

## Greatest 25

### Chapter 25 - Housemates

The sun had sunk lower in the sky, the light of day draining away, giving way to the velvety dark of night.

Zachary walked back home with his shoulders drooping, his brows creased, and his face tense as he replayed his conversation with Mr. Stein after the match.

He'd just learned he wouldn't be able to join the professional soccer stage until he was 18. That implied he still had a year and a few months before he could obtain his player's license to play in Norway.

The bureaucrats, based in Zürich, had decided to enforce a new regulation to prohibit the transfer of youth talents from developing Nations, claiming to be protecting the rights of minors. Zachary wondered how the rights of the prospective players would be protected when some had nothing to eat in their home countries. He was disgruntled.

With FIFA's new rules, there was not a chance that he could receive a license before he became an adult. Zachary remembered that some of the top clubs, such as Barcelona, had incurred the wrath of the world's football governing body because they'd signed minors during his previous life.

[Seems like I'll have to delay my plans for a bit.] He mused.

Zachary had hoped to join the under-19s after having a good game that day. He would have then gotten a lot of playing time and built up his skills and experience in official matches. But all that was no longer possible due to the damn FIFA rule.

[Maybe, I can focus on my personalized training during the period before I turn pro.] Zachary sighed.

He'd been keen on training some new skills which would benefit his career. However, he had always been busy preparing for the trial in Lubumbashi and then his move to Norway. However, he now had plenty of time to hone his skills.

With the facilities present in Trondheim, he could upgrade his fitness and refine his techniques to a higher level. His goal was to turn most of his attributes into A-grades within a year. With a system that

could help along the way, he was confident that he would turn into a monster by the time he debuted for Rosenberg.

Occupied by his plans, Zachary made it to Moholt a few minutes later. He was already feeling better, regaining his post-match jubilant mood, after the short walk through the cold evening air.

As he was about to enter his apartment, he was surprised to hear several unfamiliar voices from behind the door. It was always just him and Kasongo in the kitchen, especially during the evening.

He opened the door only to find two blonde Caucasians seated on one side of the dining table. Kasongo was comfortable in one of the other chairs, engaged in a chat with them.

"Wow, there comes our star," one of the Caucasians, with brown hair, exclaimed once he noticed Zachary standing in the doorway. He stood up and rushed to Zachary before extending his hand for a handshake. "Nice to meet you. I am Paul Otterson." He grinned.

Zachary returned the handshake. "Zachary Bemba. Nice to meet you too." He looked towards Kasongo for clarification. He wanted to know who the strangers in their apartment were.

Paul Otterson noticed his confusion and beat Kasongo to a reply. "We're your other two housemates." He laughed. "I'm in room 1, and Kendrick, over there, is in the other room."

"Oh," Zachary said. "So, you are the two academy players from Sweden?" He was enlightened. Mr. Stein had mentioned something about their housemates from Sweden being away on holiday.

Zachary was surprised. The boy before him looked more like a movie star rather than an athlete. His short light brown hair was particularly curly and artfully tousled, matching his arched brows and sharp cheekbones that were perfectly angular. He seemed like one of those pretty-boy types in teenage romance movies to Zachary.

"Yes, that is us," Paul replied, pointing at his pointed nose. His square chin, coupled with his small eye slits, combined to create intense facial expressions—like he was peeved about something all the time. However, the boy seemed like he was the more cheerful and fun-loving person among the two Caucasians.

"We have been in Trondheim for a year already. We had just gone on holiday. I watched your game—and your run was simply magic. How did you manage to do it?" He asked.

Before Zachary could reply, the other Caucasian cut in. "Paul. Give the guy a break. He's just from a match. He should be tired."

He stood up and moved towards Zachary. "Kendrick Otterson. Nice to meet you," he said, extending his hand. The Swede looked like one of those Zenned-out folks, the modern-day hippie types, with his long shoulder-length brown hair loosely framing his face. His scruffy beard did much to help the impression along. His downcast ocean blue eyes and his quiet, thoughtful demeanor, seeming to communicate a certain innocence about his person.

"Nice to meet you." Zachary returned his handshake, nodding. "You two are brothers?" He asked.

Both had ocean blue eyes and shared a common last name. But their other traits were nothing alike. Kendrick was taller—about six feet, and more muscular than Paul. Zachary couldn't easily confirm whether they were close relatives from just their looks.

"Yes, we are," Paul was quick to answer. "Do we look alike?" He asked, putting an arm around Kendrick's broad shoulders. The latter pushed him away before returning to his seat.

"Such a bore," Paul mumbled, shaking his head like an aged man.

He turned to face Zachary and asked: "Have you eaten?"

"Nope," Zachary replied. Since Mr. Stein had summoned him right after the match, he didn't get time to eat the post-match snacks with the team.

"Great." Paul clapped his hands excitedly. "Let's eat together. I've cooked Lasagna." He announced.

Fifteen minutes later, the group of four settled on the four-seater dining table to have their dinner. Zachary was surprised to find the lasagna cooked by Paul delicious. The salty pasta layers it had, spiced

up by the hot sauce, was simply amazing. Its scent was simply intoxicating and mouth-watering when Zachary cut a piece off and shoved it into his mouth.

Kasongo, the outspoken boy, took a bite of the lasagna, cheesy with dark leafy greens. He smiled, "Paul, that's so good."

With a boyish grin, the Swede raised his brows, opening up his eyes, "Obviously. Any food I touch is a work of art." He emphasized. He seemed like one of those narcissistic pretty boys who usually bullied people in high school movies. "So, the two of you are from Africa?"

"Yes," Kasongo replied after swallowing a mouthful of food. "The Democratic Republic of Congo, to be specific," he emphasized, smiling.

"Is that near Didier Drogba's country?"

Zachary's mouth twitched noticeably after hearing Paul's question. DR Congo was thousands of miles away from Ivory Coast. He wondered how a person would ask whether the two were neighbors.

"Hell, no." Kasongo shook his head. "Congo is at the center of the African Continent, bordering countries like Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania."

"Haven't heard of any player from there," Paul mumbled. "But I know Uganda. Was it the country in the Last King of Scotland?"

"Yes, we border Uganda, the country in the movie," Kasongo concurred. "So, which positions do you two play?" Kasongo skillfully diverted the topic away from his home country.

"I play as a forward and a winger," Paul replied before looking towards Kendrick—who was quietly eating his food. The boy had been silent for a large part of the evening.

"Goalkeeper," Kendrick answered after noticing that his brother was glancing at him.

Zachary couldn't recall any players with the name Otterson—who played the two positions on the Swedish team during his previous life. They were probably not famous in his past life.

"What about you?" Paul turned towards Kasongo.

"I can play on any wing," Kasongo replied.

"Are you as good as Zachary?" Paul asked, his eyes looking expectantly at Kasongo.

"Not yet." Kasongo sighed, smiling ruefully. "But I'll be in a short time."

"That's the spirit, brother." Paul nodded. "I'm the same. I want to join the Rosenberg under-19s as soon as possible. By the way, Zach, which number did you get on the Rosenberg team?" He looked at Zachary, seated opposite him. Kendrick and Kasongo also glanced at him with their eyes glittering with expectation.

"I haven't yet joined the under-19s..." Zachary explained the whole FIFA regulation about not allowing foreign under-18 players to obtain a professional license away from their home country.

"Damn! That's unfair." Kasongo shouted when he heard Zachary's narrative.

"Don't worry about the license for the meantime," Paul consoled. "We have been here for over a year, and yet we have no prospects of receiving a license before we turn 18. Scandinavian Clubs are very strict, especially with rules concerning minors."

"But be assured that your time here will pass very fast," Paul continued. "You'll have to attend the mandatory secondary school education here in Trondheim while also undergoing the hectic day to day training in the academy."

"You two are in upper secondary. Right?" Zachary asked.

"Yes," Paul replied. "We are attending the Trøndelag International School. It is the school where the NF academy sends its students for their academic education. The coaches will most likely send you there after you complete the academy registration procedures."

"Do we have to pass all the subjects to stay in the academy?" Kasongo asked, frowning.

"Yes." Paul nodded emphatically. "You have to at least perform above average to stay on scholarship. But don't worry. The school designs our learning timetables to fit our training schedules. It has a collaborative initiative with Rosenborg to train young football talents in Trondheim."

The Swede went on to explain the schedules of training at the academy to Zachary and Kasongo. In addition to the daily routine soccer training, the players had a chance to participate in international training camps and under-17 competitions if they performed well. The NF Academy team had even participated in the SIA Cup of Valencia and the Riga Cup of Latvia during the previous year. At such competitions, there were junior teams of the top clubs like Manchester City, Valencia, and PSV participating.

Zachary was pleased with the offered packages by the academy and could not wait to start his training.

After the hearty meal with his new housemates, he headed back to his room to rest for the night and prepare for the academy registration the next day. He was already dosing as the match had tired him out.

Just out of habit, he opened the system interface to check out his mission completion status for that day's match. But when he opened the G.O.A.T-missions tab, his eyes widened in shock as he perused through its contents.