Here is my business card with my phone number. If you wish for a test drive later or in the future, do not hesitate to look for me. I'll be glad to help as I'm a huge fan of Rosenberg." She said, handing out a business card to Zachary.

"Okay, I'll do that," Zachary said, receiving the business card. "Thank you for taking the time to explain to me the information about the car," he added.

"That's a no biggie," Camilla said, waving an arm in a dismissive gesture. "It's my job to help our customers. You should probably get going for that meeting of yours. I wish you good luck." She added and started moving away immediately, maybe to handle some other customers.

Zachary first glanced over his shoulder, his eyes fascinated by the slow sway of the lady's hips as she walked away. "Now that was quite strange," he mumbled before focusing on the business card within his hand once more. Inscribed on it was Camilla's name, phone number, address, and the words "Audi and Møller Bil Marketing Team, Norway" in plain font.

"What's weird?" Another voice interrupted him.

"Just talking to myself," Zachary replied, hurriedly shoving the business card into the pocket of his jacket. He then turned around to face the approaching Emily. "You're also taking a tour around the showroom?" He queried, wishing to divert the topic.

"Nope," Emily replied. "I just came looking for you. Have you finished your tour? Should we go and meet the Audi people?"

"Okay, let's go," Zachary replied, smiling at her.

Chapter 153 - Audi's Sincerity I

When Emily and her companions entered the conference room, they found the two Audi representatives waiting for them.

One was a graceful older blonde lady who seemed to have just reached the point where age had just begun to encroach on her incredible looks. Nevertheless, she was still a beautiful and elegant woman with a confident air about her persona. She seemed like a typical office-type that was always in charge.

By her side was a much younger stunning alluring woman, probably in her early 20's. Although Emily had met countless good-looking women, the one before her stood out in particular. She was so unimaginably attractive, the sharp lines of her oval face that matched well with her deep brown hair and green eyes, reminiscent of the idea of perfection. Emily could find no viable comparison to her beauty as it lay in the unspoken, in the unknown realms of the miracle of genetics.

"Good morning and welcome," the older lady said right after they'd entered the conference room. She stood up from her seat, moved around the table, and extended a hand to each one of them, starting with Zachary, then Emily, and finally Ryan.

"I'm Susanne Berdal, the head of marketing and publicity for Audi here in Norway," the woman continued after the handshakes. "I've been looking forward to this meeting for quite some time. I'm glad that Ryan made it possible for us to meet earlier than I'd expected." She paused, first taking a step towards Zachary.

"It's nice to meet you, Zachary," she said, smiling.

"It's nice to meet you too," Zachary replied, his tone polite and respectful. "Thank you for having us."

"And this here should be your agent, I presume," Susanne said, turning her gaze to Emily. "It's a pleasure having you here. I hope we can work together to make this happen quickly." She added, stepping towards Emily and patting her shoulder.

Emily had already noted that everything about Susanne Berdal projected confidence born from the experience of having chaired meetings for a long time. But, she didn't let herself feel the least bit intimidated by the older lady's dignified air. Instead, her spirits soared higher since she was close to negotiating a deal between her client and one of the most popular automobile brands in Europe.

"Thank you for having us," she replied, a polite smile outlining her face. "I'm Emily Anderson. And yes, I'm Zachary's agent. I also hope this works out. But that'll depend on what you're willing to offer." Her voice came out of her mouth with a steady rhythm as she tried to counter the self-assured air projected by the older lady. The negotiations had already begun with the handshakes. As an agent, Emily didn't want to lose any ground even before the actual meeting to discuss the endorsement deal could commence.

Susanne chuckled before turning away from Emily towards the stunning younger woman behind her. "This one is Camilla Schneider, one of my assistants," she said. "She'll be handling most of the issues between Audi and Zachary here in Trondheim. That is, of course, if we can come to an understanding. Camilla! Come say hi to our guests." She added, motioning the lady over from her seat.

Camilla's face lit up into a smile. "Nice to meet you," she said, extending a hand to greet Emily and Ryan one after the other. "I already met Zachary in the showroom. So, I guess there is no need for any more introductions or greetings."

"You already met!" Both Emily and Susanne exclaimed in unison.

Emily, in particular, was surprised as Zachary had only left their group for a few minutes. She couldn't help but wonder when he'd gotten time to link up with a hot young lady. Or maybe, the lady was trying to entice Zachary into a deal without her knowledge. The doubt started running through her thoughts. Her mind stirred to full attention as she inclined her head to observe Zachary's reaction to the question.

"Yes, we met in the showroom," Zachary said, maintaining a soft smile and his voice steady. "She was telling me about the specs of one of the cars that'd captured my attention. But I would never have guessed that she was a member of the Audi marketing team I was supposed to be meeting."

Emily let out a pent-out breath on noticing that there was nothing unusual in Zachary's response. "Well, we should get on with business since we seem to have completed the introductions?" She asked, a soft smile still outlining her face.

"Since we're already acquainted, we can start on the business at hand," Susanne concurred. "Please take your seats."

"Thank you," Emily and co said, more or less in unison before settling down in the comfort of the office seats at one end of the conference table.

"I'm glad that we're finally taking this step," Susanne said after also settling into her seat on the other side of the table. "We would really like to work with Zachary to promote our brand here in Norway."

"Thank you," Emily said, smiling at Susanne. "Since we already know what we both want, can we get right into the thick of it? As you know, Zachary here played a match yesterday evening. He needs to head back and recover in preparation for his next game." She added, patting Zachary's back.

"Of course, of course," Susanne replied, nodding. "We can get into business right away. But first—" she paused, turning towards Ryan.

"Ryan, would you be a dear and first go and check on that engine that Annah had talked about," she said, her tone formal. "We need to talk to Emily and Zachary alone for a few minutes."

"Of course," Ryan was quick to reply, a sunny smile outlining his face. "I'll be going now. Emily! You can call me when you finish up here. I'll be waiting for you in the service department." He added before rushing out of the conference room like the wind.

"I'm sorry about driving your friend away from the meeting," Susanne said, her tone apologetic. "It's just that we don't want the details of our negotiations to end up in some tabloid or the web before next month. The only way of ensuring that there's no leakage is by dealing with as few people as possible during the negotiation process. So, we usually don't allow any unrelated parties into our business meetings. Just company policy. Hope you understand!" She added, sweeping her gaze over both Emily and Zachary.

"Yes, of course, we completely understand," Emily replied, smiling back at her. "In fact, if you hadn't asked him to leave, I would have done the same before starting the actual negotiations."

"I'm glad we're on the same page," Susanne said, her voice taking on a relaxed tone. "Let's move on to the business at hand right away. As I was saying, we would like to endorse Zachary and add him to our team of ambassadors here in Norway. We're willing to bet on his potential and sign a three-year contract with him right away." She smiled.

"Go on," Emily said, leaning back into her chair.

"I've already done my research to ascertain his potential," Susanne continued, also leaning back into her seat. "I've even talked to Mr. Martin Stein, one of Rosenborg's most experienced scouts. He assured me that even he couldn't see the limits of Zachary's potential. So, I'm dead serious when I say that we wish to bring him into our team of ambassadors." Her tone had turned solemn.

"You know Mr. Martin Stein?" Zachary chipped in, eyes widening.

"Yes, we're quite close," Susanne replied, beaming. "You can ask him about me when you next meet him. That is if you don't believe me."

"It's not that," Zachary said, shaking his head. "Doubting you was not my intention. I was just surprised."

Susanne chuckled softly. "No worries," she said. "I was only joking with you there. There's no need to take it seriously. Anyway, I wanted to assure you that we have some understanding of your potential." She added, holding Zachary's gaze from across the table.

"So, I'm not going to try to cut down the wages we're offering by citing issues like he's young and so on," she continued, turning towards Emily once more. "Since we have decided to invest, we will commit fully as long as Zachary agrees to fulfill a few commitments during the contract period."

"Okay, we're glad to hear that," Emily chipped in, leaning forward to hold Susanne's gaze. "Could you give us a summarized breakdown of the sort of offer you have in mind and its attached conditions first?" She wanted to hear Audi's offer immediately in order to determine whether it was worth Zachary's time.

"We're willing to offer 7.5 million Norwegian Kroner per year to bring Zachary on to our team of ambassadors here in Norway right away," Susanne stated. "The offer we're bringing to the table is for three years, and we're willing to pay 4.5 Million first—that is as soon we've put pen on paper to finalize the deal." She paused, sweeping her gaze over both Emily and Zachary.

Emily reached out from under the table and tapped Zachary's arm to calm him down while waiting for the lady to continue. She didn't want her client to have an over-the-top reaction to the offer even before the Audi team had stated the conditions attached to the deal.

"We'll only request that Zachary fulfill three conditions," Susanne continued after failing to elicit any marked reaction from Zachary or Emily. "The first condition is to drive only the Audi brand of cars for the entire time he's under contract. Of course, we'll provide one vehicle of his choosing to him for free as soon as he signs the contract."

"Secondly, we need him to participate in some of our promotional activities like our Motor shows where we present the new models of our brand here in Norway. You don't have to worry about scheduling conflicts since we'll only call him for two or three shows each year. A few times, we may call on him to partake in the production of video ads or posters. But we shall pay extra for that. And we won't force him to film any inappropriate content that may harm his reputation just because we've got him under contract."

"Thirdly, we need to reserve the priority to retain him as our ambassador when the contract period ends."

"What?" Emily cut in, frowning. Reserving the priority to retain her client meant that he would always stay tied to Audi even after the contract period had ended. Zachary wouldn't get a chance to sign for any other automobile brands in the future as only the Audi team would have the power to dismiss his services. Emily would never agree to it since it would be harmful to her client in the long run.

"Are you serious?" Emily probed, shaking her head. She didn't even try to mask the displeasure in her voice. "This clause will be what chases us away from the negotiating table," she added, holding Susanne's gaze from across the table.

"First listen and don't come to any conclusions before I finish," Susanne said, raising her arm in a placating gesture. "We at Audi have already gauged Zachary's potential and would have wished to offer him a long-term contract. But there are still some considerations related to the internal working of our company we have to take into account. So, we can't offer him a deal for a period longer than three years at the moment."

"But, we'll be willing to match the offers of any other automobile brands and retain Zachary as our ambassador after the three years of the contract elapse. So, we'll want Zachary to commit himself to remain with us if we make such a lucrative offer. Let me give a hypothetical example. For instance, say Mercedes Benz offers Zachary 12 million Norwegian Kroner per year after the three years of our contract have elapsed. But then, we manage to match or top their offer. We shall have the privilege to retain Zachary's services as our ambassador over the Mercedes Benz car brand, which in this case, is our competitor."

"As you can see, there is no potential harm brought to your client by this clause," Susanne continued, a confident smile outlining her face. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, I do," Emily replied, nodding and scribbling down some notes in her notebook. "The condition is not harmful to my client in any way. But I have to ask one thing, though. This deal would apply solely to automobile companies. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, of course," Susanne replied, nodding. "As long as a brand isn't an automobile company—that is, our competitor, we won't care. We won't care about any other endorsements Zachary gets into as long as they don't put his reputation through the mud."

"Then that should be fine," Emily said and scribbled down a few more notes in her notebook. "But you haven't considered Zachary's growth potential. What if he's to become the best player in Europe next year? Will you still keep him at 7.5 million Norwegian Kroner a year?" She queried in a joking manner.

Susanne chuckled at that. "Well," she said, still beaming. "We've already considered that. And I can promise that when we're drafting the final contract document, we'll include clauses that will cover situations brought about by Zachary's growth potential."

Chapter 155 - Audi's Sincerity III

"Remember, we want Zachary to continue improving so that he can better market our brand," Susanne continued. "So, he doesn't need to become the best player in Europe to earn a higher annual wage from our contract next year. There'll be bonuses and wage increments even if Zachary becomes a top scorer or even the best player in the Tippeligaen. As long as he keeps improving and keeps his reputation clean, he'll be able to earn more from our deal over time. That's the kind of endorsement contract we're willing to draft."

"Okay, then I'm glad," Emily said, her face lighting up into a smile. "From my initial assessment, I believe that we'll be seriously considering this offer. But we need to look at the final contract document before we can make any major decisions. So, may I ask when you can have this draft of the contract ready?"

"Camilla!" Susanne didn't reply right away but first turned to her assistant.

"We'll have it by tomorrow afternoon," Camilla said to her, smiling.

"You heard it yourself," Susanne stated, turning back to Emily. "Tomorrow, we'll have the draft ready for you. Finalizing the deal will then depend on how fast you add your inputs."

"That's okay on our side," Emily said, first stealing a glance at Zachary. "But for the next few days, I'll be the sole person having the meetings with you as my client has serious training throughout the rest of the week. He'll only meet you for the final signing ceremony. Of course, that is if the status quo remains the same and we come to an agreement. Is that all right with you?" She asked, turning towards Susanne once more.

"That's okay with us," Susanne replied, smiling. "The only thing we want from Zachary is his signature on the final contract. In the meantime, we can work together to update the terms in the contract document. Is that agreeable, Zachary? What do you think of our offer, by the way?"

"It's good," Zachary replied, nodding. "But as my agent just said, we shall make the final decisions when the final contract document is out. And she can represent me fully in negotiating all matters related to our deal when I'm not around."

"Okay, then," Susanne said. "I promise to work with your agent to make you an offer that you can't resist. But in the meantime, I want to show you my sincerity by presenting you with a gift to commemorate our first meeting."

She first held Zachary's gaze before continuing. "You can pick any 2012 Audi Model in the showroom for free. You only have to pay the taxes, and we shall meet the other costs for the machine. How do you see this gift, Zachary?"

"Does this gift require any commitment from us right at the moment?" Emily chipped in before Zachary could respond.

Susanne laughed. "Not at all," she said, waving an arm in a dismissive gesture. "It's a gift from us, the marketing team of Audi, to Zachary. The keyword is a gift. So, don't worry. There are no attached conditions."

"Oh, okay," Emily said, smiling back at her. "Then that puts my heart at ease. But you're too generous."

"No, I'm not," Susanne countered. "I'm only representing Audi when presenting this gift. And we're simply investing in a potential long-term partner of ours. So, guys, what do you say? Will you accept my simple gift?" She inquired, her tone imploring as she swept her gaze from Emily to Zachary and back.

The corners of Emily's mouth twitched on hearing the question. She couldn't help but sigh on the inside as she thought about all the customers in the various dealerships around the world struggling to bargain for a few pounds off their car purchases. She'd faced the same situation when she was buying her second-hand vehicle only a year prior. Yet, in one of Norway's high-profile Audi outlets, a marketing manager had just begged a customer to take a car for free. Emily had to take a few moments to organize her thoughts. She was astounded by the absurdity of the situation.

"We will take the car," She said after a while since she knew Zachary wanted it. "But mark my words: if the final offer is not to our satisfaction, we'll reject the deal. We won't even take into consideration this gift of yours. I hope that is fine with you!"

"As I said, it's just a gift," Susanne said before turning to her assistant. "Camilla, take Zachary to select a vehicle. Collaborate with the manager to help him complete the procedures as quickly as possible. Remember that professional athletes are always short on time. So be fast and efficient. In the meantime, I'll continue discussing some more business with Emily here. Is that okay with you, Emily, Zachary?" She probed.

"I don't mind," Zachary was quick to reply. Emily had already discerned that he was starting to get bored by the dry proceedings. And, it seemed Susanne had noticed it too. That should have been the reason why she'd suggested that her assistant take Zachary to select a vehicle in the showroom before they could conclude the negotiating process.

"That's okay with me, too," Emily concurred after deliberating for a while. She then leaned towards Zachary and whispered: "I will text Ryan to meet you in the showroom. Seek his advice while selecting your vehicle. Okay?"

"Okay," Zachary concurred, nodding.

"Since everyone agrees, let's not waste any more time," Susanne said from across the table. "It was nice meeting you, Zachary. I do hope we become long-term partners." She stood up and extended her hand to Zachary.

"It was a pleasure meeting you," Zachary replied, also standing up and taking her hand. "Thank you for having us. And, of course, thanks for the gift."

"You're welcome," Susanne said, beaming. "Okay, Camilla, my new partner is in your hands. Off you go. Come and inform me when you complete the procedures."

"Yes, madam," Camilla replied, her tone solemn. "I'll do my best to complete everything as soon as possible." She stood up and led the way out of the conference room.

Chapter 156 - Selecting A Vehicle I

"Man, let me assure you," Ryan said, patting Zachary's back. "If you're free to select any 2012 model, then it has got to be an Audi R8 GT. You have to forget about this garbage that's the TT or whatnot. The two machines are incomparable in performance. The R8 GT is the sky, while the TT is the earth. That's why the R8 GT costs more than twice the price of the TT. Are you getting me, my friend?"

"Ryan," Camilla chipped in before Zachary could respond. "Don't forget that not all customers love sporty cars. Some are just buying vehicles for the convenience they'll bring into their day-to-day lives. So, we need to establish first which type of car Zachary needs instead of trying to force a choice on him."

"Bullshit," Ryan said, waving an arm in a dismissive gesture. He seemed to have lost all reason after beginning his car debate with Camilla. "You know very well that the R8 GT is a much better machine, even when taking the average user into consideration."

"Let me tell you this," Ryan continued, his voice animated. "Whether it's the horsepower generated by the engine, the aesthetics, the braking system, or the comfort and quality, there is no way an Audi TT will ever match an R8 GT. It's a machine in the mid-engine supercar territory. Even its base model can accelerate to 100 kilometers per hour in just 4.4 seconds. It has a top speed of 320 km/h and

horsepower of over 420 from its 4.2-liter V8 engine. We're still talking about the R8 GT base model here. So, tell me, how can a TT compare to such a machine?"

"Guys," Zachary chipped in before Camilla could reply. He had just realized that he'd run into two car-loving gearheads. "Since I have already seen the TT, maybe I should first take a look at this R8 GT. Maybe, I will like it as well. Is that possible, Camilla?"

"Good call, brother," Ryan said, smiling and giving him a thumbs-up. "Since you're getting something for free, you'd better aim for the best model in the line-up. You may never get this chance again." He added, smiling like a rogue.

"Well," Camilla said, maintaining a polite smile. "There are only two R8 GT machines here in the showroom. One is in grey while the other is blue. Like the TT, they're also clutchless, with automated manual transmission. The R8 GT model itself has the R-Tronic on board, which can be—controlled via paddles on the steering wheel. That is if the driver so wishes."

"This is the second time you're mentioning this automated manual transmission," Zachary chipped in. "But what does it mean? Is it manual or automatic?"

"I can answer that," Ryan was quick to reply before Camilla could give her response. "An automated manual transmission is mechanically similar to a manual transmission, except that the sensors and actuators perform the clutch work and shift gears. That's why vehicles with such a transmission system don't have a clutch, but only an accelerator and a brake pedal."

"So, in simple terms, the whole point is to automate the manual transmission so that the job of pressing the clutch to shift gears via a stick no longer rests with the driver," Ryan continued. "An R8 GT has such a system, and it'll be quite easy for any driver to handle while still having the ability of a supercar. That's why I'm advising you to grab it for yourself. It's literally a super high-performance machine modified for the normal user."

"So, in other words, it's like the normal automatic when you take away all the fancy terms," Zachary queried, caressing his chin. "Isn't that right?"

"Yes, you can put it that way," Ryan replied, smiling. "But it's much more complicated than that."

"Then that's good," Zachary replied, nodding. "I'm far from a racing enthusiast, and I don't like to stress my mind, especially on days after intensive training sessions or matches. So, you guys have to note that I prefer an automatic since it won't stress me on the road."

"You've got to trust me on this, Zach," Ryan said, still smiling. "The R8 GT is easy on the hands. You can set it in such a way that the computer does nearly all the work, leaving you only with the role of steering and braking. You'll surely enjoy it."

"Then let's take a look at this R8 GT model," Zachary said, turning towards Camilla. "As long as I don't have to always struggle with stepping on the clutch to shift gears, I'll probably like it."

"Okay," Camilla said, the corners of her mouth lifting into a charming smile. "I'll take you to the side showroom where the two R8 GTs are parked. Follow me." She added before leading the way across the showroom to the next one.

Zachary and Ryan trailed after her—and a while later, they stood before two gorgeous cars. They were the sort of sleek, sporty machines Zachary had only seen on TV in his previous life. They projected a racy ambiance, with their wide sculpted fenders, large air intakes at the front and sides, and low-sloped rooflines. Everything about them melded together in perfect design harmony.

Although Zachary had come to the dealership hoping to buy a simple vehicle that could blend in with the crowd, he'd instantly changed his mind after seeing the two German machines. He'd already fallen in love with the aesthetics of the two automobiles.

"So, will you be taking one of these?" Camilla inquired after walking up to the blue R8 GT and tracing a hand over it. She seemed much more alluring standing in front of the sleek machine. Leaning next to the car, she looked like the perfect muse for any photographer or artist out there.

"I love the grey one," Zachary replied, forcing himself to look away from Camilla. He didn't know what had happened to him that day. Her beauty was captivating him in ways that he couldn't understand. Even a soft smile from her would send his heart racing.

"Grey is good," Ryan said, breaking Zachary out of his reverie. "Now, this is the machine that somehow matches your status as an upcoming Rosenborg star. It's stylish, stable on the road, powerful, and of course, quite fast. Anything else wouldn't have quite cut it."

Chapter 157 - Selecting A Vehicle II

"So, Zachary," Camilla chipped in. "Should I go ahead and start the procedures and related paperwork to transfer the grey R8 GT into your names?" She inquired, holding Zachary's gaze.

"If the machine is in perfect condition, then please go ahead and start the paperwork," Zachary replied, going into poker face mode.

He didn't want Camilla to notice he was behaving awkwardly in her presence. He was sure that if he could just ignore her until he left the dealership and returned to his place, he would forget about her in a week or two.

He didn't like being close to a girl with so much sway over his emotions. He had had bad experiences during his previous life. Anita, the fiancée of his past incarnation, had had such an effect on him. But when she'd left, he'd been emotionally torn into pieces.

Zachary didn't want a similar incident to happen in his new life. Not when he was beginning to make something of himself with his football career. So, his coping mechanism was "running away and forgetting" in order to spare himself from hurting once again. He wanted to complete the procedures for the vehicle quickly so that he could run away from the dealership, or rather, Camilla.

"Wouldn't you like to take the car for a test drive to understand it better?" Camilla inquired, smiling at Zachary.

"Nope," Zachary was quick to reply since getting out of the dealership—away from the alluring Camilla took precedence over everything else. "Since you have both assured me that the machine is perfect, I'll take your word for it. Moreover, why should I be picky when I'm getting the car for free?"

"But, I have to warn you about something before you confirm your decision," Camilla said, moving closer to Zachary and lowering her voice. "Some of the test drivers of the R8 GT complained about its automated transmission system. They claimed there was always a lag, as if the computer was cutting the vehicle's power when shifting gears. I'm a bit worried that you won't get to enjoy this vehicle because of its transmission system since some of its early customers are complaining about it."

"In actual sense, that is not a problem," Ryan cut in before Zachary could respond. "I have driven an R8 GT of a friend myself, and I've felt first-hand what you've just mentioned. When you are driving the R8

GT, you get some horrendous shifts. You feel as if there's a turbo lag—as if the computer is cutting the power and the machine is pulling you back because of the R-Tronic automated single-clutch system."

"But all you have to do is put the car in sport mode to do away with that small issue," Ryan continued. "It'll make a huge difference, and you'll no longer notice any lags. As long as you don't wish to go racing, the car will meet all your needs, Zachary."

"You sound more of a car salesperson than me, Ryan," Camilla said in a joking manner. "I couldn't have known that the transmission problem could be—solved that easily, in such a kind of way. And you do have quite a lot of knowledge about the R8 GT." She added, her words colored by her exotic accent.

Ryan smiled sheepishly at that. "It's just that I helped out a friend who faced a similar problem to the one you've mentioned," he said. "That's why I know a few things about the R8 GT."

"Oh," Camilla said, nodding. "So, Zachary, will you still be taking this machine? The choice is in your hands now."

"Well, yes," Zachary agreed, nodding. "Since Ryan has recommended it to me with such confidence, then there's no need for any more considerations. I'll take the machine. But my only concern is whether my long legs will fit in such a small vehicle."

"You don't have to worry about that," Ryan chipped in once more. "I'm sure that even tall basketball players like Shawn Bradley and Yao Ming can drive the car without facing any problems. But to calm your heart, you can first take the driver's seat and experience the comfort of the car yourself."

"Okay, then," Zachary said, stepping towards the grey R8 GT. "Camilla, I'm allowed to enter the vehicle even if I don't end up taking it?" He asked when he was beside the car's door.

"Of course, there's no problem," Camilla replied, also stepping closer to the vehicle. "As I already promised, I can even take you out on the roads for a test drive. That is if you wish to understand more about the car."

"That won't be necessary," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "I only want to check whether there's enough leg space for a person like me at the front. I'm not worried about anything else. I'm quite sure that Audi wouldn't put something faulty in its showroom." He added before pulling the door open and getting into the front seat.

As Ryan had said, Zachary found the inside of the R8 GT surprisingly roomy since there were only two seats in the whole vehicle. He found no fault with the space available at the front and could even afford to stretch his legs when he adjusted the driver's seat a bit backward. But that was not all that excited him about the R8 GT. The interior design was nearly all black but very luxurious, with a low cowl and easily located controls. They all blended seamlessly with the car's fine materials to give a sporty, refined finish to the German machine.

Zachary loved everything about the car's interior. He pushed the door open and alighted from the vehicle with a smile on his face. He could hardly believe he was about to obtain such a sleek vehicle at almost no cost. That elevated his mood.

"So, what say you?" Camilla probed, stepping closer to Zachary. "Do you like the R8 GT? Will you be taking it? Or should we look at something else? Don't feel pressured into making a choice. The decision is in your hands."

"I like everything about this machine," Zachary was quick to respond. "I'll take it. No need to look at anything else."

"Then great," Camilla said, her face lighting up with a charming smile that stabbed at Zachary's heart like a nail penetrating a piece of wood. "I'll start the procedures and paperwork right away. You won't have to wait for long." She said before swishing her way out of the side showroom.

Chapter 158 - Proud Owner Of An R8 GT

Zachary was surprised by Camilla's efficiency. She managed to complete all the vehicle ownership transfer and registration procedures within an hour. A few minutes to 1:00 PM, she was already handing him the registration papers of his new Audi R8 GT in the Møller Bil customer service area.

On receiving the papers, Zachary started grinning from ear to ear. He took a defiant joy in the fact that he'd finally managed to acquire his first vehicle in both his lives. For a moment, happiness swelled inside him as if the noonday sun had warmed up his soul.

But on scanning through the papers a moment later, his smile faded, his brows drawing together into a frown. He was shocked to discover that he was still liable for over 386,000 Norwegian Kroner as the tax on the car purchase, insurance, and registration fees. That meant that if Audi hadn't given him the vehicle for free, he would have had to cough out more than 1.5 million NOK to acquire a car with the specs similar to an R8 GT. The Norwegian taxes on luxurious vehicles were egregious.

Nonetheless, he would never dream of giving up such a sleek machine just because of the tax. So, he braced himself, paid the 386K NOK, and completed all the transfer procedures without much deliberation. He could afford to splash the cash since he was already receiving 400,000 NOK as his monthly salary from Rosenborg, not counting bonuses.

"Do you have a driving license?" Camilla asked Zachary as she handed him the Audi R8 GT keys. "Or would you prefer we make arrangements for a driver to take the car back to your place?"

"No need for a driver," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "I already have a driving license and can drive the car back myself."

Although it was his first time owning a car, he was sure that he wouldn't have any trouble driving it. He'd already taken the mandatory driving lessons just after graduating from the academy so as to receive his Norwegian driving license. Moreover, he had on a few occasions driven a heavy-goods truck when the going had gotten tough during his previous life. So, he was confident in his driving skills—at least while maintaining a speed of less than 60 km/hr.

"Okay, then," Camilla said, smiling. "Our mechanics have already finished fine-tuning your R8 GT. They have moved it to the parking lot. Your new car awaits you. Thank you for considering Audi as a potential partner. If there's nothing else, I'll have to say goodbye to you since I have to report to my boss now. So, is there anything else?" She queried, her bright green eyes looking at Zachary eagerly.

"Not at the moment," Zachary replied, shifting gears into poker face mode. "I think you've already completed all the procedures perfectly. Isn't that right, Ryan?" He added, turning towards the short guy beside him.

"Oh, yes," Ryan said, nodding. "That should be everything. Unless you would like to install additional accessories in the car, we can consider this purchase complete."

"That should be it," Zachary said, turning back towards Camilla. "I don't need anything else. You've already completed everything that needs completing to perfection. Thank you."

"Then, I'm glad," Camilla said, her whole face lighting up. "I'll have to go report to my boss now. In case you get any problems with the vehicle, please call me. I'll try to help you as best as I can. Otherwise, it was nice meeting you, Zachary." She said, extending her slender hand to him.

"It was nice meeting you too," Zachary replied, taking her hand. "Thank you for all your help today." He added, inwardly sighing with relief since he was finally about to leave the dealership.

"You're welcome," Camilla said, still smiling. "Should I inform your agent that you're waiting for her here?"

"Yes, please do," Zachary replied.

"Okay, I'll inform her," she said. "I think you won't have to wait long. I believe they've already completed negotiations. Otherwise, have a good day. And don't forget to call in case there's a problem with the R8 GT."

"Yes, of course," Zachary concurred, nodding solemnly. But on the inside, he was already planning on casting away the business card and never meeting Camilla again.

"Then, all the best, and may you enjoy your new ride," she said before turning away and strutting out of the conference room.

Zachary let out a pent-up breath on seeing her figure disappear through a sliding glass door at the far side of the customer service area. He could finally let loose and relax.

"You like her?" Ryan queried from beside him.

"No, I don't," Zachary was quick to reply, sounding defensive.

"Yes, you do," Ryan said, smiling like a rogue. "You don't have to worry. She also seems to find you pleasing to the eyes."

"And how would you know that?"

"She gave you her number," Ryan replied. "Didn't she?"

"Her business card, not her number," Zachary responded, shaking his head. "It's only for business issues like when I get any trouble with the car. There's nothing much to it."

"Then how do you explain her constantly smiling whenever she was talking to you?" Ryan probed, grinning and rubbing his hands together. "Not even once did she cast a smile towards me. Don't you find that odd?"

"She is a car saleswoman," Zachary countered. "She'll always smile at anyone buying a vehicle. So, will you leave this alone?"

"If you say so," Ryan said, patting Zachary's back. "But believe me, I've got an eye for these things."

"And who are you? Cupid, Yue Lao, or Freyja? Leave it alone. Will you?"

Ryan chuckled at that. "Then, should we check out that R8 GT of yours first? We can take it for a short spin nearby."

"Let's wait a bit," Zachary said, casting his gaze towards the sliding doors at the far side of the customer service area. "Emily will be here soon. I'm sure she will emerge as soon as she hears that we have concluded all the procedures related to the vehicle."

"Okay, then," Ryan said. "It's your call since I'm only a middleman on commission."

"That reminds me," Zachary said, turning towards Ryan once more. "Remember to text me your bank details so that I can transfer the 1,000 NOK to you. Thank you for your help today."

"No problem, man," Ryan replied, grinning. "You can always call me when you need to buy any property in the future. If it's something in Europe, I'll be able to get it for you. Even if it's the goodies from outside Europe, I've got a few colleagues that can help me acquire them. Emily can vouch for me on this."

Zachary nodded. "That's okay," he said, smiling. "I'll remember that if there's anything I need in the future. You can also contact me before your next race. I would love to attend and see you drifting over the race tracks."

"Are you for real?" Ryan probed, inclining his head as if to search Zachary's face for confirmation.

Zachary nodded in response.

Ryan grinned. "Then I'll send you an invitation when it's two weeks to my next race," he said. "Please don't forget."

"Don't forget what?" Another voice said from behind them.

Both Zachary and Ryan almost jumped up in shock as they'd not expected Emily's voice to sound from behind them.

"How did you manage to sneak up on us?" Ryan asked, turning around to look at Emily.

"Have you forgotten I'm a lawyer by profession," Emily replied, beaming.

Ryan sighed, giving Emily an arch look. "So, law schools these days teach their students how to sneak up on people. Where's the world headed?"

Emily chuckled. "Susanne's assistant just informed me that you guys have already finished all the paperwork," she said, turning towards Zachary. "Is that right?"

"Yes, the car is already in my name," Zachary replied, grinning. "All the procedures are done, and I'm already one of the proud owners of an Audi R8 GT. We were only waiting for you so that we can set off."

"Congratulations," Emily said, patting Zachary's back. "We should celebrate this occasion. Shouldn't we?"

"I'll take you out for Pizza at Tyholt Tower after here," Zachary said, grinning. "That should be enough of a celebration for today."

"Tyholt Tower," Emily mumbled, seemingly mulling over the name. "Isn't that the place where people go to enjoy meals in a rotating restaurant 74 meters above the ground?"

"Yes, that's it," Ryan chipped in, rubbing his hands together. "They've got really good pizza, probably one of the best in Trondheim."

"Then I would love to go there," Emily said, smiling at Zachary.

"Have you finished up with Susanne?" Zachary queried.

"Yes, we have completed the outline of the contract document," Emily replied, her voice taking on a formal tone. "But we'll be meeting again tomorrow to discuss the individual clauses in the contract. I'll keep you posted about the progress of the negotiations. So, don't worry and focus on your training."

"Okay," Zachary agreed. "But what is your take on this deal?"

"I think it's perfect," Emily said, beaming. "Audi sponsors a lot of athletes in Norway and Europe at large. So, they are a good option as one of your long-term partners. But let's first finish the negotiations. I'll have gotten the exact picture of their sincerity towards you by then."

"Then, I'm glad," Zachary said. "Thank you for your hard work."

"You're welcome," Emily replied. "And that's exactly my job. I'm famished. Should we leave this place and go enjoy that Pizza, then?"

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

Both Zachary and Ryan concurred. And they set off from the dealership, heading to Tyholt tower for Pizza. They drove in a convoy—never exceeding 40 Km/hr, even on sections of the road with less boisterous traffic, to give Zachary a chance to acclimatize to his new machine.

Chapter 159 - Another Chat With Coach Johansen

Zachary forgot everything else and plunged himself back into his training with a single-hearted devotion after acquiring his vehicle. He was dedicated to sustaining and improving his fitness in order to cement his place on Coach Johansen's starting line-up. He had no intention of missing Rosenborg's next fixtures with Hønefoss BK and Sarpsborg FF only because he had relaxed and fallen out of shape.

So, whether it was dynamic warm-ups, passing drills, or agilities training, he soldiered through diligently with single-minded devotion, day in, day out, without any complaints.

In that way, four days passed by in a flash, and it was soon Sunday evening. The time for Coach Johansen to announce his squad for the next Tippeligaen game had arrived once more.

However, Zachary didn't feel any pressure since he knew that he'd been doing well in training. He was looking forward to the pre-match tactical session as he was almost certain he would make the squad once again.

Nevertheless, he put one more hour into refining his set-piece technique on the training ground after the team training session ended that evening. He managed to take more than fifty free-kicks before rounding up his practice. By then, the evening had started to cast its dusky gown, giving way to the darkness of the night.

When Zachary looked around and noticed that he was the only one remaining on the training ground, he quickly gathered the training balls and then started to make his way towards the locker room. He wanted to take a quick shower before heading to the tactics room for Coach Johansen's pre-match tactical briefing. But just as he was leaving the pitch, he ran into Coach Johansen, himself, along the way.

"There you are, Zach," the coach said, smiling at him. "Were you still working on your set-pieces?"

"Yes," Zachary replied, wiping the sweat off his face using the back of his hand. "I have to practice on a daily basis to perfect my shooting posture. As you know, practice always precedes perfection, and the best form of practice is repetition."

Coach Johansen smiled, nodding. "I'm glad you still remember what we taught you in the academy. You're turning into quite the player because of your dedication and hard work. I'm proud of you, and I hope you manage to stay focused on your game. If you can do that, you'll surely reach great heights in the near future."

"Thank you, coach," Zachary replied, smiling. "I'll continue doing my best. I only hope I can continue getting more playing time on the team. I'll be able to improve faster that way."

Coach Johansen half-smiled. "Let's talk in my office briefly," he said. "There are a few things I wish to discuss with you before the pre-match tactical briefing."

"Oh, okay," Zachary concurred. He was curious about why the coach needed to meet him. "But can you allow me to place my gym bag in my locker and also wash my face first?"

"Yes, of course," Coach Johansen gave his agreement. "Go and clean up first. You can come to my office right after."

"Okay, then," Zachary said. "Thank you. I'll be there shortly."

Five minutes later, Zachary arrived at Coach Johansen's office as promised. He pushed the door open after a couple of knocks and found him intently watching a football game on his laptop.

"Have a seat, Zachary," Coach Johansen said, glancing up from his laptop. "Let's talk for a bit."

Zachary nodded before settling down in a seat opposite that of Coach Johansen.

"How are you finding the team's atmosphere?" Coach Johansen probed, folding his laptop. "It has been slightly over a week since you made your debut. Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Yes, of course," Zachary replied, a smile softening his features. "The past week has been good for me. So, I'm really enjoying myself."

"That's good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "You've already netted five goals in three matches. That makes you one of our top scorers. I'm glad to have you on the team."

"Thank you," Zachary replied.

"Have you looked at Rosenborg's upcoming fixtures for the rest of the season?" Coach Johansen asked, leaning back in his chair.

"Yes," Zachary replied, nodding.

"How do you find the schedule?"

"Fine, I guess," Zachary said. "We've got at least three days between each of the fixtures. There'll also be three weeks of rest between May 30th and June 19th. So, I've got no problem with the schedule."

Coach Johansen smiled. "But you do understand that we still have quite the busy schedule this season," he said, holding Zachary's gaze. "Think about it. We've got to play a lot of matches in the Tippeligaen, the Norwegian Cup, and then the Europa League qualifiers. And all that is before September. Don't you think that's quite a tight schedule?"

"Yes, I can see that," Zachary responded, still in doubt about where the coach was taking the conversation. Even if Rosenborg had a tight schedule, there was no need for the Coach to mention it to him.

"Then, you should understand that with tight schedules, we've got to rotate the squad if we wish to continue winning games," the coach said, taking a moment to caress his red-bearded chin. "Isn't that right?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding and finally understanding the coach's purpose.

"Zachary," Coach Johansen intoned, leaning forward and locking eyes with him. "I would like you to know that you're now a key player in my squad. You've got great spatial awareness in midfield, and you can even make assists and score. You're the kind of match-winning player that every team desires in their starting line-up."

"But," the coach continued. "You can't play matches every three days without taking a rest. So, we shall rotate you out of the starting eleven for the games against Hønefoss on Monday and Sarpsborg 08 on Thursday. If there's a need, you'll only be able to come on as a substitute for those two games."

"Oh!" Zachary said, nodding. Although he understood the coach's viewpoint, he was still a bit disappointed by the coach's decision not to play him in the away game against Hønefoss the following day. He was competitive at his very core. Being on the pitch and competing against opponents made him feel whole. He didn't want to miss even a single fixture throughout the entire season.

"I can see that you are disappointed," Coach Johansen said. "But don't worry. Keep focusing on your training. We'll be facing Molde in 8 days—on May 20th and Vålerenga on May 25th. If we win those two, we'll most likely seal our position at the top of the league table. So, I need your legs fresh and well-rested for those two fixtures. Understood?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, his tone solemn.

"Then, I'm glad," Coach Johansen said. "I promise you that by the end of the season, you'll be thanking me for rotating you out of the squad a few times. You, yourself, will reach the extent of requesting a vacation so that you can relax and recover from the fatigue accumulated from playing games throughout the whole season."

"Oh," Zachary said, feeling at a loss of what to say to the coach. He felt like putting in a complaint requesting that the coach consider him for the starting eleven the following day. But at the same time, he couldn't follow through with the thought since he felt a bit guilty.

The coach had played a psychological game on him by calling him in for a private chat to explain exactly why he couldn't be part of the starting eleven. He'd given Zachary special treatment, usually reserved for the key players on the team. But in actual sense, he'd called in Zachary and informed him that he was benching him for the next two games. Zachary was feeling conflicted on the inside.

"That aside," Coach Johansen continued, his voice turning solemn. "The team physician informed me that you didn't go for your routine medical after the game against Tromsø. You should really go after the next game. Believe me; it's for your own good since you've just experienced that growth spurt of yours. We don't want to get any problems with your fitness when we're having such a busy schedule."

"Okay, I'll do that after coming back from the game tomorrow," Zachary concurred, nodding. "I think if there's nothing else, I'll go take a shower now and prepare for the pre-match tactical briefing."

"Just one more thing before you go," Coach Johansen said, sighing. "In case you manage to score any more goals in any of the upcoming matches, please control yourself. The publicity and marketing guys are already complaining about you giving away those jerseys. Moreover, you've picked up two yellow cards from those celebrations. So, please do take note. Okay?"

"It won't happen again, coach," Zachary replied solemnly.

"Then, I'm glad," Coach Johansen said, grinning. "And before I forget, congratulations upon getting that new car of yours. It's really a good machine. But please don't go racing or speeding anywhere in Norway. Always put safety above everything else when on the road. Are we together, Zach?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, smiling wryly. "Not a single time have I gone faster than 60 km/hr. So, you don't have to worry."

"Then, I'll sleep a little better today," Coach Johansen said in a joking manner. "You know it's hard for an old man like me to find any sleep knowing that one of his players might be speeding on one of the mountain passes somewhere." He sighed.

"Okay, you can go back and prepare," he said after a moment. "See you in about 30 minutes in the tactics room then," he added, waving his arm in a dismissive gesture.

Chapter 160 - To Aka Arena

After Zachary departed from Coach Johansen's office, he quickly cleaned up and had a simple dinner at the canteen. After having his fill of smoked salmon, vegetables, and pasta, he headed to the tactics room feeling reinvigorated, his hunger sated.

The pre-match tactical briefing started a few minutes after he arrived. As usual, Coach Johansen began going over every detail of the game plan for the match against Hønefoss BK. He took his time explaining even the smallest of things, be it the positioning of the players, how to take corners, and how to shape up into the 4-3-3 formation on the pitch.

Coach Johansen stayed true to his word and left Zachary out of the starting eleven when he named the line-up. But what comforted Zachary was that the coach had even benched both Mike Jensen and Tobias Mikkelsen—the other players who'd been performing very well during training. That implied the coach was indeed rotating the squad in preparation for matches ahead.

Zachary left the tactics room at 9:00 PM with a light heart after the coach's address. His mood had lifted on verifying that the coach was only resting him to prepare for the next game rather than some other bias.

After exchanging a few words with his teammates, he got into his R8 GT and cruised out of Lerkendal. He drove under the blanket of stars looming over Trondheim City, the headlights illuminating the way ahead. He could feel the firm grip of the car's new treads on the blacktop. He accelerated a bit and rushed through the roads like the wind, traveling towards Stjerdalsveien, the place he'd come to call home for the past few months.

As he steered the car around a corner and joined the lane heading to his apartment building a few minutes later, a feeling of happiness swelled within him. He'd already begun reaping the benefits of possessing his own private means of transportation. The journey back to his apartment that had previously taken him 30-45 minutes by bus—only took him a little over 12 minutes in his new car.

A short while later, Zachary parked his car in front of his apartment building and began to slowly ascend the stairs, heading towards his home on the sixth floor. But along the way, he ran into Kristin, dressed casually in baggy pants, with two plastic garbage bags in her hands. She seemed to be taking out the trash from her apartment.

"You're back very late," she said when she was still a few paces away from Zachary. "Personal training?" She probed, flashing Zachary a smile.

"No," Zachary replied, smiling back at her. "There was a pre-match tactical briefing since we'll be playing an away game against Hønefoss Ballklubb tomorrow. I rushed here as soon as the meeting was over."

"Oh," Kristin said, placing the garbage bags on the stairs. "I'm sure that you'll win against Hønefoss. You'll even emerge victorious in the next game against Sarpsborg 08. But what worries me is the game against Molde after those two fixtures. Do you feel confident enough to guarantee Rosenborg's win against them? We need revenge since they knocked us out of the Cupen last year."

Zachary sighed. "If they play the same way they have been playing since the start of this season, then there's no need to fear them. Moreover, we'll be at Lerkendal this time around. So, they should be the ones getting scared, not us."

"That's great," Kristin said, beaming. "I'll be rooting for you in the stands. And before I forget, my grandpa was hoping you'd visit him. Do you think you can accompany me to his place in Bergen, maybe at the start of June when there's a break in the season fixtures?"

"That may not be possible," Zachary said, shaking his head. "I'll be back home in DR Congo by then for my holiday. So, we can either go and see him a bit sooner or wait until I return from my vacation. That'll be at the end of June."

"Then, why not go, visit him sooner rather than later," Kristin said. "We could go on May 21st, the day after your match with Molde. We can fly to Bergen and be at his place early in the morning. That way, we'll be able to return to Trondheim by nightfall."

"That should be okay, I guess," Zachary said, nodding. "We usually have a day off after games. So, I think we can use that time as long as we come back that same day."

"Of course, we'll be able to come back the same day," Kristin said, beaming. "I'll be informing my grandpa about our visit. So, please don't forget."

"I won't forget," Zachary intoned solemnly. "You have my word."

"That's great, then," Kristin said. "But since you have a match tomorrow, let me say good night and leave you to rest. Good luck in your game." She added, beginning to pick up the garbage bags from the floor.

"Thank you," Zachary replied, smiling back at her. "Do you need help with that?" He queried, pointing at the plastic bags in her hands.

"Not at all," Kristin replied, her voice firm. "I can handle this myself since the dumpster is only a few meters away from the building. You, on the other hand, should focus on resting and preparing for tomorrow's game. How are you moving to Hønefoss, by the way? Bus or plane?"

"We'll go by plane this time around," Zachary replied. "So, we'll be flying out by around noon tomorrow."

"Then I believe it's high time I say good night to you," Kristin said, the corner of her lips lifting into a soft, radiant smile. "I wish you all the best in your match tomorrow. I'll not be attending, but I'll still follow the game on TV."

"Thank you," Zachary said, returning her smile. "And good night to you too." He added before walking past her and continuing to ascend the stairs to the sixth floor.

A few minutes later, he was already safely in the confines of his living room. He went through his customary pre-bedtime yoga routine before eating a light snack and heading to bed for the night. Although he was on the bench for the match against Hønefoss Ballklubb the following day, he needed to rest early. That way, he would be ready if the coach needed him to enter the game as a substitute.

The next day, Zachary traveled together with his teammates who'd made Coach Johansen's squad to Hønefoss town in the southern part of Norway. They arrived at Hønefoss Airport, Eggemoen, at around three in the afternoon. Without any dilly-dallying, they got on to a bus and headed to a nearby training ground.

When they arrived, they went through a light session of pre-match fitness drills under the guidance of Rolf Aas, the fitness coach. As usual, he was very strict and didn't allow any players to relax during the session. Whether it was leg-lifting, lunges, or full sprints—he watched Zachary and his teammates with undivided attention. If any player dared to slacken, he would give him a mouthful of a lecture without mincing his words.

That way, the minutes and hours quickly flashed by—and soon, it was almost 6:00 PM. Zachary and his teammates concluded their light training session before heading to Aka Arena for the game against H?nefoss.