

## Greatest 401

Chapter 401 System Upgrade and Resolutions      Zachary's eyes glittered with excitement after he finished perusing the contents of the mission completion message. After a year of toiling, he'd finally completed the 2013/14 Europe League Serial Challenge. He'd even perfectly realized all the milestones of the mission and, as a result, earned ample rewards. As such, not even his extreme state of exhaustion could lower the sense of contentment he felt at that moment.

The rewards for completing the mission included a staggering sum of 267,000 Juju points, an S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir, and an S-grade mental-conditioning elixir. They were enough to raise Zachary's fitness and footballing skills by a significant margin within a month or two. They were sufficient to turn him into an almighty ball wizard before his transfer out of Rosenborg.

Zachary still yearned to improve his skills. He hadn't let his one successful season over-inflate his ego. He knew himself well, and at best, he was close to the level of great midfielders like Kaka, Andrés Iniesta, and Bastian Schweinsteiger at their peaks. And probably, his attacking prowess could even match the 22-year-old Kylian Mbappé of his previous life. But that was as far as his skills could take him on the list of the world's best players.

Thus, Zachary knew he still had ways to go before reaching the top. He wasn't about to start comparing himself to phenomenal generational talents like Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Zinedine Zidane, Maradona, or other all-time great players usually mentioned in the G.O.A.T debate. He wouldn't delude himself that he'd stepped into the ranks of the best players in the world just because of a single successful season. That would be a big mistake and oversight on his side.

He understood that most professional footballers would have periods when they performed like monsters on the pitch and played spectacular football. Then, after a period of time, they would lose their incredible form and start putting up slightly mediocre performances.

For instance, Paul Pogba had been on-form in Juventus during Zachary's previous life, but his skills declined after he went to Manchester United. Michael Owen was also the same. At a young age, before he'd clocked 24 years, the English and then Liverpool striker was a true-blue footballing demon on the pitch. Owen was the nightmare for all the defenders in the Premier League at the time and won the golden boot several times. He even won the Ballon d'Or at the young age of twenty-two. But later in his career, his form dwindled, and he started playing like any other standard player. That was the unpredictable nature of football careers.

With all those examples in mind, Zachary had warned himself to remain modest despite his success. He had to stay down to earth and maintain his immense hunger to improve his football skills.

Only then would he have a long and successful career. And only then would he have the qualifications to challenge the phenomenal talents at the top of the footballing world.

"First things first," Zachary thought, leaning back into the sofa, "Let's upgrade the system before thinking about other things."

Zachary had already amassed almost thrice the amount of Juju points required to upgrade the system. So, without further ado, he navigated to the system's home menu before clicking on the upgrade button, displayed in the top left corner of the near-transparent system interface.

"DING"

The all-familiar system notification sound resounded within his mind right after his finger made contact with the crystal-like display.

"The user has chosen to upgrade the system," the system AI's apathetic voice immediately followed. "To proceed with the upgrade, the system will have to deduct 100,000 Juju points from the user's stock. Additionally, the system will shut down for eight hours during the upgrade process. The user will not be able to use any of the system's functions until the eight hours elapse."

"Does the user still wish to proceed with the upgrade? Please click on the 'accept' or the 'reject' buttons to confirm your choice."

Zachary didn't waste any second making his choice. He leaned forward and tapped the 'accept' upgrade button that had just floated to the front of all the system interface's contents.

"DING"

A new system notification resounded in his mind the next instant.

"SYSTEM ALERT!!"

"The user has confirmed an immediate upgrade of the system," the AI intoned. "The system will immediately deduct 100,000 Juju points from the user's current stock to upgrade the system from level-4 to level-5. The user can check further details on the system interface."

Zachary had already focused all his eyes on the crystal-like display as the notifications resounded within his mind. He could already see that the system had commenced the upgrade process by looking at the flashing messages on the screen.

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"SYSTEM ALERT!!"

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SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

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SYNCING AND SAVING USER DATA

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LOADING NEW PACKAGES

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UPGRADE PROCESS COMMENCING IN 5, 4,3,2,1, & 0...

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The translucent crystal-like display trembled slightly as the countdown reached zero. It then shimmered for a moment before dimming and fading into thin air.

"It's already 11:30 PM," Zachary thought, glancing at his wall clock on the opposite wall. "That means the system will complete the upgrade at around 7:30 AM. It should already be back online by the time I wake up."

A soft smile outlined Zachary's face as he rose from the sofa. He took a quick shower and brushed his teeth before jumping into bed. A few minutes later, he became oblivious to everything else around him and entered the sweet and relaxing slumberland.

His sleep was peaceful, and he woke up when the rays of the morning sun had already brightened up his entire bedroom. He stretched out his arm and picked up his phone from his bedside table. He then glanced at the screen and realized it was already nine in the morning. He'd slept for more than nine hours.

Zachary immediately jumped out of bed. He was soon in autopilot mode, washing his face, having breakfast, brushing his teeth, going through his morning yoga routine to boost his post-match recovery, and then taking a shower. After all that, he finally settled on one of the comfy chairs in his living room before summoning the system interface with a mental command.

"DING"

The system notification sound immediately rang within his mind. Before Zachary could even blink, the space before him shimmered slightly as the familiar crystal-like display manifested within his vision. He leaned back into the sofa gracefully before starting to peruse through the system notifications.

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#SYSTEM ALERT!!

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->System upgraded successfully.

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NEW PACKAGES LOADED

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LEVEL-5 VERSION OF SOCCER G.O.A.T USER INTERFACE SUCCESSFULLY INITIALIZED

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NOW LOADING AND SYNCING USER DATA

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"DING"

"The system has finalized the upgrade process," the system AI's voice sounded in Zachary's mind.  
"The system is now at level-5. For details, the user can check the system interface."

"Excellent."

Zachary's eyes glittered, full of excitement. He rubbed his hands together and immediately navigated to the system's home menu. Without further ado, he started perusing the contents on the screen.

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SOCCER G.O.A.T SYSTEM

SYSTEM LEVEL: 5 (181,110/1,000,000 Juju points to level up)

USER: Zachary Bemba

AGE: 19 years

TALENT ASSESSMENT: Grade-S

JUJU-POINTS: 181,110

(Evaluation: A promising and sensational young professional player on his way to greatness)

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USER MENU

\*USER STATS

\*G.O.A.T MISSIONS

\*SYSTEM SHOP (2 new messages)

\*SYSTEM LOTTERY

\*SNOOPING TOOL

\*TRAINING TOOLS

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NB: Please level up the system to unlock more functions.

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Zachary's eyes narrowed when he noticed that the amount of Juju points needed for the next system upgrade had reached a staggering one million. The sum was multiple times the number of all Juju points he'd amassed since his academy days. If he didn't win major trophies and perform like a monster on the pitch over the next few seasons, he would take forever to raise such a sum of Juju points. It was really a crazy number.

But Zachary wasn't all that worried about the next system upgrade. That was because the more his skills grew, the less he needed to rely on the system. For instance, his desire to learn new skills from the system after upgrades had lessened after his talent broke into the S-grading. With his already incredible fitness, he could already master most of the skills as long as he devoted ample time to them.

Additionally, he already had enough skills in his repertoire to give the best players in the world a run for their money. He could side-step, pass like a maestro, shoot and finish like a box assassin, and even convert free-kicks. As long as he improved his fitness to match the level of a player like Cristiano Ronaldo, he believed that the skills he'd already mastered would push him into the ranks of the best players in a generation. Then, he would only need to improve his game intelligence to evolve into a terrifying nightmare for all his opponents on the field of play.

"What matters most for me now are the system's elixirs," Zachary mused. "As long as I utilize the vitality-enhancing elixirs to raise my fitness to the above S-grade level, I'll become almost unstoppable. Then, I can evolve all my skills into my own unique style of play as I grow as a player."

A sharp glint passed through Zachary's eyes as he anticipated his future path. His increased abilities were already pushing him into the competitive world of the best players on the planet. He was no longer

satisfied with only learning the skills of other great players. Instead, he yearned to improve himself and create his own unique footballing style encompassing all his skills. And he really believed that he could achieve the feat with the help of the elixirs from the system.

"But first things first," Zachary deliberated. "I should learn a heading skill and master defensive plays like N'Golo Kante's sliding tackles. Only then will I have no weakness as a player when I start creating and improving my unique style of play."

After making the resolution, Zachary immediately acted on it. He navigated to the system shop sub-menu to examine the available new skills after the upgrade.

Chapter 402 Learning New Skills      Zachary watched with a calm heart as the contents of the interface shimmered and morphed into the system shop menu. Then with another flicker of the translucent crystal-like display, eight glittering skill cards appeared and floated forward before hovering in front of everything else on the interface.

"Oh my! These are some crazy skills."

Zachary couldn't contain his surprise when he set his sights on the images of various famous footballers depicted on the skill cards. Without losing any second, he started perusing through the details of the skills that had just appeared on the system interface.

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1) CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju: For positioning and heading accuracy within and outside the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju points]

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2) Box-Vampire Suarez: The true art of positioning, skipping past opponents, and deadly finishing within the box. You'll be able to draw blood every time your opponents grow lax within the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control and S- grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju points]



3) Box-Assassin Lewandowski: Most of the time, no one can stop you when you receive the ball within the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control and S- grade Agility attributes to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju points]

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4) Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard: Immaculate positioning and deadly shooting outside the 18-yard box. The keepers will fear you when you receive the ball in the final third. Requires at least S- grade Body Control, S- grade Agility, and S- grade Strength attributes to master the skill.

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5) Alien Dribble-Magic Messi: Ultimate dribbling and effective breakthrough defenses. Allows you a base 95% chance of executing successful dribbles during one-on-one encounters and a 70% chance of breaking through packed defenses with two to four players barring your way. Increases the chance of avoiding tackles by 65%. Reduces the risk of injury while dribbling past even the most-menacing defenders by at least 75%. Requires at least SS grade Body Control, S grade game intelligence, and SS grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 400,000 Juju points]

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6) Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic Ronaldinho: Ultimate dribbling and breakthrough defenses using side-steps and body feints. Allows you a base 97% chance of executing successful dribbles during one-on-one encounters and a 50% chance of breaking through packed defenses with two to four players barring your way. Increases the chance of avoiding tackles by 70%. Reduces the risk of injury while dribbling past even the most-menacing defenders by at least 65%. Requires at least SS grade Body Control, S grade game intelligence, and SS grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 400,000 Juju points]

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7) Impenetrable Bastion Paolo Maldini: Ultimate defending and tackling. Allows you a base 60% chance of executing successful defensive plays, including sliding tackles, during one-on-one encounters. Increases the chance of winning aerial duels by 60%. Reduces the risk of injury while executing risky defensive plays by 50%. Requires at least S grade Body Control, SS grade game intelligence, S grade Stamina, S grade Strength, and S grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 400,000 Juju points]

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8) Midfield King Michel Platini: Ultimate control, efficiency, and creativity within the midfield. Increases base passing accuracy by 30%, enhances spatial awareness during critical moments by 50%, and raises shooting accuracy outside the box by 20%. Boosts aerial and ground duel ability within the midfield by 50% and reduces the risk of attracting yellow and red cards after executing risky defensive plays in midfield by 50%. Requires at least S grade Body Control, SS grade game intelligence, S grade Stamina, S grade Strength, and S grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 400,000 Juju points]

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NB: The user can only learn a maximum of two skills before the next system upgrade. The user can upgrade the system to obtain more opportunities to learn more skills.

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"These new skills are really incredible."

Zachary couldn't help but have mixed feelings after perusing the skill details. Before the system upgrade, he'd assumed that the skills from the system would no longer have any marked impact on his career path. But after learning about the functions of the four new skills that had just appeared in the system shop, he changed his mind immediately.

The four new skills were incredible enough to enhance the skills of any football player by a significant margin. For instance, Messi's alien dribble-magic and Ronaldinho's step-over-and-feint kingly magic were dream skills that could enhance Zachary's already potent ball handling and versatility on the pitch. By learning any of the two skills, he could improve his dribbling and make it more effective while also gaining the ability to avoid tackles and injuries on the pitch. He would instantly become unstoppable and turn into a terrifying ball wizard, feared by all defenders in the world. That was the potency of the new skills in the system shop.

"But the number of Juju points and the other requirements to learn the new skills are just too much," Zachary thought as he perused the skill details again.

The cost of learning any of the four skills that had just appeared in the system shop was a staggering 400,000 Juju points. Additionally, he had to elevate some of his attributes, including game intelligence and agility, to the above-S grade to meet the fitness requirements for learning the new skills. That was a tall order as far as Zachary was concerned.

"There's no hope of learning the four new skills in the near future," Zachary determined as he leaned back into the sofa. "I'll need to play well and amass a large sum of Juju points before I can learn even a single skill. Simply frustrating!"

Zachary narrowed his eyes as he made a few simple inferences within his mind. By his estimates, he would only accumulate the needed Juju points to purchase any of the skills after winning at least two trophies, almost on the level of the Europa League. But even then, he would still not have met the fitness conditions, especially the SS grade game intelligence, required to learn any of the skills.

"I need to remain patient," Zachary resolved. "I need to take one step at a time and continue developing myself as a player. I'll meet the requirements at one point if I persist and continue performing well on the pitch. As for now, I guess I can only choose to learn the heading and outside-the-box shooting skills to enhance my abilities as soon as possible."

Zachary's eyes flickered with fierce determination as he set his sights on the first and fourth skill cards hovering before everything else on the system interface. His heading ability, especially in front of the goal, had always been his weakness. On that day, he was finally determined to rectify that weakness and abolish it from his person by learning the CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju.

Additionally, Zachary had decided to learn the Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skill to augment his shooting ability from outside the box. As long as he combined the new skill with his already terrifying arrow shot, he believed that he would turn into the ultimate nightmare for all goalkeepers who would face off against him in the future. He would be able to unleash horrifying missiles of shots towards the goal from anywhere within the final third.

"Let's do this."

Zachary took in a deep breath to calm himself down. He then extended his forefinger and tapped the 'purchase' button below the first skill card on the translucent crystal-like display.

"DING"

The system notification sound reverberated in his mind as soon as his finger made contact with the glowing screen. Then, on cue, the seven other skill cards shimmered slightly before fading away from the interface. Only the card depicting the image of Cristiano Ronaldo heading the ball continued hovering in front of everything else on the crystal-like display. It soon floated forward and expanded to fill up the entire screen.

"The user has chosen to purchase the CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju," the AI's apathetic voice rang in Zachary's mind after a moment. "The system will have to deduct 4,000 Juju points from the user's stock after confirmation of the purchase. Does the user still wish to purchase CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju?"

"Yes," Zachary replied immediately. "Please confirm the purchase."

"Command confirmed..." the AI intoned.

"Checking skill requirements before confirming purchase..."

"The user possesses S-grade body control, which meets the basic requirements for learning the skill."

"DING"

"Congratulations. The system has now confirmed the skill purchase from the system shop. The system requests permission to commence the necessary quantum mental conditioning to help the user achieve initial mastery of the skill."

"Proceed with the mental conditioning," Zachary said and braced himself. He'd already gone through the procedure more than twice. He wasn't worried that anything would go wrong.

"Loading required data and packages for the CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju..." the AI intoned after a moment. "The system will commence the quantum mental conditioning procedure in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0."

When the countdown reached zero, the system started transmitting the associated CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju data into Zachary's brain. He momentarily experienced a splitting headache as diverse visions and memories of himself heading the ball on various occasions drilled into his mind. They soon became a part of him, making him feel like he was a veteran and master of finishing with headers for a few seconds. But a while later, the sensation faded as the mental conditioning process gradually ended.

"Sweet."

Zachary was on cloud nine as he'd just achieved initial mastery for the CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju. He'd finally taken the first step to learning a heading skill that would increase his versatility on the field of play to a great extent. Zachary would only need minimal effort and practice on the training pitch and within the G.O.A.T Skills simulator to totally make it his own. Then, he would have another sure-fire scoring ability in his arsenal.

"Let's continue," Zachary decided before returning his focus to the interface. Since he'd already met the requirements for learning the Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skill, he followed the same procedure and purchased it from the system shop. He soon went through the all-familiar mental conditioning procedure before achieving initial mastery in the outside-of-the-box shooting skill.

Chapter 403 Missile Launcher in Hand      "System," Zachary called out in his mind after going through the mental conditioning procedure to learn Steven Gerrard's Rocket-Launcher skill. "Bring up my current GOAT Skills data on the interface."

"DING"

"Command received," the system AI responded immediately. "The user's G.O.A.T Skills data coming up on the interface right away."

"Excellent." Zachary rubbed his hands together in anticipation. Without further ado, he focused his eyes on the contents of the translucent crystal-like display before him.

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->G.O.A.T Skills: 11

(i) ZINEDINE-PIRLO MENTAL JUJU

[1st-level: Progress: 100%]

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(ii) ZACHARY-ARROW-SHOT

[Progress: 1st level mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(iii) BEND-IT LIKE BECKHAM JUJU

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(iv) CRUYFF-TURN

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(v) RONALDINHO ELASTICO DRIBBLE

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(vi) DEAD-BALL SPECIALIST JUJU (Quasi-Passive skill

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(vii) MARSEILLE TURN

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(viii) ROBINHO STEP-OVER JUJU

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(ix) ZINEDINE TOUCH MAGIC

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(x) CR7 AERIAL FINISHING JUJU

[Progress: 10%, Initial mastery achieved]

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(xi) ROCKET-LAUNCHER STEVEN GERRARD

[Progress: 10%, Initial mastery achieved]

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"DING!"

The system notification resounded within Zachary's mind as he was still perusing through the skills.

"The system has detected that the Zachary-Arrow-Shot and Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skills match in usability and learning requirements," the AI's voice soon followed. "The system can help the user merge them into one at the cost of 2500 Juju points."

"Does the user wish to merge the two skills?"

"Yes, of course," Zachary readily agreed. "Proceed with the merging of the two skills."

He had learned Steven Gerrard's Rocket-Launcher skill in order to enhance his outside-of-the-box shooting ability. And the best way to achieve that was by merging the new technique into his already potent arrow shot.

After combining the two skills, he would have more versatility when unleashing long shots towards the goal. Be it curling shots, knuckleballs, or straight missiles — he would be able to launch them all from anywhere within the final third.



"User's command received," the AI intoned after a moment. "The system has deducted 2500 Juju points from the user's stock. Merging of the Zachary-Arrow-Shot and Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skills commencing in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0."

When the countdown reached the zero mark, an explosion went off within Zachary's mind. His thoughts turned into one jumbled mess as he experienced a splitting headache. For the next few seconds, it was as if someone was slicing his brain into pieces, and he gradually lost his senses. Fortunately, the abnormal state didn't last long, and he regained his regular faculties after a short while. He breathed in deeply to calm himself down as he listened to the system's notifications.

"Zachary-Arrow-Shot and Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skill merging complete," the system AI intoned. "The user can go ahead and name the new skill."

"Just name it Zachary-Missile-Launcher," he replied.

"Command received," the AI said.

"Naming the new skill as Zachary-Missile-Launcher."

"DING"

"Skill data now updated within the system."

No sooner had the system notification resounded in Zachary's mind than the contents of the interface experienced changes. The number of G.O.A.T skills on the list reduced from eleven to ten as the Zachary-Arrow-Shot and Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard skills faded from the panel. In their place was a single skill, which was the Zachary-Missile-Launcher. It was already at the 80% mastery mark.

"This is great."

Zachary was delighted by the results. He only had to train the skill on a daily basis for less than a month, and he would achieve 100% mastery. He would then make the skill his own and use it in competitive matches without facing any challenges.

"I'm really looking forward to the future."

Zachary smiled as he turned his focus away from the skill list. He navigated through the system menu until he reached the gift pack page showing his most-recent rewards from the system. They included a dosage of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir and another of an S-grade mental-conditioning elixir. They were his prizes for completing the 2013/14 Europa League serial mission.

On glancing at the list of the rewards, Zachary could hardly contain his excitement. His heart was already racing with anticipation as the two elixirs were the perfect cheats to enhance his abilities in the shortest time possible. As long as he consumed them, his attributes, including game intelligence and physical fitness, would rise to incredible levels. Then, he would be able to amaze the world right after transferring out of Rosenborg and joining another team.

"Should I consume them right away?" Zachary mused. "No. I can't consume the vitality-enhancing elixir now as it will negatively affect my match fitness. But the mental-conditioning elixir is another story..."

Zachary had already consumed the A-graded version of the vitality-enhancing elixir and understood its side effects well. As long as he ingested it, all his fitness attributes, including his balance and coordination, agility, strength, and stamina, would experience marked improvements. But in the short run, such rapid and almost instantaneous progress would destabilize his skill mastery and cause him to experience a dip in form. As a result, he would start putting up mediocre performances in Rosenborg's next few matches and then lose his halo as a world-class young talent. Then, what would follow would be a depreciation of his value on the transfer market as big teams like Juventus lost interest in acquiring his services.

Zachary, of course, couldn't allow such a scenario to transpire. He had already resolved not to consume the elixirs unless they had no immediate side effects on his short-term match fitness. He would wait until his schedule opened up — when he didn't have to play competitive football for about a month before ingesting the elixirs.

"System," Zachary mumbled, leaning back into the sofa. "What are the side effects of the mental-conditioning elixir? Will it negatively affect my fitness and skills in the short run after consuming it?"

"DING"

"Consuming the mental-conditioning elixir will not affect the user's match fitness and ball skills in a negative way," the AI replied. "Instead, it will boost the user's mental capabilities and allow the user a higher mastery over his body and capabilities. As such, it will allow the user to experience an all-round development of football capabilities without any negative side effects."

"Excellent," Zachary said as a soft smile outlined his face. If the mental conditioning elixir had no side effects, he would consume it first. As for the vitality-enhancing potion, he would keep it for later when he had the time to undergo targeted training to handle its adverse influence on his fitness.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Zachary's phone started vibrating on a nearby table when he was planning to consume the elixir. He extended his arm and picked it up before glancing at the screen. The next moment, his eyes flickered with a trace of excitement when he realized that the call was from Emily, his agent.

"Hello, Emily," he said after pressing the accept button and placing the phone against his ear. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is fine, Zachary," Emily replied from the other end of the line. "But first things first: Let me start by congratulating you upon winning the Europa League. And also, congratulations upon winning the Europa League golden boot."

"Thank you," Zachary replied, his heart brimming with pride. "The final against Sevilla wasn't easy. But luck was on our side, and we managed to beat them."

Emily chuckled. "I see you're as modest as ever. But honestly, how do you feel after winning the Europa League?"

Zachary laughed. "I feel great. I feel like I'm on top of the world. Every time I close my eyes, I keep on picturing various moments of the final before visualizing myself holding the Europa League trophy. It's the best feeling in the world."

"That's good to hear," Emily said. "I'm really happy for you. Let's hope you'll have more trophy moments that will light up your world in the future."

"That's also my wish," Zachary said. "And I really feel like I'll have more of such incredible moments if I continue working hard both on and off the pitch."

"You surely will," Emily agreed. "Anyways: Now that the Europa League is over, it's time to put most of our plans into motion. First, we need to submit an official request to the Rosenborg management, showing your intent to transfer out of the club. It should officially notify the club to start listening to offers from other clubs during the upcoming transfer window. What are your thoughts on this, Zachary?"

"I'm with you on this issue," Zachary replied. "I also wish to complete my transfer as soon as possible. That way, I'll be able to say my goodbyes to Rosenborg early enough and rest for a month or two before joining my new club. So, you can go ahead and submit the request immediately. But make sure that the Rosenborg management understands that I would like to be the one that chooses the club where I'll be going. I don't want them to force me to go to an undesirable club just because they wish to make some extra profit."

"Great proposition," Emily said from the other end of the line. "I'll submit the request to management today. If all goes well, Rosenborg should start official talks with the clubs interested in your services as early as next week."

"Excellent," Zachary said. "I really hope that this transfer business concludes quickly. I can then focus on honing my skills and preparing for the new season in my new club in a new city, wherever that will be."

"Don't worry," Emily said from the other end of the line. "We already have offers from many clubs. Among those, your first choice destinations - Tottenham and Juventus have already tabled money that Rosenborg can't refuse. It's now only a matter of handling a few more negotiations and agreeing on personal terms with either club before sealing the deal. So, you can even complete your transfer before the World Cup in June."

"That would be for the best," Zachary said. "I really hope that everything works out quickly. By the way, how far with my grandma's Schengen identity card?"

"Oh," Emily said. "I almost forgot about that. The ID is already out. I'll pick it up tomorrow."

"That's great then," Zachary said. "My grandma is undergoing her last check-ups this week. With the valid Schengen ID, I can easily move her to any city I'll be heading to after completing my transfer out of Rosenberg."

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Chapter 404 Once Again Consuming an Elixir      After ending the call with Emily, Zachary stood up from the sofa and stretched a bit to loosen his stiff muscles. He then moved around his apartment and locked all the windows and doors. Then, he switched off all his electronic appliances before returning to his bedroom and latching the door behind him.

The morning sunlight pouring through the big window on the opposite wall lit up his face as he settled on his bed. He blinked to adjust to the lighting in the room and summoned the system interface. And voila, the familiar crystal-like display materialized before him with a slight shimmer the next moment.

"System," he called out in his mind while glancing at the interface. "I would like to consume the S-graded mental-conditioning elixir right away."

"DING"

"Command received," the system AI replied. "Confirming... The user has a single dose of an S-graded mental-conditioning elixir stored in the system inventory. The user can select the respective cards in the inventory to summon the elixirs."

"But," the AI continued, "The user must not delay consuming the elixir by more than five seconds after its removal from the system inventory. Otherwise, its effects will disappear after it spends more time out of the inventory."

"Noted," Zachary said and glanced at the card that had just floated forward and occupied the entire crystal-like display before him. Depicted on it was an image of a small apple with the words "S-grade Vitality-Enhancing Elixir" inscribed below it. It exuded a lustrous glow as it slowly spun around in its fixed position in the middle of the glittering card.

"Let's do this," Zachary mumbled as if to himself. He acted immediately and clicked on the image of the apple on the card.

"POP!"

With a slight popping sound, the card exploded into glittering particles as a tiny apple, the size of a small lollipop, materialized from the crystal-like display. It appeared before Zachary and slowly dropped into his outstretched hand.

He didn't dare waste time as he had only a five-second window before the expiry of the elixir's effects. He wolfed it down in a single bite without bothering to savor its taste. Then, he lay back on his bed and braced himself for the immediate effects of ingesting the elixir about to assault his body.

A few seconds passed, and he slowly started to feel light-headed. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, an explosion went off in his head, causing prickling sensations to assault his brain. He tossed and turned on the bed as his eyes moistened and beads of sweat rolled down his forehead. He slowly lost his core senses of hearing, taste, sight, and smell as the immense discomfort within his mind grew to unbearable levels.

Just then, as the mental torture reached its peak, his body's instinct to protect itself kicked in. He shivered and trembled before blacking out and becoming oblivious to everything around him.

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Emily worked with all the haste she could muster after ending her call with Zachary. Within the comfort of her hotel room, she quickly started drafting an official letter addressed to Rosenberg's management.

In the letter, she briefly stated that her client, Zachary, would like to exit the club and move on to greener pastures during the upcoming transfer window. She requested the club management to listen to offers from big clubs, especially Tottenham and Juventus, in as few words as possible. Then, she ended the letter by thanking management for taking good care of her client during his tenure at Rosenberg before signing her name as Zachary's agent.

Thirty minutes later, after printing three copies of the letter and sealing them in three envelopes, she boarded a taxi to Lerkendal. She arrived at around eleven and immediately headed to Coach Johansen's office. On arriving at his door, she paused in her footsteps before knocking slightly.

"Come in," a deep voice sounded from behind the door.

After hearing the voice, Emily inhaled a long breath of air and smoothed out the invisible wrinkles on her suit. Then, she pushed the office door ajar before stepping into Coach Johansen's spacious office.

"Emily!" Coach Johansen exclaimed, glancing up from his desk. "Welcome. It's a pleasure to have you here in my office." He rose from his chair and extended his hand from across the desk.

"Thank you," Emily said, taking his hand for a firm handshake. "How's your morning, coach?"

"My morning is as great as it could be," Coach Johansen replied, releasing her hand. "Please have a seat."

"Thank you," Emily said and settled on one of the chairs in front of the coach's L-shaped office desk.

"So," Coach Johansen said after sinking back into his office chair, "To what do I owe the pleasure of having you in my office today morning?"

Emily smiled and fished a sealed envelope out of her handbag. She placed it on Coach Johansen's table and said, "I'm here to submit this."

"What is this?" Coach Johansen asked. He narrowed his eyes as he picked up the envelope.

"It's an official request asking the club management to allow my client, Zachary, to transfer out of Rosenborg during the next transfer window," she said, trying her best to maintain a professional tone. "You can read the letter for details."

"Oh!" Coach Johansen's eyes widened, but only for a moment. "Is the request coming from Zachary himself?"

"Yes." Emily nodded.

Coach Johansen sighed and leaned back into his seat. "This day has finally arrived." He tore apart the seal of the envelope and started reading the letter.

Emily waited a few seconds before saying, "Coach! You have been Zachary's coach and mentor since his academy days. That's why I'm informing you first about his decision before submitting the transfer request to Rosenborg's legal office."

"Oh! I see." Coach Johansen nodded and kept on reading the letter.

"Will you support his transfer request when it is tabled before management?" Emily asked, not minding the coach's off-handed attitude.

The coach finally looked up from the letter and locked eyes with Emily. "Of course, I will," he answered matter-of-factly. "As you said, I've been Zachary's coach from his academy days. So, as his first mentor, I really wish for him to succeed. I really hope that he joins a suitable club, where he'll continue performing well both on and off the pitch."

"Then, I'm glad," Emily said as a professional smile outlined her face. "Honestly speaking, Zachary's skills are already world-class. As a result, he has already caught the eyes of the top clubs in Europe. So, it's in the best interest of Rosenborg to sell him at this point in time."

"You don't have to convince me," Coach Johansen said. "I know that moving to a new club is the right move for Zachary at this moment. He'll be able to quickly grow as a player by constantly facing off against stronger opponents in bigger leagues."

Chapter 405 Emily, the Woman of Action "I thank you for your understanding, Coach," Emily said, standing up from her seat. "I have to go now and submit a copy of the letter to the legal office. Thank you for your time."

"Just a moment," Coach Johansen said. "What are Zachary's intentions? Where does he want to go after leaving Rosenborg?"



"His first choice is Tottenham," Emily immediately replied, as she didn't need to conceal such information. "As for his second choice, he is considering Juventus."

Coach Johansen narrowed his eyes. "I understand his second choice. Juventus will provide a suitable environment for him to grow over the next few seasons, especially with all the word-class stars on the squad. But why is his first choice destination Tottenham? Why not any other big club in Europe?"

Emily shrugged. "Maybe, he's confident in himself to help Tottenham start winning titles. Remember: He has already done so for Rosenborg and helped the team win the Europa League."

"I get his reasoning," Coach Johansen said, sighing. "But I still hope you can advise him against a move to Tottenham. Of course, I know that Zachary is a phenomenal player. I know he can even help a weak club achieve an impossible dream, like winning the Europa League. But why give himself such a difficult task if there's another better option? Why not join a bigger club where he'll be sure to win trophies season in, season out? Do you get my reasoning, Emily?"

"I do," Emily said, nodding. "I'll pass on your message to him. Or better, you can call him and talk to him yourself. I'm sure he will consider your advice."

"Then, I'll do just that and call him later today," Coach Johansen said. "And about the transfer request, you don't have to worry. Management is very open to selling Zachary to any other party outside Norway at the right price. So, be rest assured that there won't be anyone at the top blocking your request."

"That's good to know." Emily smiled, nodding. "Thank you for the info. I have to go now and submit the other letter. Have a good day, coach, and thank you again for your time."

"You're welcome," Coach Johansen said, smiling. "I wish you the best in your endeavors to process Zachary's transfer to a new club. Have a good day too."

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After leaving Coach Johansen's office at Lerkendal, Emily quickly headed to Rosenborg's offices in Brakka and submitted a copy of the transfer request to the legal department. She then took a taxi back to her hotel before picking up her key from the reception and returning to her room.

A thoughtful expression outlined her face as she sat on a chair in front of the reading table on one side of her room. She was considering her next moves to aid Zachary's smooth transfer out of Rosenborg.

"Going by Coach Johansen's hint," she mused, "The management has already come to terms with the fact that a small club, like Rosenborg, can't keep a player at Zachary's level. They are ready to sell for the right price. But I can't leave anything to chance, especially since Zachary wants this transfer processed as soon as possible. I have to take extra measures to ensure that Rosenborg starts considering offers from interested parties in the shortest time possible."

Emily's eyes flickered with a trace of resolve as she picked up her phone. She quickly searched for the number belonging to Olav Brusveen, the TV2 Sporten reporter, before dialing it.

"Hello, my dear Emily," an enthusiastic voice sounded from the other end of the line when the call connected. "You've finally remembered to return my call. What a pleasant surprise!"

"Cut the drama, Olav," Emily said. "Let's get down to business. I have a good scoop for you. It's insider info that you can't get from anywhere else at the moment."

"A piece of insider news!" Olav's tone immediately turned professional. "Let me guess. It's about Zachary."

"Bingo!" Emily said, intending to sound sarcastic. "Brilliant! You've managed to make an almost impossible guess. Now, do you want the info or not?"

"First things first," Olav responded, "What is the price for this piece of news? Will it put me in trouble?"

"The info is legit," Emily said impatiently. "And, of course, you don't have to pay anything for it. Take it as a favor from a friend."

"I see," Olav's voice sounded from the phone speaker. "For a moment, I was scared that you might want me to pay for the info with my body. Imagine my surprise."

"Olav!" Emily's voice rose an octave or two as she spoke into the phone.

"Okay, okay! Sorry, that was just a joke. Go ahead. I'm all ears now."

Emily inhaled deeply and said, "You didn't hear this from me. But you can be sure that Zachary's party submitted an official transfer request to Rosenborg's management today morning. How you use this information is up to you. But make sure you don't mention that it came from me. Otherwise, you'll never get another scoop from me."

"I understand," Olav said, his voice sounding totally professional. "You don't have to worry about me causing trouble for you. I'll say that the info was from a reliable source close to Rosenborg."

"Great," Emily said. "You can do what you have to do with the info. I'm hanging up now."

"Wait," Olav hurriedly said. "What about my request to exclusively interview Zachary? When can I interview him?"

"That's not up to me to decide," Emily replied. "I will first discuss with Zachary about the notion. If he agrees, you can conduct the interview before the end of the week."

"Okay, thank you," Olav said. "I'll be eagerly waiting for a positive response from Zachary. Have a good day and thanks for the scoop."

"You're welcome, and have a good day too," Emily intoned and ended the call.

She leaned back into her seat and exhaled a breath of relief as she'd finally crossed another task off her schedule. She was sure that the pressure on Rosenborg's management would increase after some credible news outlets published articles about Zachary's official transfer request. Then, the club's agents would be forced to act with haste when listening to offers from other parties.

"I should also send a message to the representatives of both Tottenham and Juventus concerning the transfer request," she decided after a moment of deliberation. "That should further quicken the transfer process."

Emily was a woman of action. She opened her laptop and started drafting an email addressed to the relevant parties.

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Chapter 406 Impressive Stats      Zachary awoke after seemingly a long time. His brain slowly rebooted, and he could see, hear, and smell everything around him again. A wave of emotions flooded his entire being, and his eyes moistened as his senses gradually returned to him. For the first time in his two lives, he felt like he'd never truly realized how beautiful the world was.

He felt much more alive as he pushed himself up from his bed and started walking around the bedroom. His senses were more acute than ever, and he felt like the world was a new place, probably even a utopia.

The sounds pouring into his ears were richer while all the things around him, be it the curtains, the furniture, the beddings, and the paintings, appeared to be more colorful than before. He could hardly believe his senses as even the sun rays streaming golden through the window were more lustrous than ever.

"Is this the power of the system's S-grade mental-conditioning elixir? Truly miraculous!"

Zachary was amazed beyond words could describe. His mind had powered up after he'd consumed the S-grade mental-conditioning elixir, and he could tell that his thought process had become faster and crystal clear.

In a split second, he recalled long-forgotten childhood memories from his previous life, and his sharp mind even reproduced many details from those recollections. He even had the time to ponder some of the math questions his high school teacher used to give him, and he felt he could solve them without expending much mental effort. He believed that he could quickly compute trigonometric, projectile mechanics, or geometry and vector problems as long as he had a pen and paper. His mind was that badass after consuming the S-grade mental-conditioning elixir.

But that was not all. Zachary started going through a light exercising routine in his bedroom and immediately sensed that he had better control over his body. He could even perform more complicated set combinations of fitness exercises without making any mistakes. With his mastery over his body, he would shine in great splendor if he were to switch professions and become a dancer. The upgrade of mental capabilities had really brought him a lot of unexpected bonuses.

"This intelligence upgrade is really out of this world," Zachary thought, settling back on his bed. "It'll even help me if I'm to study at a university or learn a new language in the future. But what excites me the most are the advantages the upgrade will add to my performance on the football field."

Zachary was in high spirits. Contrary to what many might believe, intelligence was an essential attribute that could contribute to the success of any footballer on the professional stage. Its development usually impacted several complex factors in sports, such as problem-solving skills during crucial moments, the formation of cognitive skills (especially spatial awareness and visual acuteness), the ability to maintain focus and composure, social behavior, and interpersonal relationships on any team. That was the power of intelligence in modern football.

At its most basic level, the game intelligence attribute encompassed a player's ability to make good decisions in a football match. Regardless of a player's speed or physical capabilities, the players with the better instincts and higher IQs usually got a head start. It was a simple truth, and that was why the best players in the world possessed extremely high game intelligence attributes. Their football IQs were exceptional, allowing their motor abilities to flourish on the field of play. They were not just great dribblers, passers, and shooters — but extraordinary geniuses with a frightening ability to make superior and immaculate decisions at a moment's notice. And that was what set them apart from other similarly physically fit players on the professional stage. That was what made them one-in-a-billion talents on the highly competitive football scene.

"Phew"

Zachary exhaled to calm his volatile emotions. His eyes flickered with a sense of anticipation, and he decided to summon the system interface.

"System," he called out mentally. "Bring up my current stats on the interface."

"DING"

"Command received," the system AI replied immediately. "User-stats data coming up on the interface."

With that said, the crystal-like display shimmered slightly before showing his primary attribute data.

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\*USER STATS

->Physical Fitness: S-

->Soccer Technique: S+

->Game Intelligence: S-

->Mental Ability and Mindset: S+

->X-Factors: S+

->G.O.A.T Skills: 10

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"This is great!"

Zachary could hardly contain his excitement. His game intelligence and mental ability stats had experienced significant changes and rose all the way to the ranks of S-grading. They had turned from his worst to become some of his best attributes in less than a day.

"System," he commanded. "Show me the breakdown of all my attributes."

"Command received," the AI intoned. "Breakdown of attribute data coming up on the screen immediately."

"Excellent."

Zachary immediately focused on the information displayed on the translucent crystal-like display.

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\*USER STATS (Breakdown)

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->Physical Fitness (Av. Rating: S-)

Balance and Coordination: S-

Agility: S-

Strength: S-

Stamina: S-

Endurance Points: 17,500/18,000 (S-)

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->Soccer Technique: (Av. Rating: S+)

Ball Control: S+

Dribbling Skills: S-

Passing Accuracy: S+

Body Control: S-

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->Game Intelligence: (Av. Rating: S-)

Spatial Awareness: S+

Tactical Knowledge: A+

Risk Assessment: S+

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->Mental Ability and Mindset: (Av. Rating: S+)

Soccer Passion: S+

Composure and Mental Strength: S+

Coachability: A+



Self-Motivation: S+

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->X-Factor (Av. Rating: S+)

Consistency Factor: S+

Luck Factor: A+

Supernormal Factor: S+

Match Winning Factor: SS

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"I have finally reached this point," Zachary mumbled, his eyes glittering with excitement. A serene sense of contentment arose within him as he had finally managed to push all his stats into the ranks of the S-grading. After learning several skills, like the Zinedine touch magic and the Robinho step-over juju, and after consuming several system elixirs, he'd at long last joined the ranks of the heavy hitters in the football world.

"I can't be content yet," Zachary immediately resolved. "I have got to keep working hard to improve my attributes until I achieve the highest level humanly possible by the system standards."

Zachary's entire being was surging with anticipation. He looked forward to the day when his attributes were so high to the point that not even the most potent of the system's elixirs could raise them any further. That would be the day he would turn into a terrifying monster — a demon feared by all his opponents on the football field.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Zachary's phone suddenly started vibrating from the bedside table. It forced him out of his dream-like state and brought him back to the present. Without further ado, he extended his arm and picked up the phone from the table before glancing at the screen.

Chapter 407 A Bolt out of the Blue      The next moment, Zachary's eyes narrowed when he noticed that the incoming call was from a number beginning with the country code +41. It was from Switzerland and quite possibly from one of the people taking care of his grandma in Zurich.

"Could my grandma's last test results already be out? Or could there be a problem?"

Various thoughts flashed through Zachary's mind as he pressed the accept button. He inhaled deeply and positioned the phone against his ear.

"Hello, Zachary," a familiar voice, speaking fluent Swahili, sounded from the other end of the line. "This is Marie, your Aunt. I'm calling from the hospital in Zurich."

"Yes, Aunt Marie," Zachary said. "Could grandma's test results already be out?"

"Not yet," Marie replied, sighing audibly. "There's another problem with grandma. She collapsed suddenly at around noon. Let me give the phone to Dr. Sanders. He'll explain everything to you."

A sickening pool of dread immediately formed in the pit of Zachary's belly. He couldn't stop his body from trembling as he placed the phone against his other ear.

"Hello, Zachary," the familiar voice of Dr. Sander's sounded from the phone speaker. "I'm sorry to be the bearer of the bad news..."

"Just go ahead and tell me what's wrong with my grandma," Zachary interrupted, sounding impatient.

"Okay," the doctor said. "Your grandma collapsed suddenly at around noon today. We immediately put her through a scan and noticed that her surgical wound had started experiencing some problems."

Around the area in her brain where we removed the tumor, there has been increased neural cell death and some neural inflammation that has affected your grandma's recovery."

"The inflammation itself has led to the accumulation of fluid in the nearby tissues, bringing about a condition we term as brain tissue edema," the doctor continued. "The swelling has also led to increased intracranial pressure — the condition that forced your grandma to collapse and sink into a coma. I know this is hard to take in. But please be assured that we're doing everything possible to save your grandma's life. She is already in the theatre, undergoing treatment as I speak now."

"She's even already in the theatre!" Zachary's head was spinning. His heart squeezed in agony, and he asked, "Why wasn't the problem with her surgical wound detected early? I left her in your rehabilitation center to prevent such issues from happening!"

"Some things are out of our hands, Zachary," the doctor said in a placating tone. "Sometimes, the body misbehaves, especially if someone is far along in their old age. Your grandma seemed fine when we conducted a check-up a week ago. But unexpectedly, the surgical wound started misbehaving in the last few days. All we can do is react accordingly and try our best to save her life."

"This is quite shocking to me." Zachary expelled a long breath of air out of his lungs before continuing. "So, she's in the theater now?"

"Yes," the doctor replied from the other end of the line.

"How long will she be there?"

"Three to five hours, depending on the magnitude of the problem."

"Okay, doctor," Zachary said, glancing at the clock. It was already three in the afternoon. "Please do your best to save my grandma. I'll also fly to Zurich right away to be with her before the end of the day."

"Okay, I wish you a safe journey," the doctor replied. "On our end, we'll also pull out all stops to save your grandma's life."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

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After ending the call, Zachary started preparing for his trip to Zurich. He first dialed Coach Johansen's number and informed him that he wouldn't be attending training the following day due to an emergency situation with his grandma.

After that, he called Camilla, Emily, and a few other friends and told them about his circumstances. Then, he worked with all the haste he could muster to pack a few clothes, eat some lunch, and take a shower. After finishing everything, he exited his apartment before boarding a taxi to the airport.

His heart raced with anxiety as he watched the buildings flashing by the taxi's window. He felt that the car wasn't moving fast enough. But even then, he didn't pressure the driver to speed up as he was well aware of the strict speeding regulations in Norway. He just hardened his resolve and closed his eyes as a way to ignore the slow passing of time.

"Sir, we're here," the driver said after what seemed like a year of driving.

"Oh!" Zachary immediately opened his eyes. He quickly paid the driver before exiting the taxi and hurrying towards the airport's entrance with his suitcase in tow.

As usual, the airport officials at Værnes were very efficient and good at their work. They helped him book an immediate flight, and thirty minutes later, he was already seated in the business class section of a plane and well on his way to Zurich.

Five and half hours later, at around 10:30 PM, the plane touched down on the runway at Zurich airport. After it came to a halt, Zachary quickly followed the other passengers down the airstair as his heart burned with worry and apprehension.

He went through the procedures at lightning-fast speed and picked up his luggage. He then ignored all the people requesting his autograph and quickly exited the airport before boarding a taxi to the hospital.

The traffic was a bit light on the streets of Zurich that late at night, and the taxi arrived at the hospital's entrance twenty minutes later. Zachary paid the fare before jumping out of the vehicle and jogging toward the waiting room of the neurosurgery operating theatre.

His frequent visits to see his grandma had already allowed him to memorize the entire hospital's layout. So, he didn't even need to ask for directions along the way. He arrived before the waiting room a few minutes later and paused at the door. He then let out a breath to calm himself before pushing the door open and glancing inside the room.

The situation in the room was not quite right, causing Zachary's mood to sink into a whirlpool of desperation and anxiety. Dr. Sanders was exchanging words with Mia, the nurse in charge of his grandma. The two medics stood in a corner, conversing at a low volume as if they didn't wish to disturb the other room occupants. But what was odd was that the only other person in the room was the sobbing Aunt Marie. She had buried her head into her hands on a seat at another end.

The whole atmosphere was gloomy and didn't sit well with Zachary. He felt light-headed as he stepped into the room with his suitcase in tow.

Dr. Sanders immediately noticed him. He ended his conversation with Mia and hurried toward him. "Zachary! You're here. Come sit down before we talk." He tried leading him by the hand towards one of the seats by the door.

Zachary resisted and remained standing in place. His 6'4 foot physique towered over the doctor as he locked eyes with him. He narrowed his eyes and said, "Dr. Sanders! Please tell me straight. Is there anything wrong with my grandma? Did the operation not go well?" He asked, praying that his assumptions were wrong.

"I'm so sorry, Zachary," Dr. Sanders replied, patting his back. "All the surgeons on duty tried their best to save your grandma. But while they were removing the accumulated fluid in her brain, she lost the battle for her life. She passed away at 6:48 PM this evening. I'm really sorry for your loss, Zachary..."

Zachary could no longer hear anything else as he stepped back in a daze and knocked his suitcase over without even realizing it. He felt weak and dizzy as impactful waves of grief assaulted his entire being. It was as if the world was collapsing around him, and he couldn't stop his eyes from moistening.

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END OF VOLUME THREE

Chapter 408 Two Months      \*\*VOLUME 4: THE ALMIGHTY BALL WIZARD\*\*

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Tuesday, July 15, 2014.

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It was another beautiful sunrise in Bukavu, DR Congo. Everything was in honeyed tones, endearing and soothing, as the flaming orb rose from the horizon in the east. It ignited the sky, causing it to burst into a bright, passionate mix of morning scarlet and yellow.

Then, slowly but steadily, a mild heat radiated around the atmosphere, wrapping Zachary in an invisible shawl of warmth. He squinted as an easy breeze picked up and caressed his face. His mind was at peace with the world as he went through a relaxing yoga routine recommended by his therapist atop a mat in front of his late grandma's farmhouse in Bukavu.

"A few more will do for today," he thought while slowly taking in a lungful of air. He flexed his lower back and pushed his head upward to look into the distance. Then, he tilted his pelvis skyward like a "cow" in an unhurried way before exhaling deeply to force his abdomen inwards. Finally, he arched his spine and brought his head and pelvis back down like a "cat" to complete another repetition of the cat-cow yoga pose.

But he didn't just stop at that. He repeated the process and held the yoga pose a few more times as beads of sweat rolled down his forehead. He only ended his routine about a dozen minutes later when all his muscle groups and mind had totally relaxed.

He stretched slightly before jumping up from the mat and looking around to appreciate the sights. But the next moment, the expanse of his late grandma's farm in its full glory gave him shivers, causing

him to recall some painful memories. His eyes glazed over, and he couldn't help but stare absentmindedly at the animals grazing in the distance.

It had been a full two months since his grandma had passed away. Those two months were the cruelest and most nerve-racking he had ever had to go through in his new life.

Two months prior, in the Zurich University Hospital's waiting room, the news of his grandma's passing had devastated him and caused him to wallow in absolute despair for a few hours. But with the help of friends and support from his always-dependable agent, Emily, he'd managed to stay sane and above the whirlpool of total self-destruction before slowly coming to terms with the tragic incident.

A day after learning of the unfortunate news, he'd regained a bit of his spirit and arranged transportation for his grandma's body back to his ancestral land in Bukavu. He had then splashed all the money he could to give her a memorable burial presided over by her favorite bishop in charge of the Catholic Cathedral in Bukavu. But even after that, he'd still felt like he hadn't done enough for his grandma.

As his grandson, he had felt inadequate and supposed he should do a bit more while sending off his grandma. So, he'd stayed in Bukavu, at his late grandma's farm, to grieve and hopefully to learn to cope with the passing of the only person he'd regarded as his sole guardian in both his lives. It had been about two months since he made that decision, but he was still living a devil-may-care life at the farm.

He had even put most of his plans, including the transfer out of Rosenborg, to a halt as he mourned the loss of the only caring parental figure he'd ever known. Fortunately, the recently concluded World Cup had forced most football club tournaments worldwide to a standstill. Even the Norwegian League, which usually commenced in March and ended late in November, had been on pause due to the most prestigious football competition between countries. Thus, his spontaneous two-month vacation in Bukavu didn't cause any breach of the terms of his contract with Rosenborg.

If he could return to Norway and begin attending Rosenborg's training within the week, he wouldn't face any penalties from the club. And that was a relief as far as he was concerned.

"Since the world cup final is over," Zachary thought, "I better get my shit together and return to Europe within the week. I must force myself to cope with the sorrow and continue on with my life. I must not blunder and mess up my football career. Otherwise, grandma will be disappointed while watching over me from heaven."

Zachary's eyes flickered with steely resolve. He slowly rolled up his yoga mat before turning around and starting off on the short trek toward the main house.

With all the money constantly pouring in from his successful football career, he had already built a big bungalow in place of the shanty excuses of dwellings he had lived in during his previous life. There were no more huts or grass thatched shacks — but a modern and elegant five-roomed house in the center of his grandma's farm.

Additionally, after concluding his grandma's burial two months ago, he'd even hired masons to build a tall perimeter wall surrounding the entire expanse of the farm to keep away encroachers and thieves. Then, after the wall was up, he'd hired three armed guards, a trained maid, and an experienced shamba boy to look after the place.

As for his relatives, like Aunt Marie and Uncle Joseph, he'd enticed them to surrender their claims to the property. After offering them a few ten dozen million Congolese Francs, they had relinquished all their rights to his grandma's farm and declared him the sole owner. In the end, he'd spent more than the actual market value of the land, but he still didn't mind. His heart was at ease after acquiring the proof of ownership of the land that held the most sentimental value in the world to him.

"Ka-chunk-creeeeeeek!"

The door creaked as Zachary entered the house and stepped into the living room. He tossed his yoga mat in the corner by the door before marching towards the kitchen.

"Boss!"

A young African lady standing over the sink exclaimed when Zachary stepped into the kitchen. Her figure, wrapped by a knee-length floral dress, was alluring, and her bearing refined. Her backside was a feast for the eyes, round and plump — and leading into a pair of long shapely legs. She was beautiful by any standards, and she was the trained maid Zachary had hired to take care of the house.

"Good morning, Davina!" Zachary greeted in French, nodding at her. He wasn't enticed by her gorgeous willowy body and pretty face. "How're you holding up? Any challenges yet?"



"Good morning, boss!" Davina responded, also in French, as her eyes glittered with excitement. "Everything is moving on well, and I'm settling in well. I haven't faced any challenges yet."

"That's good to hear," Zachary said, picking up a sealed water bottle from the fridge. "Keep working hard. I expect you to take good care of this house, even while I'm away."

"Don't worry, boss," she responded reassuringly. "I'll do exactly that. You can trust me."

"Good to know," Zachary said, smiling slightly. "But please, don't keep on calling me boss? You make me seem like a don of some Italian Mafia syndicate. Calling me by my name, Zachary, would do just fine."

"I understand, boss..." She smiled awkwardly after realizing her slip-up. "Sorry! I understand, Zachary."

"Has Patrick milked the cows yet?" Zachary asked, choosing to ignore the slip-up. "Where is he now?"

Patrick was the shamba boy he had hired to care for the animals and crops on the farm. Since he couldn't see him around, he decided to ask Davina about his whereabouts.

"He completed the milking early, before 6:30 AM," she replied. "He has now gone to the banana plantation to weed. You can find him there."

"He seems to be working hard," Zachary said, nodding. "I like that. Okay! You can continue with your work. I'll be heading back." Without waiting for a response from the young lady, he turned around and stepped out of the kitchen.

A few more strides took him through the dining room — and soon, he was in the main corridor of the house. Seconds later, he slowed down slightly before coming to a complete halt before what was supposed to be the door to his grandma's bedroom. Memories of his time with her assaulted his mind in waves, threatening to cause his eyes to moisten. But he inhaled deeply and willed the sad recollections away before continuing towards his own bedroom at the end of the corridor.

"I need to get myself together," he thought as he stepped into his bedroom. "I can't let past memories control my future. I must toughen my mind and return to training as soon as possible."

Zachary closed his bedroom door behind him and chugged down some water. He then undressed and took a quick shower before drying himself and settling on his bed.

A serene expression slowly outlined his face under the illumination of the morning sun rays streaming golden through the window. He sighed and picked up his phone before dialing Emily's number.

"I have to do this. I don't have to grieve forever."

Stern resolutions ran through his mind as the international call connected. He exhaled a lungful of air and slowly positioned the phone against his ear.

"Hello, Zachary," Emily's familiar voice, full of spirit, sounded from the other end of the line a moment later. "I was thinking of calling you, but you beat me to it. How're you?"

"I'm alright," Zachary replied. "I'm doing really okay." He felt like he'd to put an emphasis on that.

"Are you really okay?" Emily asked, sounding a bit skeptical.

"Yes, I am," Zachary said. "It has already been two months. So, it's time that I recover from this setback. In fact, I'm planning to return to Europe within a few days. I should be flying out of DR Congo either tomorrow but one or the day after that."

"That's really great." A high level of excitement was evident in Emily's voice. "But, have you completed all arrangements at home? Do you need my help with anything?"

"I don't need any help here in Congo at the moment," he replied. "I've almost organized everything. I now only need to complete two more tasks before returning to Europe."

"Great!" Emily quickly replied. "Go ahead and do what you have to do. I wish you all the best of luck in your endeavors."

"Thanks. How far with the transfer business, by the way?"

"Everything is still on pause until you return to Europe," Emily responded with a sigh. "And that reminds me. Have you decided on which club to join yet? Which side did you finally pick? Tottenham or Juventus?"

"Not yet decided," Zachary said. "As you know, my mind was not in the right place over the past two months. So, I'm still hanging in the balance."

There was a brief silence on the other end. "I understand. But maybe, you should meet the representatives of the clubs when you return to Europe. That'll help you decide faster."

"Meeting the representatives!?" Zachary mumbled, taking a few seconds to ponder the pros and cons of the deed. His eyes lit up, and he said, "I think I can do that. You can go ahead and organize the details of the meeting."

"Excellent! Which representatives do you wish to meet first? Those from Juventus or those from Tottenham?"

"I'm still slightly biased towards Tottenham," Zachary replied. "So, let's meet the Tottenham representatives first."

"Yeah! Tottenham it is," Emily confirmed. "I'll organize the meeting. But you'll have to pass by London when returning from Africa. That's where you'll meet them and hopefully seal the deal to join Tottenham. That is, of course, if the negotiations concerning personal terms go well."

"Okay, then," Zachary said. "Today is Tuesday. So, I'll most likely be traveling on Friday night. So, see you in London probably on Saturday."

"That's perfect," Emily intoned. "I'll set the meeting for Saturday afternoon. Let's say at 3:00 PM."

"Okay."

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Chapter 409 Leaving Bukavu      Zachary became busy after ending his call with Emily. He spent his morning hours packing his luggage before meeting his Congolese lawyer in charge of securing his property. Then, in the afternoon, he drove to town and linked up with Coach Samson Damata at a local hotel in Bukavu.

The Congolese coach had already requested to meet him more than a couple of times over the past two months. So, he figured that he should not disappoint him, especially since he was the person that had helped his grandma settle down in Lubumbashi.

"Welcome!" Coach Damata said in Swahili as soon as Zachary stepped before his table in the otherwise silent restaurant. "It's a pleasure to see you again, my young friend." Without waiting for Zachary to reply, the coach pulled him into a bear hug and patted his back repeatedly.

"How are you doing? Coach Damata asked, releasing Zachary.

"I'm doing okay," Zachary replied.

"And how's everything at home?" The coach asked as he stepped back and settled down on his seat.

Zachary followed suit and sunk down on an opposite seat before replying, "I've already employed people, including a local lawyer and hired guards, to secure my grandma's property. So, everything is moving smoothly."

Coach Damata smiled as he adjusted his plump figure within his seat. "It's great to hear that you're doing okay. During the times you feel sorrowful, take heart. Try to live your life, and you'll learn to live with the loss of your grandma with time."

"Thanks for the encouragement," Zachary replied, nodding. He then turned to the waitress who had just approached their table.

The waitress smiled splendidly and said, "Welcome to our humble restaurant. We have various drinks and most of the African dishes available. What will you be having?"

"Do you have bottled water?" Zachary inquired.

"Yes," the waitress replied.

"Then, give me a bottle of water. The bigger one!"

"Okay, noted." The waitress smiled before turning to Coach Damata. "What about you, sir? What will you be having?"

"Get me some African tea and a chapatti," the coach replied. "Make sure the food is hot. Okay?"

"Understood," the waitress said. "I'll bring over your orders shortly. Thanks again for choosing our restaurant." She then whirled around before stepping away to prepare the orders.

"She's really polite and enthusiastic," Coach Damata remarked when the waiter was out of earshot. "Maybe, she recognizes you."

Zachary chuckled. "Enough with the small talk," he said. "We've known each other for a long time. We aren't strangers. So, go ahead and tell me why you were very impatient to meet me."

Coach Damata forced a smile. "Actually, I'm meeting you to return a favor to an old friend. He tasked me with forwarding a proposal to you."

Zachary couldn't help but raise an eyebrow. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

Coach Damata nodded. "The old friend I'm talking about is Maxans Omari, the president of DRC's football governing body - FECOFA. He tasked me with inviting you to join the next training camp for the DRC national football team. He hopes that— No, let me rephrase that. We hope that you might join us at the start of September to prepare for the African Cup of Nations qualification matches."

"I see," Zachary said, sighing. "Thanks for inviting me. But I don't think I'll join the national team this year. I need time to refocus and straighten myself out, especially after everything I have gone through. So, can we take a rain check on this? We can consider the notion again next year — when I'm sure my mind is in the right place."

Coach Damata's eyes flickered with a trace of disappointment, but only for a moment. A soft smile outlined his face as he said, "Okay, then. We'll wait for you. But whatever you do, don't forget that DR Congo is your homeland."

"I know," Zachary replied, smiling helplessly. "I'll remember that."

It was at that moment that the waitress brought over their orders. Zachary's mind strayed as he waited for her to finish serving the drinks and dishes.

Half a year ago, he'd already positively considered the prospect of playing for DRC's national team. But after the death of his grandma, he felt like the bond between him and his homeland had shattered. He realized that he no longer felt any sense of belonging to the country and didn't want to bother with it. And since he didn't owe anything to the place, he decided against hustling with the various challenges affecting DRC's football community. He would wait and bide his time before thinking about the notion again.

Even though he was vaguely aware that a supernatural being had given him the system under the condition of helping his homeland, he had still resisted the notion of immediately joining the national team. That was because there were many ways to help his home country other than playing for the national football team.

For instance, he could build football academies, stadiums, hospitals, schools, and other facilities in his homeland. He could also set up a charity organization and start donating money to war victims from war-torn areas.

As long as he kept on earning millions by progressing his career in Europe, he would have the capacity to help his nation in many more ways than any Congolese politician or football player ever has. That was his vision. And that would be his way of completing the task placed upon his shoulders by the creepy ghost that appeared right before he received the system.

"So," Coach Damata said, breaking the silence on the table after the waiter stepped away. "Did you watch the World Cup final?"

"Yes, I did."

"It was really a surprise for Germany to win against Argentina," Coach Damata remarked. "I expected Messi to win the World Cup. But he failed again."

"Argentina tried," Zachary said after taking a sip of his water. "But the German team played better as a whole. Their teamwork was incredible, and they bested Argentina in all the crucial areas. They deserved to win."

"That's true," Coach Damata admitted. "So, when are you returning to Europe?"

"Within a couple of days, at most," Zachary said. "I'll be leaving Bukavu today evening. First, I'll fly to Kinshasa and settle a few things there. Then, I'll catch another flight from there and immediately head to Europe."

Coach Damata nodded. "The transfer rumors on the internet hint at you joining Tottenham, Juventus, Manchester United, or Chelsea. They insist that all four clubs have already made offers to Rosenborg as the first step to acquiring your services. Is that true?"

"Yes," Zachary confirmed.

"So, which team will you choose? Can you give me a hint?"

"I can't answer that," Zachary said, smiling mysteriously. "I don't want to hinder my agent's work due to my big mouth. But when I do—make a decision, you'll be among the first people to know. I'll call to give you the news."

"Then, I'll be waiting for your call," Coach Damata said. "And I wish you all the best of luck when choosing a new team."

"Thanks," Zachary said. "I also have a favor to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"If you can, please take some time to check on my grandma's property every once in a while. That'll help keep my employees in line when I'm away."

"Don't worry," the coach said. "I'll do that. You can travel to Europe and play your football at ease. I'll help supervise your employees here in DRC."

"Excellent," Zachary said, smiling. "You're a lifesaver. To thank you, I would like to gift you my Audi."

"Are you talking about the one I delivered to your late grandma's place in Lubumbashi a few years ago?"

"Yes, that's the one."

Coach Damata's eyes widened. "That's quite an expensive vehicle. Is it really okay to gift it to me?"

"Don't sweat the small stuff," Zachary said, waving his hand about him in a dismissive way. "We've known each other for years. You've even helped my grandma on several occasions. So, gifting you a car is the least I can do. Moreover, don't forget that I have a contract with Audi. They deliver me free cars almost every year. The car I'm offering you is just one of them."



Coach Damata laughed. "That's true. How could I forget that the seemingly helpless boy from less than five years ago has already turned into a world-class footballer? Zachary! I accept the car. Thank you very much. Driving such a vehicle is like a dream to me. I'll be able to stand out from among my colleagues in Lubumbashi."

"You're welcome," Zachary said, smiling. "The car is here in Bukavu. So, you can drop me off at the airport at five in the evening and then drive off in your vehicle afterward. Is that okay with you?"

"That's very okay," Coach Damata replied. "Let's just do that."

"Excellent."

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As planned, Zachary returned to his grandma's farm with Coach Damata after leaving the restaurant. He entered the house and instructed the maid to settle the coach in the living room. As for him, he hurried to the bedroom to commence his preparations for his journey that evening.

Thirty minutes later, he marched out of the house with his suitcase and dropped it in the vehicle's boot. He then called his employees over and gave them detailed instructions on how he expected them to conduct themselves while he was away. After that, he turned to Coach Damata, the plump and aged man standing a few meters away.

"The gentleman over there is Coach Samson Damata," he said to his employees. "He'll represent me when I'm away. Remember to respect him and to take his instructions seriously. Okay?"

"Okay." All the employees responded, more or less in unison.

"Good." Zachary smiled, nodding. "I'm going. So, let's meet again when I return. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," they replied.

"Coach Damata, let's go," he said, glancing at his watch. "It's almost four. I'm about to be late for my flight."

"Have you finished organizing everything? Do you have your passport and IDs with you?"

"Yes to all questions," Zachary replied. "Let's just go."

"Okay," Coach Damata replied before jumping into the driver's seat. "Let's go."

Zachary nodded and settled into the front passenger seat. He fastened his seatbelt, and off they went, driving out of his late grandma's farm before joining the murram road, heading towards the city. They had commenced their short journey to Kavumu Airport, the only airline transit hub in Bukavu.

At a distance, Zachary couldn't help but turn his head around to glance back at his grandma's farm through the vehicle's rear windshield. At that moment, he had a feeling that it would be a long time before he would return to the place.

"Are you okay?" Coach Damata asked, glancing briefly at him from the driver's seat.

"I'm okay," Zachary replied, sighing and turning his gaze away as his grandma's farm faded in the distance. "Let's just move on."

"Okay."

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Chapter 410 In Kinshasa      Zachary managed to board a FlyCAA flight from Kavumu Airport to Kinshasa that evening. After thirty minutes of flying, then a three-hour stopover in Goma, and finally another two and a half hours in the skies, he made it to the capital city of his homeland late at night at around eleven o'clock.

Complicated feelings impacted his entire being in waves as the plane descended and touched down on the runway of N'djili Airport. He sighed as memories of his last time in Kinshasa emerged from the deep confines of his memory bank and whirled around in his mind. They were all vivid recollections of the last few days of his previous life.

At that time, a lifetime ago, he had been between a rock and a hard place. His life hadn't been his own since he had owed an enormous debt to a dangerous man in Kinshasa City. That caused him to live in anxiety, day in, day out, as he tried to escape the clutches of his creditor.

In the end, he hadn't managed to outrun them, and his creditor's sycophants had drowned him in the Congo River. And that was how his sorry excuse of a hopeless life had ended in Kinshasa.

Now that he was back, he couldn't contain his emotions. He was angry at the thugs who had drowned him in the river. He was even more furious with their boss. There was even a voice deep within his heart, goading him to enact revenge on them.

With the money he possessed and his standing in Congolese society as a famous footballer, he wouldn't have to do the dirty work himself. He would only have to bribe the local police and military, and they would make the thugs disappear in no time. Their gang would vanish into thin air within days, never to be seen again. That was the power of money and status in Kinshasa, DR Congo.

"No. I can't go ahead with this. I can't get involved with those thugs again. My grandma in heaven would be disappointed."

Zachary caught himself before sinking into a whirlpool of feelings of revenge. Their cruel acts towards him had happened a lifetime ago. They had even caused his death, which allowed him to reincarnate with a badass system that totally changed the trajectory of his destiny.

So, in a way, they had helped him out, making him feel like he could ignore and forget their transgressions against him. He figured that he didn't have to lower himself to their level. Instead of fighting with local thugs, who only amounted to annoying bugs in his new life, he could spend the effort training and progressing his career. That was the way of champions.

Moreover, as the saying goes, he didn't want to battle with monsters, lest he became a monster himself. He also didn't want to stare into the abyss that was the Kinshasa crime community to avoid that very abyss from gazing back at him.

Zachary understood that if he acted against the thugs, he would bring himself trouble. He might even attract the attention of some of the high-profile criminals who had the potential to threaten his

safety. Additionally, Zachary also felt that the act would pollute his mind and twist his behavior in some way. He might slowly get used to making all the people that offended him disappear — and in the end, turn into a criminal himself.

All the most heinous criminals in the world started with superficial crimes, like simple acts of revenge. Then, they would get comfortable and level up to become vile thugs and the prime enemies of society. Zachary didn't want to risk being that way. He didn't want to turn into a disappointment that tainted his late grandma's memory. So, he forced himself to disregard the thugs that had ended his previous life.

"Honored customers!" The air hostess said in French after the plane braked and came to a complete halt on the runway. "Thank you for choosing Compagnie Africaine d'Aviation as a means of travel tonight. We have arrived in Kinshasa. Please don't forget your hand luggage as you disembark. We wish you a pleasant stay in Kinshasa, and we do—hope that you utilize our services again for travel around DRC in the future."

With that said, the doors opened, and the passengers started descending the airstair. Zachary followed the rest out of the plane before heading to the airport's arrivals section.

Just then, he realized that many gazes were on him as he walked through the airport's hallways. Many people constantly looked his way with glittering eyes while others pointed at him. They had obviously recognized him as the Congolese footballer who had just won the Europa League. If he didn't take measures, the people eyeing him would probably approach him for autographs within the next few seconds.

"Not this again," Zachary thought and quickened his steps. He didn't want to deal with the fans at that late hour. So, he quickly looked for an airport official to help him through the ordeal.

The airport official was an understanding man. After receiving a few dollars from Zachary, he quickly called security to keep the excited fans at bay. He then helped Zachary through all the necessary procedures before arranging a credible taxi cab to take him away from the airport.

Zachary thanked the airport official and gifted him a few more dollars before boarding the cab. He fastened his seatbelt, and off they went, cruising out of the airport and onto the streets of Kinshasa.

As the tall buildings and fancy mansions flashed by the vehicle's window, Zachary sighed as mixed emotions emerged within his mind again. He started recalling the tremendous mountain of inequality between the haves and have-nots that was ever present within Kinshasa.

Fancy high-end buildings, magnificent mansions, expensive sports cars, and trendy people were often-common sights in affluent neighborhoods of Kinshasa like Gombe. It was to the point that if foreigners arrived in that part of the city for the first time, their first thought would be, "I'm in one of the trendiest cities in Africa." But if they were to take a brief tour around and move deeper into Kinshasa, they would immediately experience a swift change in opinions. That was because they would see the many slums housing one of the world's most impoverished populations in the same trendy city. They would be surprised by the enormous difference in the standard of living between the two groups of people living only a matter of kilometers from each other.

"We're here," the cab driver said after a few more minutes of driving. "This is the Pullman Kinshasa Grand Hotel."

"Oh!" Zachary said and leaned forward to glance through the windshield. A splendid high-end building appeared before his vision. It was indeed the five-star hotel where he would be spending his night.

"Thank you." Zachary smiled and paid the driver. He then exited the cab and walked towards the hotel entrance with his luggage in tow.

Thirty minutes later, he was already within the confines of his hotel room, enjoying a warm shower. After coming out of the bathroom and drying himself, he settled down on the table near the balcony to enjoy his room service dinner. He finished his meal within a few minutes before settling on his bed to consider his course of action for the following day.

"She said she'll be in Kinshasa this week," he thought. "I should call her and inform her that I'm already in Kinshasa. But, I should not hold any high expectations."

Zachary had surprisingly not felt any connection with her when they met for the first time at his grandma's burial two months prior. His mind had been blank, without even an ounce of positive or negative feelings towards her when they talked. It was as if he had met a stranger who would never take a firm position within his heart. But to fulfill his promise, he still decided to meet her in Kinshasa before setting off for Europe.

"Let's do this."

He sighed and immediately picked up his phone. A serene expression outlined his face as he dialed the number he had saved in his phonebook only two months ago. But the next instant, he couldn't stop his heartbeat from quickening as the call connected. He exhaled to calm himself down and placed the phone against his ear.

"Oui, allo!" A feminine voice sounded from the other end of the line.

"Hello, I'm Zachary." He also spoke French. "We met at the burial in Bukavu two months ago. We had made plans to meet this week."

"Oh, Zachary dear!" The voice at the other end exclaimed. "It's you. I've been waiting for your call for a long time. How are you, and how's everything?"

"Everything is fine," Zachary replied, forcing his tone to remain neutral. "I'm already in Kinshasa. Can we make plans to meet tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course," the woman at the other end replied. "Where should we meet? And what time?"

"Can we meet at the Pullman Kinshasa Grand Hotel?" Zachary suggested. "We can link up at the hotel's restaurant at midday. That is if that's okay with you."

"That's okay," the woman replied. "Let's meet tomorrow at midday then. I'm really looking forward to seeing you again."

"Then, see you at midday tomorrow," Zachary said. "Goodbye, and have a goodnight."

"Goodnight to you, too, dear."

Zachary didn't say anything else. He ended the call before exhaling again. His mind wandered, and he sat motionlessly on his bed, glancing absentmindedly at the wall.

He only caught himself after a few minutes and forced himself to focus back on the present. Without further ado, he cleaned up and started preparing for bed. But deep within his mind, he was still thinking about his only meeting scheduled for the following day.

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