

Greatest 29

Chapter 29 - Life At The Academy III

After the gym work-out, Zachary and his flatmates rode their bikes towards TIS—the Trøndelag International School.

He had gotten used to riding his bike outdoors for hours over the course of the past year. Riding a bike was liberating for him. It had become his go-to way of moving quickly through the streets of Trondheim.

"F**k! When will this rain stop?" Paul, who was riding beside him, cursed out loud as they rounded a corner and headed into a narrow tarmac road connecting Festningsgata main-street to their school.

The rain poured down from the white—velvety sky steadily and softly. The days in Trondheim were beginning to wane—as the inevitable cold winter neared, each nightfall happening sooner than the one before. The warm days of summer were long past.

"Stop complaining and just ride," Kendrick snapped from behind Zachary. "It's almost 10, and we're almost late for class."

"Okay, Okay," Paul yelled, glancing back at his brother. "Let's race to see who'll reach the school gate first. The loser cleans the bathroom this week." He grinned from ear to ear.

"Fellas, is it a deal?" He asked, bringing his bike to a sudden halt. The other three followed suit and braked beside him.

"Deal." Kasongo and Kendrick nodded in unison before readying themselves to start the race.

"What about you?" Paul turned towards Zachary as he fastened his jacket. The Swede was also preparing for the small race.

"I'll race," Zachary replied. "But no punishments or cleaning the bathroom for the loser. We have got to maintain a strict rotation of who cleans the apartment each week. That's the only fair way."

"Zach." Paul sighed. "You're no fun."

"Let's just race without the punishment," Kendrick cut in, concurring with Zachary.

"This time, I'm winning," Kasongo said, gripping the handlebars of his bike more tightly.

"You wish..."

"Guys," Kendrick interrupted, his tone impatient. "We need to get to school before class starts."

"Three, two, one... and go," Paul yelled before taking off and moving ahead of the others. The other boys followed suit. Their bicycle wheels rolled over the wet track, their speed bringing the cold rain splattering into their faces much harder than it would have if they had just walked. Their waterproof outer-wear had long failed at keeping their bodies dry, leaving their trunks as wet as their legs.

Their race through the rain managed to get them to the school gate in less than four minutes. Kendrick Otterson was first, his brother second, Zachary third, and Kasongo last.

Zachary never ceased to be amazed by just how fast his two Swedish housemates could go on their bikes though they were much slower than him on foot. He occasionally mused on how they might have been better off as professional cyclists rather than soccer players.

"I win again," Kendrick declared as they passed through the gate and entered the school grounds.

"My bike was not in the best condition," Kasongo sighed. "Otherwise, I would have covered the distance in less than a minute," he added in a serious tone. The others ignored him since it was not the first time he had blamed a loss on his equipment.

They rode quietly across the school grounds at moderate speed. The courtyard was a richly planted garden with walkways of smooth white stone set in several meandering paths across it. Due to the rain, no students were lounging at the benches, talking, reading, or eating packed snacks. It seemed they were all in the three buildings, 3-stories high, surrounding the expansive u-shaped courtyard.

Zachary parked his bike in the bike-room and removed his outer waterproof clothing. He then followed his flatmates through the large glass doors—into the building containing his classroom.

On the inside, a hubbub of conversation from the students hustling and bustling down the corridors assaulted him. They seemed to be in one of the ten-minute breaks at the end of each lesson. A crowd of vibrant young students of various nationalities filled up the hallways. The chaos was perfect, like a movie. Friends greeted each other with hugs—or playful punches while newcomers stood looking scared.

Most of the students gave way when Zachary and his flatmates passed through the hallway heading to the stairs at the far end of the building. Sports students on scholarship garnered a great deal of respect from their peers. Zachary had rarely faced any bullying despite being relatively new to the school.

But there were always exceptions to the norm.

As they ascended the stairs to the next floor, a group of students, one year their seniors, blocked their advance. Grant Anderson, the substitute goalkeeper of the Rosenberg under-19s, descended the stairs ahead of his small entourage of three, his lips curling into a wide grin.

"Well, well—what do we have here?" He said. "Two wannabees from a third world sh*thole accompanied by their two loser friends. What can I say? Rosenberg has fallen really far to list you as one of its potential players." His sycophants laughed at the comment like they had just listened to a funny monologue delivered by Eddie Murphy. Zachary wondered how a grown-up could find such nonsense funny.

"Here comes an idiot to mess up our day," Paul whispered. "I just don't get why the school doesn't expel him." He groaned.

"Ignore him," Kendrick said, his voice somewhat hushed. "With the backing of his father, he will never get expelled whatever he does."

Zachary didn't even pause his ascent to glance towards Grant. He had long gotten used to the constant insults from the tall Caucasian goalkeeper.

Followed by Kendrick, Zachary sidestepped the silhouette of the goalkeeper and continued ascending the stairs. He couldn't waste his valuable time on pointless quibbles with a jealous teenager.

Kasongo and Paul, though, stopped and glowered at Grant. The latter licked his lips and said in a crisp tone: "Grant, one of these days, I'll beat you up so bad that even your mama won't recognize you. Keep insulting me—and you'll get what's coming to you." The Swede harrumphed before moving past the goalkeeper.

"Kasongo!" Zachary turned back, looking towards the boy still squaring off against Grant, who stood at almost a foot taller than him. "Are you coming? We have less than ten minutes before the lesson begins."

Kasongo quietly ground his teeth in frustration before following Paul Otterson up the stairs.

"Cowards born as losers, to loser mommies," Grant scoffed, as Kasongo and Paul were only a few steps away from him.

The two paused midway up the stairs before turning back. "Say that again," Paul growled, clenching his fists.