

## **Greatest 421**

### Chapter 421: Camilla's Considerations

#### 421 Camilla's Considerations

"Damn!" Camilla surprisingly let out an expletive. "That's my lasagna getting burnt." She freed herself from Zachary's entanglement and ran off to the kitchen with a sense of urgency. She didn't even bother to put on a single piece of clothing.

Zachary's eyes naturally followed her departing figure, his eyes drawn to the tantalizing swaying of her hips. His heart raced, and his throat seemed to go dry. He was drawn in by the 'optical nutrition' presented before him.

Then, Camilla disappeared through the kitchen door, and Zachary caught himself. He smiled awkwardly and pushed himself off the sofa. In a matter of seconds, he put on his boxers before following after her.

"Damn it! I spent hours preparing this dinner. Damn!"

The first thing Zachary's ears picked up when he stepped into the kitchen was unexpectedly a string of more curses. Camilla was in the middle of pulling out a tray of charcoal — no — a tray of what was supposed to be lasagna from the oven.

Her countenance at that moment was a tremendous contrast to how happy and sensual she had been only a minute ago. She looked totally dejected as she carefully placed the tray atop the granite kitchen counter.

Zachary's heart winced slightly. He quickly opened the kitchen window to let out the smoke and smell of burnt food before stepping toward Camilla and patting her shoulder. "Sorry," he said in a soothing tone. "Don't mind the food. We can make some more dinner later."

"Okay," Camilla said, nodding and seeming to calm down. Then, she pointed at the mess of burnt food before her and continued, "I'm sorry about all this. I really wanted to make you some good dinner. But, I messed up greatly."

"No, we messed up greatly," Zachary corrected, smiling at her. "Don't forget that it takes two to tango. And don't forget that I have already feasted on the most delicious dinner in the world." He winked and eyed her unclothed silhouette suggestively.

The corners of Camilla's full lips curled into a smile. A sparkle appeared in her emerald-green eyes, and she stepped forward and hugged Zachary. "You, bad boy!" She purred, caressing his bare back.

The sensual way she had said those three words ignited Zachary's bestial nature. In one swift motion, he swept her into his arms and rushed off to her bedroom.

In a matter of seconds, the two of them were atop Camilla's enormous bed, engaging in nature's most primal and intimate ritual. Their passion was burning hot and urgent, and they explored each other for another thirty minutes before taking a shower together. Then, they dried themselves and put on casual clothes before returning to the kitchen to think about dinner.

"We're really sloppy and negligent," Camilla said, eyeing the tray of burnt lasagna they had left sitting on the kitchen counter minutes ago. "What will we do about dinner now?"

Zachary grinned. "No need to worry. We can order home-delivered dinner online through Foodora or Wolt.com. They have efficient and fast delivery services. For instance, we can order pizza. It will arrive in less than fifteen minutes."

"Then, pizza it is," Camilla agreed. "You can go make the order online. Meanwhile, I'll pour out the burnt food, clean the tray, and prepare some fruits for us to enjoy with the pizza."

"Okay, I'll go make the orders," Zachary readily agreed. He then smiled at Camilla encouragingly before stepping out of the kitchen.

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Twenty minutes later, Zachary and Camilla sat at the table in the kitchen, enjoying their home-delivered dinner. The artificial lighting of the place cast rosy glows upon their faces as they swallowed down chunks and chunks of Italian pizza. Their smiles were bright, their eyes glittering, and their postures relaxed as they ate with relish. They were obviously enjoying their meal and each other's company.

"So," Zachary said after wolfing down another piece of pizza. "I'll be joining Juventus for the next season." He finally breached the topic that had mainly brought him to Camilla's place.

"I'm aware," Camilla replied, sighing. "I heard in the news. Congratulations. I'm really happy for you."

The way she responded made Zachary think she wasn't happy, but he didn't deliberate much about the issue. "Thanks," he replied as he locked gazes with her. "Now that I'm moving to Italy, how do we maintain our relationship? Turin is thousands of kilometers from Trondheim!"

Camilla raised a brow and planted her elbows on the table. "What exactly are you implying?"

"Is there a possibility of you moving to Turin with me?" He asked, meeting her gaze. "We could also move in together after arriving there."

During the two months Zachary spent in Bukavu, he had done some introspection. He had constantly asked himself whether it would be easy to find another incredibly gorgeous, caring, and understanding girl like Camilla. The answer was that the prospect was extremely difficult. After having bad experiences dating all kinds of 'slay queens' during his previous life, Zachary knew deep in his heart that women who were both beautiful and down-to-earth like Camilla were as rare as four-leaved clovers. You could search through dozens of cities for years without finding one. That was why Zachary had resolved to ask Camilla to follow him to Turin.

Camilla glanced at Zachary with widened eyes. She was clearly surprised and caught off guard. She breathed in deeply — as if to calm herself down and said, "But I have a job here in Trondheim. I'm under contract with Audi to work here in Norway. I can't get up one day and decide to leave. That would be unprofessional."

"Oh!" It was Zachary's turn to get caught unprepared, and his mind blanked out for a moment. He recovered a second later and was about to argue that she could work around the contract or find a way to allow her to move to Turin. But just then, a jolt went through his mind, and he stopped suddenly.

He had just realized that if Camilla really wanted to move to Turin with him, she would have jumped at the chance. If she really wanted to move in with him, she would have at least tried to think of the

loopholes in her contract with Audi. That was because there was always a way where there was a will to make things happen. That was the simple and harsh truth.

"Oh, Zachary!" Camilla said from across the table. "Don't put on that sad expression. We can still continue our relationship, even if I don't move to Turin."

"Really?" Zachary was a bit skeptical. The only way they could continue their relationship was over a long distance. And from what he had heard, agreeing to a long-distance relationship was like welcoming a pot of troubles. You might even go six months without seeing your partner, and in the end, she might cheat on you with another nearby and convenient guy.

"First listen," Camilla hurriedly said. "I know you might think that long-distance relationships usually fail. But that doesn't have to be the case on our part. We can be the exception and make things work. For instance, I could visit you often to ensure we don't fall apart. On top of chatting regularly by phone, I could also come to your matches every weekend. You won't even feel that I'm not living in Turin. I'll always be there when you need me. That's even how it has been between us here in Trondheim. I only come to your place for one or two days each week. But our relationship has stood strong for about a year. Isn't that so?"

Thinking about the issue carefully, Zachary immediately came to a realization that their relationship was as Camilla had described. While he was busy training, they could go even weeks without a meeting, but they hadn't faced any serious problems in their relationship.

"You do have a point," Zachary agreed after deliberating for a moment. "Then, if you're okay with it, we can continue our relationship over a long distance."

"Of course, I'm okay with it," Camilla said, beaming. "I'm the one who brought up the idea. Let's continue with dinner and forget the sad stuff."

"Okay."

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The following morning, just as the day dawned crisp and clear, Camilla said goodbye to Zachary. She kissed him, then escorted him down the stairs before watching him drive away in his Audi R8 GT.

Just then, memories of their previous night's conversation played within her mind, causing her expression to flicker with a trace of regret. She sighed and shook her head as she watched Zachary's car disappear around a corner in the distance.

Honestly, she had been tempted to accept his offer. A large part of her had wanted to throw all caution to the wind and follow him to Turin. But after considering a few issues, she had exerted all her will to say no to him.

First, there was the issue of him never showing too much attachment to her. If she didn't try to call him more often, he might even spend weeks without talking to her. That begged the question of whether he was really into her.

Then, there was also the matter of Zachary never telling her about his plans or hardships. He would always first talk to his beautiful agent before informing her of anything important. And that begged the question of whether he really saw her as his potential life partner or just a trial-and-error girlfriend.

After considering all that and a few more issues, Camilla had hardened herself and politely rejected his invitation to Turin. She had decided to remain cautious and see how their relationship could persevere through the test of a long distance. Then, she would confirm whether they were meant to be before encouraging the next step of their relationship.

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Chapter 422: Directives from the New Club  
Zachary returned to his apartment in Stjødalsveien after leaving Camilla's place. He wasn't in the best of moods as he changed into a fresh set of training clothes and settled into his morning yoga routine.

He couldn't seem to focus as thoughts of his conversation with Camilla continued revolving within his mind. He even mistimed the execution of his yoga poses a couple of times due to his recurring episodes of absentmindedness.

While driving back from Camilla's place, he had done some introspection and realized that he'd handled the whole conversation with her in an amateurish way. He did not ask her about her work with Audi or if

she liked the prospect of living in Italy. He just went ahead and dived in to invite her to move to Turin with him. Moreover, that was after not informing her beforehand about his decision to join Juventus. What the hell was up with that?

Zachary felt—like banging his head on the nearby table as he carefully thought things through. Was she supposed to drop everything and follow after him, the certain someone who was only offering her an uncertain future? Who was he to her? She was not even his official wife. How sure could she be that he wouldn't leave her for some bimbo after a few months? Zachary slowly came to see her side of things as he calmed down. He sighed and continued going through his yoga practice, albeit with more intensity.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Suddenly, his phone started vibrating from a nearby table. He paused his yoga practice and stepped forward to pick it up. On glancing at the screen, his heart started racing with anticipation. He accepted the call and placed the phone against his ear.

"Hello, Zachary," Emily's bubbly voice sounded from the other end of the line the next instant. "Good morning?"

"Good morning to you too," Zachary answered, his mood immediately improving. "As always, it's a pleasure to hear from you. What's new? Could it be that the contract is ready for signing?"

Emily chuckled. "You guessed right. Together with the attorneys representing Juventus, we worked almost round the clock since yesterday morning. We polished the contract and produced a final draft just today. It's ready for signing."

A smile outlined Zachary's face as he sat cross-legged on the yoga mat. He switched the phone to his other ear and said, "Thanks for the hard work."

"You're welcome," Emily replied.

"When am I needed to sign the contract?"

"Tomorrow," Emily intoned. "Have you forgotten that it will be a Monday? It's the day we agreed that you would travel to Turin for the official signing ceremony."

"Of course, I remember," Zachary said. "I was merely confirming."

"There's an issue you should know before tomorrow," Emily said, her tone suddenly turning solemn.

"Speak away. I'm all ears."

"Yesterday," Emily said, "I spoke with Mr. Fabio Paratici about your wish to officially report for duty at Juventus at the end of August. First, I explained to him that you wanted to use the month before the start of the Serie A to shift and settle down in Turin. Then, I elaborated on how you needed time to train individually to regain your fitness, especially after spending two months out of action. I was quite persuasive as I wanted Juventus to exempt you from playing the pre-season friendlies. Guess what his response was."

Zachary's heart skipped a beat. "Did he refuse?"

"Exactly," Emily confirmed. "Fabio is a tough man. He totally refused to hear me out. First, the man quoted how Juventus would start paying you a weekly wage of roughly 160,000 Euros per week after you signed the contract. Then, he went on and on about how it would be unfair to the club if you couldn't report for duty as soon as possible. His words: you would be pocketing money without doing any work, which was unacceptable at a top European Club like Juventus."

"Mr. Fabio also hinted about the attitude of the new coach - Massimiliano Allegri," Emily continued. "Coach Allegri wants all his players, including those that participated in the World Cup, to feature in Juventus' pre-season program. He wants to use the pre-season friendlies to foster chemistry within the team before the commencement of the Serie A season. So, as you can see, he won't tolerate any player missing the pre-season tour. That is unless a player is injured or has another significant reason that prevents him from playing in an intensive official match."

Zachary's mood sank on hearing all that. He had just consumed the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir and needed about a month to train intensively and escape its side effects. So, if he participated in the pre-season tour, he might perform below par and disappoint his new club and bosses.

"So, when does Juventus want me to report for duty in Turin?" He asked after taking in a deep breath.

"The sporting director said the maximum they can allow is ten days for you to shift and settle down in Turin," Emily replied. "That means you don't have to feature in Juventus' first two friendlies against A.C.D. Lucento and Cesena. But come 1st August, you'll have to head out with the rest of the Juventus team for the pre-season tour of Asia and Australia. That's a must for all Juventus players that aren't on injury spells."

"And, of course, we can't claim that you are injured so that you can miss the pre-season tour," Emily warned. "That's because the club will conduct a thorough medical examination before the signing ceremony tomorrow. The physicians will be able to ascertain the condition of your body with almost a hundred percent accuracy. You can't get away with the excuse of being injured."

"I see," Zachary said, expelling another lungful of air. "In that case, I'll go along with what they want and join their pre-season tour of Asia and Australia. I don't want my absence to put me at loggerheads with my soon-to-be bosses."

"Excellent choice, Zachary," Emily yelled from the other end of the line. "Before making the call, I was fretting over the fact that you might continue insisting on missing the pre-season tour. But now, it seems that I was worried for nothing."

"Of course, I wouldn't go against the directives of my new coach," Zachary said matter-of-factly. "That would be a gateway to hell, especially at a new club. I have a feeling that the coach would even choose to bench me for weeks or months if I insisted on missing the pre-season tour."

Although Zachary said that, he had already thought things through. He had realized that Juventus' pre-season tour would consist of matches against very low-tier teams in Asia and Australia. As a Juventus player, he would only face off against footballers less skilled than even those playing for the teams at the bottom of the Norwegian League. Thus, Zachary didn't need to fear the pre-season matches. That was because he could still put up modest displays against such players, even with his recently-declined technique attributes.



"I'm glad that you understand the importance of making a good first impression," Emily said after a moment. "If you maintain that attitude, you won't face any major problems while trying to fit into the Juventus team."

"Hopefully," Zachary intoned. "So, at what time should I arrive in Turin tomorrow?"

"As early as possible," Emily replied immediately. "It's best that you set off from Trondheim before five in the morning. That will allow you to arrive in Turin before 11:00 AM. I can even wait for you at the airport if you plan on following that exact schedule."

"You speak as if you're already in Turin," Zachary remarked. "Could that be the case?"

"Of course, I'm already in Turin," Emily answered. "I arrived here yesterday morning. That aside, can you manage to set off from Trondheim before 5:00 AM tomorrow?"

"Fine," Zachary confirmed. "I will wake up early and set off before five in the morning."

"That's perfect, then," Emily said. "I'll book a 4:30 AM flight for you. You only need to prepare and, at the latest, be at the airport by 4:00 AM."

"Don't worry," Zachary assured. "I'll be there on time."

"One more thing," Emily hurriedly said. "I'm going to e-mail you a copy of the final draft of the contract. Please read through it and note down all the terms that might be confusing or not to your liking. We can go through them tomorrow before we head to the Juventus grounds for the medical and the signing ceremony."

"Understood," Zachary replied. "I'll read through it before the end of today."

"Excellent," Emily cheered from the other end of the line. "I have to go now. Goodbye. See you in Turin tomorrow."

"See you in Turin tomorrow," Zachary replied and ended the call.

He placed the phone on the table and glanced at the wall absentmindedly. Then, his expression flickered a couple of times before blossoming into a smile.

He was both anxious and excited. Although he was yet to regain his peak fitness, he was still eagerly looking forward to commencing his life at his new club.

He hungered for the thrill of competing against other phenomenal talents playing for top teams partaking in the Serie A and the Champions League. He yearned to impress and leave his mark on the world football scene. And from the bottom of his heart, he desired to make his grandma in heaven proud of his future performances so that she would sing happily together with the angels whenever she saw him play.

Of course, he was a bit nervous since he had to learn a new language and compete against world-class teammates before settling down and cementing his place at Juventus. But that couldn't dampen his mood.

With his recently improved fitness, he was sure that he would shine as long as he dealt with the side effects of the vitality-enhancing elixir in a proper manner. He just had to bide his time and train intensively while getting through the tricky period of the pre-season. Then, his time would come when he regained his peak fitness. His time would come just when the Serie A was about to commence at the end of August. That was the source of his confidence.

Chapter 423: On the Eve of the Journey to Turin Zachary completed his routine morning yoga practice soon after ending his call with Emily. He took a shower and went about the task of packing his luggage as quickly as possible.

He was meticulous while loading and arranging all his vital necessities, including his clothes, shoes, and documents, into his suitcases. He didn't forget anything important as he wanted to move once and for all to Turin.

He didn't wish to continue journeying back and forth between Trondheim and Turin in order to move more of his stuff. That would waste a lot of time, which he could better utilize to train and elevate his ball skills back to the peak before the commencement of the Serie A.

As for his other bulky belongings like furniture, electrical gadgets, and kitchenware, he could not move them all the way to Italy. He had already resolved to either discard them or give them away. He would seek the help of Ryan Bellmore, Emily's short friend, who would distribute them to people or green shops that needed them. And, of course, when he arrived in Turin, he would buy new items.

Minutes quickly turned into hours as Zachary worked with haste to organize his luggage. He finished packing everything at around 2:30 PM and then arranged his four suitcases by the door. Then he took another shower before settling on his kitchen table to enjoy some home-delivered lunch.

After eating, he tossed the dirty dishes into the dishwasher before exiting his apartment and driving off to the NF Academy grounds. He was heading to the youth football training center to complete two tasks.

Firstly, he wanted to meet Coach Bjørn Peters. He planned to request him to move to Italy with him so that he could continue being his fitness trainer. Secondly, he wished to fulfill a promise by delivering the jersey he had worn during the Europa League final to a young man called Joshua Simonsen at the academy.

Traffic was light on the roads that Sunday afternoon, allowing Zachary to travel from his apartment to the academy in only twenty minutes. He parked his car in one of the parking spaces and headed to the fitness trainer's office.

On arriving and entering the cramped office, he found Coach Bjørn Peters seated behind his desk, working on who knows what. His muscular physique was hunched over his laptop as he typed away at an impressive speed.

"Zachary," the fitness coach exclaimed, glancing up after a few seconds. "You're finally here! I thought that we had agreed to meet at 2:00 PM. It's now coming to 3:30 PM. What happened?"

"Sorry, coach," Zachary said, smiling. "The packing of my bags was a harder task than I expected. Even though I worked with haste, I could only manage to finish cramming everything into my suitcases at around 2:30 PM."

"Oh!" Coach Bjørn Peters nodded. "So, everything is ready. When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow, early in the morning," Zachary replied, settling down in one of the seats in front of the coach's desk. "I should be setting off before five in the morning."

"This is really happening," Coach Bjørn Peters said with a grin. "You're about to start playing for Juventus, one of the biggest clubs in Europe. How do you feel?"

"Honestly," Zachary replied, "I'm a bit anxious."

"You don't have to be," the fitness trainer assured. "Life at any club is the same. As long as you're talented and hardworking, you'll find it easy to fit into any team, including Juventus."

"Thanks for your encouragement, coach," Zachary said humbly. "Coach! I'm here to talk to you about something else."

The coach leaned back into his chair and said, "Go on. I'm listening."

Zachary nodded and asked, "Coach! How do you feel about living in Italy? How do you feel about moving to Turin?"

Coach Bjørn Peters raised a brow. "Is this an invitation? Are you inviting me to Italy to continue working as your fitness trainer?"

"Yes, it is an invitation," Zachary confirmed, nodding. "I sincerely wish to invite you to Italy so that you can continue working as my fitness trainer. We could even negotiate a new salary structure if you are to agree to my proposition."

Coach Bjørn Peters smiled. "Honestly, I wish to continue working as your fitness trainer," he said. "However, one tiny issue is holding me back from immediately accepting your invite."

Zachary's eyes narrowed slightly. "What is it?"

Coach Bjørn Peters sighed in response and fired back a question. "Zachary! Is there a possibility of you hiring a professional chef before moving to Turin?"

Zachary was stunned by the question. He didn't immediately respond as he tried to figure out why Coach Bjørn Peters had suddenly switched the topic.

"Well?" The fitness trainer pressed before Zachary could come up with an answer. "Do you wish to hire a professional chef to help you arrange your meals? Now that you're joining a top European club like Juventus, you'll have to maintain a strict diet. A professional chef would do wonders and help you achieve that."

"I think the idea is good," Zachary finally replied. "I would like to hire a professional chef or, better yet, a nutritionist to arrange my diet. That will be good for my training. But why are you asking me this? Do you have a candidate in mind?"

"Excellent guess," the fitness trainer intoned, a grin outlining his face. "My wife is both a professional chef and a certified dietitian. If you could employ her, she would do a good job organizing your diet. Trust me; she's good at what she does. She is currently working as the head chef at the Clarion Hotel."

Zachary chuckled. "You sound like an insurance salesman. But that aside, you want me to employ her so she can move with you to Italy?"

"That's my wish," the fitness trainer said, nodding.

"That's easy then," Zachary said, smiling. "If she's as good as you say, I'll surely hire her. I will tell Emily to contact you with details of the terms of her employment contract."

"Excellent! Thank you, Zachary," the fitness trainer gave a small cheer. "I'm very excited to continue working as your fitness trainer even after you move to Turin. Thanks for giving my wife and me this opportunity."

"You're welcome," Zachary said, a bit taken aback by the coach's enthusiasm. He had previously thought he would need to push a bit more to convince the fitness trainer to follow him to Turin. But surprisingly, the coach had jumped at the chance after he promised to hire the wife, who was surprisingly a skilled chef and certified dietitian.

Zachary couldn't stop smiling on the inside. He felt like he had hit the jackpot since he had only invited one professional but obtained two without the need to negotiate the terms defining their employment first. It was like the classic case of buy one but get two. What a good bargain that was.

"When do you want us in Turin?" Coach Bjørn Peters asked.

"As soon as possible," Zachary said. "As soon as Emily contacts you, you can begin negotiating the contract terms concerning your employment. Then, as soon as you come to an understanding with our party, you move to Turin without further delay. I really hope that you'll be available to help me regain my top match fitness before the start of the Serie A season."

"Then, I'll be eagerly waiting for Emily's call," the coach said. "Immediately after receiving our contracts from her, we'll work with haste to read through them and understand them. And if everything is to our liking, we'll sign them to seal our business relationship. I can then travel to Turin and start helping you regain peak match fitness.

"Excellent," Zachary intoned, standing up. "This marks the extension of our relationship as coach and player. Thanks for agreeing to my offer, coach." He extended his arm from across the table.

"You're welcome." Coach Bjørn Peters stood up and took his hand for a firm handshake. And that marked the start of a solid business relationship that would take them places in the future.

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After leaving Coach Bjørn Peters' office, Zachary linked up with Joshua Simonsen, the young fan he'd promised his jersey. They met in a concealed location near the academy's parking lot, where Zachary offered the young footballer the jersey he'd worn during the Europa League final.

"As promised," Zachary said, handing him the black jersey, "Here is the signed jersey. It's the exact one I put on during the Europa League final."

"Thanks a lot," Joshua Simonsen mumbled incoherently, his expression constantly flickering with various emotions. Then, before Zachary could respond, he yelled at the top of his lungs like a mad man, "Oh, my God. I have obtained Zachary's Europa-League-winning jersey. Who can match my awesomeness from now on?" His yelling was so loud, and it immediately attracted a crowd of academy players.

Those academy players soon swarmed around Zachary, asking him this and that with glittering eyes. And since he couldn't simply ignore them, he spent roughly an hour answering their endless questions before leaving the academy in his R8 GT.

Thirty minutes later, he met Camilla at a cafe in City Syd. The two of them had an early dinner together at a corner table as Zachary informed her about his intent to leave Trondheim and head to Turin the following morning.

Camilla, of course, was as understanding as ever. She wished him the best of luck in the new city of Turin and made him promise to call her often. Then, after the meal, she sent him off with a goodbye kiss before turning and walking away towards her car.

Zachary continued watching her all the time until she entered her car and waved him goodbye. He sighed as she drove off into the distance, his mind recalling all their intimate moments together. At that moment, he understood that he adored her greatly and really hoped their relationship could continue going strong even after he moved to Turin.

Chapter 424: Language Barrier and Signing CeremonyMonday, July 21, 2014.

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As planned, Zachary arrived in Turin at around ten in the morning on that Monday. After settling down and placing his luggage in a hotel room, he got busy by first meeting Emily to discuss the details of the contract. Then, after the meeting, the two of them traveled together to the Juventus Training Center, colloquially known as "the Vinovo" by the Turin football community.

There, at the Vinovo, proceedings moved forward fast, and Zachary underwent a rigorous medical conducted by the highly skilled and experienced physicians of Juventus' physiotherapy center. Without

any surprises popping up, he passed with flying colors, thus overcoming the final hurdle that could have barred his way from becoming a Juventus player.

"I will go meet the Juventus attorneys to sort out the final contract issues that we discussed," Emily said after they left the physiotherapy center. "We must polish the document before the signing ceremony at 3:00 PM. In the meantime, you can head to the canteen for lunch. Do you remember where it is? I showed it to you right after we entered the training center."

"I think I remember," Zachary replied, sounding totally not confident. Inwardly, he was ashamed as he had ignored most of Emily's introductory explanation about the facilities in the training facility due to his excitement. He had only managed to engrave the locations of the training turfs and the gyms into his mind while reflexively choosing to ignore everything else.

Emily raised a brow and tilted her head to glance up at him. "You think, or you know? Which one is it?"

Zachary smiled awkwardly in response.

Emily shook her head and exclaimed, "Footballers! How can they easily forget directions when they can make snap decisions and find their teammates at a moment's notice during intensive matches? Truly baffling!" She sighed before saying, "Come; follow me. I'll take you to the canteen before heading off to the meeting with the attorneys. I don't want you losing your way, especially since you don't speak Italian."

"Thanks," Zachary mumbled.

With Emily leading the way, they arrived at the entrance of the canteen within five minutes. Zachary said his goodbyes to her and immediately walked through the doorway.

On entering the spacious and fancy canteen, Zachary surprisingly ran into two familiar club officials, who were also about to have lunch. One was Fabio Paratici, the sporting director he had met in London. The other was his soon-to-be coach, Massimiliano Allegri, the man he'd seen several times on television during his previous life.



"Zachary!" Mr. Fabio Paratici was the first to call out to him in English. "It's great to see you again, my young friend. We're excited to have you here. Welcome to Juventus." He extended his hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Paratici," Zachary replied, taking the hand for a firm handshake. "It's really a pleasure to arrive here in Turin. I'm looking forward to life at this club."

Mr. Paratici chuckled and turned to the recently appointed Juventus coach beside him. "Let me take the opportunity to introduce you to this gentleman here. He's Massimiliano Allegri, and hopefully, he'll be your coach for many years."

Zachary immediately inclined his head to observe the famous coach he had heard so much about during his previous life. The first impression that the coach gave to Zachary was that he was an easy-going and friendly person. There seemed to be a warm air swirling around him as he smiled and enthusiastically extended his hand to Zachary.

"Welcome to Juventus," the coach said, his speech sounding strained. He had struggled to pronounce the three words — a tell-tale sign that he had little or almost no English language knowledge. But that didn't dampen his presence as he waited for Zachary to take his hand. He was obviously a confident man who couldn't allow a few shortcomings to affect his bearing.

"Thank you, Coach Allegri," Zachary replied in English, taking the gentleman's hand. "It's a pleasure meeting you, and I look forward to working with you."

Zachary then stepped back and waited for Mr. Paratici to translate his English words for the benefit of the Italian coach. In the meantime, his mind quickly formed an impression of Massimiliano Allegri - the famous coach from his previous life who replaced Antonio Conte and guided Juventus to win many Serie A, Coppa Italia, and Supercoppa Italiana titles.

Although it was their first meeting, Zachary felt that Massimiliano Allegri was a coach he could work with to elevate his career to incredible heights. Allegri seemed like an empathetic and spirited man on the first impression. He even repeatedly tried to strike up a friendly conversation with Zachary after their group of three settled at one of the tables to enjoy their meals.

But alas, Zachary couldn't understand whatever he was saying since he was totally ignorant as far as the Italian language was concerned. And, of course, Fabio Paratici couldn't keep functioning as his translator

as he soon got busy on the phone, doing whatever sporting directors usually did. As a result, the two men who couldn't understand each other could only halt their sorry efforts to hold a meaningful conversation. They continued enjoying their meals quietly while waiting for Mr. Paratici to end his phone call.

In the meantime, Zachary started making some resolutions within his mind as he enjoyed his last lunch before signing the contract to seal his move to Juventus. After settling in Turin, he vowed to spare time and join a language school that could allow him to learn Italian as soon as possible. Secondly, Zachary resolved to purchase a good house with spacious floor space immediately after receiving the first 15 million Euros of his signing bonus money. He wanted a place of his own as he didn't wish to continue residing in a hotel room.

"You guys are very quiet," Mr. Paratici remarked, interrupting Zachary's thought process. He had just completed his phone conversation. "It seems the language barrier issue is hindering you from communicating."

"That's the case," Zachary confirmed.

"You should learn Italian as soon as possible," Mr. Paratici advised. "Otherwise, you'll find it a challenging task to settle down and live comfortably here. You won't even be able to communicate to most of your teammates and even your coach."

"I know," Zachary said. "I'll join the language school as soon as possible."

Mr. Paratici nodded and switched the topic. "So, I looked at the results of your medical. They are quite impressive. It seems you are ready to head out with the rest of the team on the tour of Asia and Australia."

"I'm not yet at a hundred percent match-fitness condition, especially since I've been out of action for two months," Zachary confessed. "But I'll work extra hard over the next few days to prepare for the tour."

"Good," Mr. Paratici said, nodding. "Playing the pre-season matches will help you regain your peak fitness faster. You should look forward to the tour."

"I understand. I'll be ready for the tour," Zachary said and returned his focus to his food.

A period of silence soon descended at the table as the three men concentrated on wolfing down their Italian dishes. They completed their meal in minutes and exchanged pleasantries before parting and going their own ways.

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By 3:00 PM on that sunny Monday afternoon in Turin, Zachary was already in one of the conference rooms of the Juventus headquarters in Corso Galileo Ferraris, ready to sign the contract to join the Italian club. He was all smiles as he settled in the seat of honor positioned in-between the spots occupied by Fabio Paratici and Massimiliano Allegri, his soon-to-be bosses.

Behind Zachary's seat stood Emily, his agent acting as his interpreter for the signing ceremony. She had donned an ocean blue lady's suit that emphasized her lithe figure and brought out the color of her eyes. She looked all professional with her hair tied in a ponytail at the top of her head.

Zachary felt more confident with her by his side. As always, Emily was the ever-caring agent and had volunteered to take up the interpreter role since she was fluent in Italian, French, and English. That allowed Zachary to calm down as Emily could always chip in to inform him about the crucial points of all the discussions around him during the signing ceremony. Moreover, by staying close to Zachary, she could also watch out for any pitfalls that the attorneys of Juventus could add to the contract during the last minutes before the signing ceremony.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," the lady, acting as the master of ceremonies, said to break the low murmuring around the conference room. "For Zachary Bemba's benefit, we will hold this ceremony in mostly English. But you can rely on your translation software to continue following the proceedings. Now to the main event. It's a good day for Juventus as we welcome Zachary Bemba, the 19-year-old football phenomenon, to this glorious club of Turin..."

"Clap! Clap! Clap..."

No sooner had the words come out of her mouth than a round of applause resounded around the conference room. The club officials in attendance clapped their hands for about a minute to welcome Zachary to the club without caring about procedures or etiquette. Some even whistled and yelled at the top of their voices, clearly forgetting the fact they were in a meeting chaired by their bosses.

Zachary was quite stunned by their enthusiasm as he watched on from the seat of honor. But he maintained his composure and continued smiling while waiting for the master of ceremonies to resume her speech.

"Well, it seems everyone here is excited and eagerly waiting to see Zachary Bemba in the Juventus colors," the lady master of ceremonies smiled and continued after the clapping had died down. "So, without further ado, let the contract signing begin."

With that said, the club attorneys brought the contract documents forward. They placed a copy each before Zachary, Massimiliano Allegri, and Fabio Paratici and motioned for them to go ahead and sign the papers.

Of course, the signing was without issues. Zachary put pen on paper on each page to confirm his move to Juventus. Then, he shook hands with Fabio Paratici, the sporting director, and Massimiliano Allegri, his new coach, to monumentalize the deal. Meanwhile, the cameras clicked and flashed to record the memorable moment in football history when Zachary joined Juventus.

Chapter 425: The Excitement of the Juventus Fans Paolo Favero was a staunch fan of Juventus from the inside out. He had supported the Turin-based club since childhood when players like Zinedine Zidane and Alessandro Del Piero were in their prime. He had also witnessed the fall of Juventus in 2006 due to the Calciopoli Scandal.

During the investigations, the Juventus managing director at the time was found guilty of having an exclusive relationship with referee designations, which allowed the director to exert his influence while handpicking referees for the matches. The Juventus club director also faced accusations of wielding his power over players and other clubs. And that was what specifically sealed the club's relegation to the lower Serie B division in 2006.

At that time, Paolo's mood had been at the lowest it had ever been due to the fall of Juventus. The sorrow had been too much for him, and he had been about to retire from supporting football. But luckily for him, the club had turned over a new leaf and quickly made many crucial reshuffles before he could follow through with the decision.

Those reshuffles worked wonders in a short time, and the club managed to rise from the ashes in a short period. Juventus returned to the top Serie A league after a single season before claiming the 3rd spot and qualifying for the Champions League. Things worked out well starting from then, and Juventus began dominating Italian football again for the next couple of seasons.

But all that couldn't excite Paolo. His belief in his club was not as firm as before, as he feared the scandal would happen again. But in 2010, Juventus put his heart at ease again by appointing the revolutionary Andrea Agnelli as the chairman and his far-sighted right-hand man, Fabio Paratici, as the sporting director.

The two men worked their magic in a short period. They hired the tactical and passionate coach, Antonio Conte, and also brought in a fresh stock of talented players, like Andrea Pirlo and Paul Pogba — who helped the club to reclaim its position at the top of the Scudetto. But that was not the end of the pleasant surprises they could bring to the passionate Juventus fans.

On that Monday in July 2014, they had again executed their magic and finalized the signing of Zachary Bamba, the phenomenal 19-year-old playmaker who had destroyed Juventus the previous season. They had announced the news on the Juventus website, causing staunch Juventus fanatics like Paolo Favero to experience waves of unforgettable bliss. It was as if they had experienced the most enjoyable wet dream.

"Oh, my God, Jesus on a wooden bicycle!" Paolo Favero exclaimed as he saw the headline about Zachary Bamba. "At long last, the club has finalized this move. What a pleasant surprise!"

As a staunch fan of the Old Lady, Paolo Favero couldn't keep a lead on the excitement bubbling in his heart while reading through the article on his computer. He leaned back in his comfy chair and pinched his arm to confirm that he wasn't dreaming. Then, he focused back on his laptop's screen and re-read the piece again to ascertain that it was indeed the truth.

"What has got you grinning from ear to ear, dear?" His wife, who had settled on a nearby sofa to watch a soap opera, asked suddenly. "Look at yourself. Your smile resembles that of a dead cow! You're even almost jumping up from that chair! Did you win the lottery?"

After hearing the question, Paolo's grin widened even further, and he couldn't help but let out a hearty chuckle the next second. He laughed so hard that his shoulders quivered and trembled. His eyes misted as his mood shot through his apartment's roof and soared into the night skies of Turin.

"Well, dear!" his wife pressed again, her eyes filled with worry. "What's up? Why are you so happy today?"

Paolo exerted all his willpower to calm himself down before turning to face his beautiful wife. He breathed in deeply before saying, "He has finally arrived."

Paolo's wife's eyes blanked out for a moment in confusion. "He has arrived!" She mumbled, glancing at her husband with a strange expression. "Who has arrived? The Messiah? Jesus or his mother?"

"Eh!" It was Paolo's turn to blank out for the moment. Then, his expression also turned strange, and he asked, "Dear! Why is it that you're always thinking about religion and so on? Don't you ever think about anything else?"

"Well, I thought that only the return of the Messiah could make you that excited," the wife remarked. "But it seems I'm wrong. So, tell me what has made you that excited. Stop being mysterious."

Paolo grinned again and locked eyes with his wife. "The man himself has arrived in Turin today. He has already gone through the medical and signed the contract. The club will unveil him tomorrow at the Juventus stadium. Oh, my god! Don't wake me up if I'm dreaming." He spoke at the pace of a machine gun. He could even give the speedy rapper - Busta Rhymes a run for his money with his fast flow in the Italian language.

"Oh, so this is about football!" His wife sighed, clearly losing interest. "Dear! You should focus less on football and concentrate on..."

Paolo's wife stopped mid-sentence as her two teenage twin sons came rushing into the living room. They seemed out of breath as they raced past the sofas toward their dad. "Boys!" She yelled. "What are you two doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in the study working on your holiday assignments?"

"Ah, mom!" One of the twins said, pausing in his step and smiling awkwardly. "We'll finish the assignments later. Let's first confirm something with dad." Without waiting for their mom to respond, they rushed forward and surrounded their sorry example of a father.

"Dad!" One of the twins shouted, his eyes glittering. "Has he really arrived? Has he really signed the contract?"

Their father nodded, still grinning like a Cheshire cat. "He completed the medical today morning and signed the contract in the afternoon. As we speak, he's officially already a Juventus player. He will play for us next season."

"Oh, my God! He's finally here." The twin boys gave a small cheer as their expressions turned into mirror images of that outlining their father's face.

Paolo's wife creased a brow and suddenly chipped in, "Congratulations to you all. You've piqued my curiosity. Who are you guys talking about?"

"Who else?" The twins fired back in unison, sounding impatient. "Of course, it's the one and only Zachary Bemba. He's the ball wizard Juventus has been chasing for the past three months."

"Damn!" Their mother exclaimed. "How are you two so in sync when replying? You guys must have practiced that a couple of times."

The boys shrugged in response and ignored their mother. They once again returned their focus to their dad. "What's his shirt number?" One of the twins hurriedly asked.

"Well," the dad said, "They haven't announced the shirt number yet. The club officials said they would reveal it during the unveiling ceremony at the Juventus stadium tomorrow."

"The unveiling ceremony is tomorrow?" Another twin asked, his eyes flickering with anticipation.

"Yes, it is."

"Can we go?" The twins asked in unison that time around. "Please, can we go?"

"That's a big NO," their mother was the first to reply. "You're not going anywhere before completing your holiday assignments."

"Dad!" The boys ignored their mother and glanced at their father with puppy eyes.

Paolo Favero sighed and glanced at his wife. "Dear!" He said, his tone meek. "Tomorrow is a big occasion for the football team they support. Let's allow them to go and watch Zachary Bemba's unveiling ceremony. It'll be over in only a couple of hours, and they can return and focus on their holiday assignments with renewed intensity. Isn't that right, boys?" He turned toward his sons with a fierce glare.

"Yes, yes," the two boys replied, nodding like hens pecking grain. "We promise to focus only on our holiday assignments when we return from the unveiling ceremony."

"Paolo!" The wife sighed, shaking her head. "You're spoiling them again."

"Dear," Paolo said in a pleading tone. "All young boys in Turin love football and support Juventus. If our two boys miss the unveiling ceremony tomorrow, they will be like outsiders when they return to school. They won't be able to talk to their friends about the biggest event of Juventus' transfer window..."

Paolo continued spewing out meaningless rubbish to convince his wife. And after a couple of minutes, his wife relented and allowed the boys to attend the unveiling ceremony the following day. But that was after making them promise to spend the entire week focusing on their holiday assignments.

"Ole, ole, ole, ole..." The boys began cheering excitedly after hearing their mother's verdict. There was even a swagger in their steps as they rushed back to their bedroom.

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Unbeknownst to the Favero family, similar scenes were happening in homesteads all over Turin that evening. Kids begged their mothers to allow them to attend Zachary's unveiling ceremony, while fathers called their bosses and gave excuses of sickness since they didn't want to miss the event. Even wives and working young ladies threw caution to the wind and decided to attend the unveiling ceremony. That was the magnitude of the excitement caused by Juventus' sudden announcement of Zachary's official arrival in Turin.

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Chapter 426: Shirt Number Argument Zachary was busy again the following day. Early in the morning, after going through his mandatory yoga routine, he headed to the Juventus Stadium to tour its facilities for the first time as a Juventus player. Under the lead of his guide, who was also his interpreter, he trekked through the magnificent pitch side, the glittering changing rooms, the press room, and many more facilities.

Then lastly, he entered the museum and experienced Juventus' glorious history with his very own eyes. He felt slightly overwhelmed after witnessing the collection of memorabilia, photos of the Juventus legends, institutional documents, football equipment used by historical club players, and the trophies accumulated by Juventus over the years.

And when his gaze finally landed on the large portrait of Zinedine Zidane, standing upright in all its majesty, he couldn't help but pause in his step for a few seconds. He gazed at the life-like image with pure admiration while recalling some of the notable performances of the Frenchman.

The man was the most graceful footballer Zachary had ever witnessed. Fans could get lost in Zinedine's elegance while watching him handle the ball like a magician, and they could only sigh in wonderment as they observed him executing killer passes like the best of Maestros. Due to all those factors, Zachary had adored Zinedine greatly as a child. The Frenchman's performances were thus a crucial factor that pushed Zachary to fall so very in love with football.

"Are you a fan of Zinedine Zidane?" Angelo Mattiello, his freshly-hired guide and interpreter, asked from beside him after noticing his gaze. He was a man of short stature, with a mean face, dreadlocks, and a prominent beard that gave him a thuggish look. But contrary to his fierce bearing, he was quite the warm person when you spent time with him. And that was why both Emily and the Juventus officials had urged Zachary to hire him the previous evening. To assure Zachary of his professionalism, the man had even signed a contract, which included a confidentiality clause with severe consequences if broken.

Zachary smiled on hearing the question from his interpreter. "Of course, I'm a big fan of Zinedine Zidane," he said. "The Frenchman was like an artist on the pitch. So, I don't think there are souls within the football community today that are not his fans, at least to some extent."

"True," Angelo Mattiello said, also nodding. "He was a true talent in the history of football. But do you know you possess a flair similar to his when you're on the pitch? Your style of handling and passing the ball and that Marseille turn of yours—" The man sighed. "All those skills of yours are as elegant and brutal as when Zidane performed during his prime."

"Is that so?" Zachary asked, smiling mysteriously. "If they are, I'm flattered."

Of course, Zachary understood that he possessed some of Zidane's flair on the pitch. That was because he had mastered three of the legendary Frenchman's skills. Zachary would replicate the Frenchman's style to a certain extent by utilizing moves like the Zinedine Touch Magic or the Marseille turn. But naturally, he would never admit that.

Angelo Mattiello suddenly glanced at his watch and said, "It's already coming to 9:00 AM. We should head to the meeting room. Otherwise, we'll be late for your meeting with your bosses."

"Okay," Zachary naturally agreed. "Lead the way."

With that said, Zachary followed after his guide as they exited the museum. They quickly walked through the spotless clean hallways of the stadium before arriving at the slightly ajar door of the meeting room. Without knocking, they entered and found Fabio Paratici, the sporting director, Massimiliano Allegri, the head coach, and Antonella Busso, a secretary, waiting for them. And without wasting time, their parties exchanged greetings and then eased into the theme of the meeting.

"So, Zachary," Fabio Paratici, the sporting director, said after leaning back into his seat. "This is our first official meeting after you became a Juventus player. How do you feel?"

Zachary smiled. "As I said yesterday, I'm excited and looking forward to life at this great club. I wish to succeed at this club. So, I'll always give my best whenever I'm on the pitch."

"Excellent," Fabio said, his stern countenance easing into a grin. "It seems like our intents are aligned. Actually, we were discussing the matter of your shirt number before you arrived. And we all feel that our historical number 10 could suit you the most. What do you think?"

Zachary raised a brow, glancing back and forth at the two men and the one woman seated on the other side of the table. "Isn't that Carlos Tévez's number? Why are you offering it to me?"

Fabio exchanged a meaningful glance with Coach Allegri before answering, "Obviously, it's mostly for publicity purposes. But we have also been searching for a player who can reignite the true glory of the number 10 shirt. We have been looking for a player who could become a phenomenal legend like previous bearers such as Alessandro Del Piero, Michel Platini, and Roberto Baggio. And now, we feel like we have finally found that player. That player is you."

"Oh," Zachary said, feeling a wave of complicated emotions wash over him. "I'm flattered by your offer to have me wear the number 10 shirt with such a glorious history. But, I have to refuse. I will choose another number that doesn't belong to any of the players active on the team."

Zachary's tone left no room for negotiation since he was totally against the proposal made by his new bosses. While playing for TP Mazembe during his previous life, a talented new signing had come into the team and taken over his favorite number 6 since he'd been underperforming. He obviously didn't complain since he couldn't go against his bosses at the time. But that didn't mean that he wasn't hurt on the inside. After the incident, Zachary lost his confidence and even put up worse performances for TP Mazembe the following season.

That was the happening that had made him understand that the act of robbing a shirt from an active player was disrespectful and demeaning. Thus, he would never do it to someone, especially if that someone was about to become his teammate.

"Do you have anything against the number 10 shirt?" Fabio asked, creasing his brows. "What's your reason for refusing it in such a manner?"

"There is really no deep meaning behind refusing the shirt number," Zachary replied. "It's just that I don't want to start my tenure at Juventus on a bad note with some of my teammates."

"I see," Fabio said, smiling and nodding. He then faced Coach Massimiliano Allegri, and they started exchanging rapid Italian sentences that Zachary couldn't understand. They talked for about a minute, seemingly arguing about something.

Zachary couldn't take it anymore. He whispered to his interpreter, "What are they talking about?"

Angelo, the interpreter, leaned towards Zachary and whispered back, "Coach Allegri is insisting that you're right. He says they shouldn't force the number 10 on you, especially since it already has an owner. On the other hand, Fabio claims to be helpless. He mentioned something about the club chairman and many of their staunch fans insisting on handing the number 10 shirt to you. That almost summarizes their entire argument."

Zachary's heart skipped a beat on hearing the interpreter's translation. He creased his brows, fearing that the worst could occur. Probably, the club management would force the number 10 shirt on him, and then he would offend Carlos Tévez and a few of his close friends even before he started training with his new teammates.

"Damn! What a bad way to start off in a new club," Zachary mused, exhaling and leaning back in his chair. He already regretted not telling Emily to include a clause about his shirt number in his contract with Juventus.

"Zachary!" Suddenly, Fabio Paratici's voice resounded around the room again. "We have really considered all angles concerning the matter of your shirt number. But we still wish you can accept the number 10 for the club's good. Even our fans want to see you in the number 10 shirt next season. So, you can see how our hands are tied."

"You're forgetting one point," Zachary said, leaning forward. "How does Carlos Tévez feel about the entire situation? Do you think he is okay with a nineteen-year-old newbie coming into the club and taking over his number? If you were in his place, how would you feel?"

Fabio sighed and shook his head. "My young friend," he said, "You should be aware that football is ruthless and with no guarantees as a sport. Someone will always have to give way when a more talented player comes along and joins the team. That's the competitive nature of football. It's always the same for shirt numbers or when fighting for spots on the starting line-up."

"Let me ask you this, Zachary," the sporting director continued. "With your talent, you'll eventually join the starting line-up sooner rather than later. Will you reject the spot on the first team simply because you feel pity for a teammate? Will you tell Coach Allegri not to include you in the match squad simply because you don't want to offend your teammate?"

"That's different," Zachary argued. "We're not talking about a player who has lost his form. We're talking about Carlos Tévez, the man who was your top scorer last season. He was likely your best player."

"I'm sorry," Fabio said, shaking his head. "We don't see it that way, and the fans don't see it that way. Why would we drop out of the Champions League during the group stages if we had good players in all positions? Then, in the Europa League, why did we lose to your Rosenborg, a team clearly much weaker than us?"

Zachary could only remain silent as he had no answer for that. He just sighed helplessly and leaned back in his seat.

"Zachary," Fabio continued. "I'm aware of your considerations. They are truly commendable. But you must understand that we are trying to build something incredible here. We want to put together a team that can compete with teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona, and Bayern. That's why we are doing a major rebuilding, starting with you wearing the historical number 10 shirt."

"Okay, I understand. It seems that I must agree to the number 10 shirt," Zachary said with another sigh. Since his bosses had already decided, it was unwise to keep arguing with them. He would have to swallow his frustration and wear the shirt. And hopefully, Carlos Tévez would be a dear and not mind him taking over his shirt number.

Chapter 427: Initiation and Unveiling  
"Don't look so down," Fabio consoled after witnessing Zachary's reaction. "When you settle into the team, you'll realize how fortunate you're to wear the number 10 shirt. You'll learn that most of your teammates would kill to have that number."

"I understand," Zachary said, nodding. He didn't want to waste more time arguing with his bosses about the shirt number issue.

"It's good that you understand," Fabio said, standing up. "Now that I've settled the matter of your shirt number, it's time for me to go and have it printed. We must have it ready for the unveiling ceremony in the afternoon."

"Oh!" Zachary said, totally not believing the sporting director's words. He suspected that the club's top dogs had decided on his shirt number and printed it out long before he arrived in Turin. As for the meeting to inquire about his opinion that morning, they could have just held it out of formality.

While not knowing what was on Zachary's mind, Fabio smiled and continued speaking. "Zachary! Once again, I welcome you to Juventus. I have a good feeling about you. You have a unique halo of success surrounding your entire persona, and you're most likely to excel and achieve great things at Juventus. Of course, that's if you remain focused." He extended his hand from across the table.

"Thank you, director, for your high praise and encouragement," Zachary replied, taking Fabio's hand for a firm handshake. "I'll work hard to live up to your expectations. That, I promise you."

"Good," Fabio said with a smile. "It's about time for me to go. Since your interpreter is present, you can utilize the time before the unveiling ceremony to chat with your coach. I'm sure you two have a lot to talk about."

Without waiting for Zachary to respond, Fabio turned toward Coach Allegri and talked to him in Italian for a few more seconds. Then, he waved Zachary goodbye before walking away and disappearing through the meeting room doorway.

"Dannazione!" Coach Allegri intoned after his colleague had stepped out of the room. "Tutta la nostra conversazione è stata stressante..."

The coach continued spitting out more Italian words that Zachary couldn't understand. And, of course, Zachary soon had to turn to Angelo Mattiello, his interpreter, for help. "What did he just say?" He asked after the coach had paused in his speech.

"He's talking about how the discussion with the sporting director was a bit stressful," Angelo translated. "He sincerely pleads with you not to take offense simply because the club has forced the number 10 shirt on you. And he also hopes you can work well together during the upcoming few seasons."

"Oh, I see," Zachary said, smiling and locking eyes with his new coach. "Coach Allegri! The shirt number issue is only a small matter. It wouldn't affect my attitude and dedication toward the club. I was only against the idea because I didn't want to offend a teammate who currently owns the shirt."

After saying all that, Zachary again turned to his interpreter for help. Angelo smiled and nodded at him before starting to translate his words to Italian for the coach's benefit. And in such a weird manner, the first meaningful conversation between Zachary and his new coach transpired.

The two men discussed many issues, including Zachary's objectives at the club, his favorite players in football history, the results of his medical, his match fitness issues, and whether he would be ready for the pre-season tour. And finally, the coach asked Zachary about the position he wanted to play on the Juventus team.

Zachary naturally replied that he wished to play in the central midfield as he had done during his tenure at Rosenborg. He explained to the coach that he was always more creative and at the top of his game when he was in the middle of the pitch, executing passes or breaking forward to catch the opponents off guard. And he repeatedly emphasized his passing abilities and high spatial awareness to ensure that the coach understood that only in the midfield would his skills bloom in great splendor.

After hearing his lengthy response, Coach Allegri nodded to indicate that he had gotten the message. Then, he warned Zachary through the interpreter to be ready for a fierce battle for spots on the starting line-up due to Juventus' incredible line-up of midfielders, which included the likes of Andrea Pirlo, Claudio Marchisio, Paul Pogba, and Arturo Vidal. Finally, he urged Zachary to continue working hard and utilize every chance he got to impress the coaching staff if he wanted to cement his place on the Juventus team.

Zachary nodded and took his advice to heart. As for the matter of the intensive competition for spots on the starting line-up, he wasn't worried. With his recently enhanced attributes and skills, he believed he would dazzle everyone when he finally stepped on the pitch during an official match. But first, Zachary had to deal with the side effects of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir before thinking about achieving all that. Otherwise, he might become a joke if he committed the weirdest of amateur mistakes during the heat of the game.

"The coach is saying that you two have already discussed all the crucial issues concerning your arrival at Juventus," Angelo translated more of the coach's words. "So, he suggests that you end your conversation at this point. But he has also cautioned that he wants to see you start attending training within eight days. That way, you will have a bit of preparation before the pre-season tour."

"You can tell the coach I've gotten his message," Zachary responded with a smile. "I'll try to complete all immigration procedures and settle down in Turin as quickly as possible. Then, I can start attending Juventus' official training sessions."

Angelo nodded and immediately translated the words to Coach Allegri. The latter also nodded and exchanged a few more words with Zachary through the interpreter before ending their first meeting as coach and player.

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"I really have to learn Italian as soon as possible," Zachary made the resolution within his heart for the umpteenth time after arriving in Turin. The language barrier problem was too aggravating for him. Without the help of an interpreter, he couldn't even have a meaningful conversation with his coach or go shopping on his own. That was a shame and an inconvenience as far as he was concerned.

"Angelo!" Zachary suddenly called out to his interpreter as they walked out of the meeting room. "Can you recommend any language schools to me?"

Angelo thought for a few seconds before replying, "I would recommend a school called L'Italiano Porticando. The school has several language programs, including private lessons for those who want to learn Italian at their convenience. As a professional footballer, it could be the best option for you."

"Are they still enrolling students?" Zachary queried again.

"They enroll students all year round," Angelo replied. "So, you can apply and register at any time."

"Then, I'll just enroll tomorrow," Zachary said. "I'll be relying on you to guide me there."

"Of course," Angelo said. "Feel free to call me when you're ready to register."



"Excellent," Zachary said, smiling. "Let's grab something to eat before I start preparing for the unveiling ceremony."

"Okay."

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By 2:00 PM that afternoon, the Juventus stadium was almost fully-occupied. The staunch fans dressed in Juventus' black and white colors had occupied most of the seats in the stands. Some were already cheering and dancing as if awaiting the start of an official game. They were obviously excited as they waited for Zachary's unveiling ceremony with bated breaths.

"Dad!" One of Paolo Favero's sons called out in a raised voice to make himself heard over the din within the stadium. "Why is Zachary not coming out of the tunnel? Didn't they announce that he would appear before us at 2:00 PM?"

"Marco! Please relax," Paolo answered, patting his son's head. "He should be stepping onto the pitch soon. Let's continue waiting."

"Has the club announced Zachary's shirt number yet?" His other son hurriedly asked.

"Not yet," Paolo answered. "This time around, the club is doing things in a mysterious manner. No club official has stepped forward to make any announcement concerning Zachary's shirt number. It's as if they are hiding the entire thing from us."

"But what do you think his shirt number will be?" His son asked again. "Could it be the famous number 10?"

"I don't think so," Paolo was quick to reply. "The number 10 shirt belongs to Carlos Tévez, our leading goal-scorer last season. The club would surely not take the shirt away from him unless they're planning on selling him. But I don't see that happening soon. So, Zachary is most likely to choose another number."

"Makes sense," his son agreed. "I also don't think the club will sell Carlos Tévez. His aggressiveness and speed will allow him to link up well with Zachary when we're attacking..."

Just then, while the Faveros were still discussing the matter of Zachary's shirt number, the cheers around the stadium hit a thunderous crescendo. In a flash, Paolo turned his gaze towards the tunnel portal and noticed that Zachary had just stepped onto the pitch.

The young playmaker looked majestic in Juventus' black and white striped jersey as he waved at the fans. His aura was overbearing but contained, his walking gait kingly but also pleasing to the eye, and his smile warm but with a sternness about it. It was as if he was making a tour of his backyard as he made rounds around the pitch to greet the fans.

"This is the aura of an emperor entering his territory for the first time," Paolo mumbled, his eyes misting slightly. He was ecstatic after witnessing Zachary's majesty within Juventus' colors. He had a feeling that for the first time after Zinedine's time, he might get to experience the glory of a phenomenal ball wizard that could compete with the likes of Messi and Ronaldo playing for his club.

"Dad! Dad!" One of his sons shouted, interrupting his train of thought. "What did I say? Zachary is in the number 10 shirt. They gave him the number 10 shirt."

"Oh! They gave him the number 10 shirt!" Paolo exclaimed after finally noticing Zachary's shirt number. "Does that mean that they're about to sell Tévez? What is the club thinking?"

"Who knows, and who cares?" His other son said in a dismissive tone. "The only thing that matters is that we have Zachary on the team. For now, let's enjoy the unveiling ceremony. Zachary is about to start showcasing his skills."

"True," Paolo agreed. "What matters is that Zachary is already a Juventus player. Let's enjoy the unveiling ceremony indeed."

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Chapter 428: Initiation and Unveiling II Zachary was surprised by the turn up for his unveiling ceremony that afternoon. While walking around the pitch, he could easily judge that more than 40,000 fans were

in the Juventus stadium to welcome him. Most were even yelling his name in chorus while waving excitedly at him. As far as he was concerned, they had given him the warmest welcome a club could show to a new player. He couldn't contain the feelings of joy and pride bubbling within him.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen!" The announcer yelled after Zachary had finished making his rounds around the pitch. "Let's put our hands together for Zachary Bemba, the new number 10, the future phenomenon for the most glorious club in Italy. Zachary Bemba! We welcome you to Juventus."

Without losing composure, Zachary smiled and stepped onto the stage positioned in the middle of the pitch. After taking a few steps, he stood before the familiar Fabio Paratici, the sporting director, who shook his hands enthusiastically and hugged him.

After a few seconds, the sporting director stepped back and grinned. "As I said, everyone at Juventus, including the fans, the top management, and the coaching staff, can't wait to see you playing for the club. Do you believe me now?"

Zachary nodded and smiled. "It's really an honor to have these many fans welcome me to the club. Thanks for organizing everything."

"You're welcome," Fabio said with a grin. "Come; I'll introduce you to the club chairman."

Without waiting for Zachary to respond, the sporting director led him by the hand toward another gentleman with a bushy beard and slightly overgrown eyebrows. "Andrea!" He said, his voice exuding a sense of pride. "This is Zachary in the flesh. He is finally here at the club."

The other gentlemen chuckled and extended his hand to Zachary, "Nice to finally meet you, Zachary Bemba," he said in English. "Thank you for choosing to join the most glorious club in Italy. On behalf of all the fans, the management, and club officials, I welcome you to Juventus."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman," Zachary said, taking Andrea's hand. "I'm also happy to be here at the club. Thank you for signing me."

Andrea chuckled and released his hand. "Let's not make the fans wait any longer," he said. "We can discuss more after the ceremony. But for now, I'll first give a speech welcoming you to the club. Then, you can also follow my lead and say a few words to the fans. You can speak English and Fabio will be your interpreter. By the way, did you prepare a short speech for today?"

"Nope," Zachary replied honestly. "But don't worry. I can easily compose the speech within my head."

"Good," Andrea said. "Since you're ready, let's move on with the program."

With that said, the president stepped before the microphones positioned at the center of the podium and started speaking rapidly in Italian. His speech clearly excited the fans, and they kept on yelling after every sentence of his. And finally, he gave a few concluding remarks before welcoming Zachary to take center stage.

Zachary nodded and walked forward towards the microphones. Every step he took across the stage elicited a wave of thunderous cheers from the fans. But all that didn't affect his composure, and he finally stood before the microphones.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" He said, glancing around and towards the sea of fans in the stands. "Dear fans of Juventus! It's an honor to be here. Thanks a lot for taking the time to come and welcome me to this great club. And thank you for giving me the warmest of welcomes to Turin."

He paused and waited for Fabio to translate his words into Italian. The latter wasted no time completing the task, thus eliciting another wave of cheers from the fans in attendance.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Zachary continued after getting the signal to resume from Fabio. "Please bear with me for not speaking Italian. I'll do my best to learn the language in a few months."

Fabio translated that, causing many fans to whistle and burst into laughter. They seemed to be quite the understanding crowd and didn't mind Zachary's lack of knowledge of the Italian language. The only issue they probably cared about was what Zachary could do for their club on the pitch.

"I only wish to say a few words to all of you that have come to welcome me to Juventus," Zachary continued while Fabio translated. "It's really a great honor to be at this great club. It's a dream come

true for me to be at such a club with glorious history. As such, I promise that I'll do my best and work hard to make all of you proud when I finally step on the pitch. I'll try my utmost to meet all your expectations as a Juventus player. I thank you all again for coming. JUVENTUS, OYE!" He pumped his fist and ended his short speech with a small cheer.

That got the fans going, and they responded to Zachary's cheer with zest. Then, a bit later, when he began showcasing his skills by juggling the ball on the podium, their voices rose up several notches and shook the entire stadium. They sang the famous chants of Juventus in Italian while occasionally mixing in his name for the next few minutes. They only stopped cheering when the unveiling ceremony ended with Zachary's return to the dressing room.

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Later that day, at five in the evening, Zachary attended his first press conference as a Juventus player. He spent an hour answering questions from many famous journalists working for popular media houses like ESPN, BBC, Sky Sports, and many others. And to respond to their queries, he talked about his aspirations at Juventus and why he chose to join Juventus, among other things.

Of course, Zachary couldn't say that he'd chosen Juventus because of the money the club offered him. That was publicity suicide. Instead, he repeatedly emphasized how Juventus was a great football club at the top of Europe and how he desired to succeed there.

Zachary honeyed his words and often mentioned how he wished to contribute to Juventus' glory by helping them win more trophies throughout the press session. His responses were very engaging to the extent that Fabio even mentioned that he could make a good politician after they exited the press room.

"So, Zachary," Fabio said as they made their way through the stadium's spotless hallways. "The press conference has marked the end of your official unveiling and initiation as a Juventus player. What remains is for you to settle down in Turin and start training with the team."

"I know," Zachary said, nodding. "I'll try to settle down as soon as possible."

"Excellent," Fabio said. "So, when do you think you can attend your first training? Before you reply, I hope you consider that you need to meet your teammates as soon as possible. You can't wait to get acquainted with them just before a game."

Zachary thought a bit and said, "If that's the case, then I won't try to look for a house before the pre-season tour. I'll instead settle down in a hotel near the training center. Then, I can work on my fitness for a few days before starting to train with the team on Monday, the 28th."

Fabio grinned and paused in his steps. "That's six days from now. Excellent choice. If you don't mind, we can arrange a hotel for you as a club. It would be very comfy and at no cost. What do you think?"

"Of course, I don't mind," Zachary hurriedly replied. "I would greatly appreciate it if the club organizes a secure hotel room for me. That would save me a lot of trouble."

"Then, let's do this," Fabio said, "I'll instruct my secretary to book for you an executive room at the J Hotel. Since the hotel belongs to the club, you can stay there until you find your own house in Turin. But I must warn you not to get too comfortable and stay there for a long time. One to six months is okay. But beyond that, the hotel management will start billing your stay at the hotel."

Zachary chuckled. "And why would I wish to stay for all that time in a hotel? I'll get myself a house after we return from the pre-season tour."

"Then, excellent," Fabio said. "We must part ways now, as I'm heading for another meeting. We'll meet again when you turn up for training on Monday. I'm looking forward to that."

"Don't worry," Zachary assured. "I'll be there."

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The next six days were like a roller coaster ride for Zachary, especially since he was busy. After settling down in a comfy executive room of the J Hotel, he spent most of his time training in the gym or on the turfs to deal with the side effects of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir.

Under the guidance of Coach Bjørn Peters, the fitness coach who had surprisingly already arrived in Turin, Zachary was like a maniac as he exercised like never before. Sometimes, he would even beg his fitness trainer to add more load to his training due to his urgency. He was that serious as he wanted to attain top match fitness before the start of the Serie A season on August 30th.

But that was not all there was to Zachary's schedule. Aside from the training, he also enrolled in a language school and took his first step towards his immediate goal of learning Italian. Every evening, he would head to the L'Italiano Porticando and spend about three hours pronouncing Italian words that he couldn't yet understand.

Of course, the classes were boring to Zachary since they were unrelated to sports. But for his future as a Juventus player, he soon became focused and even tasked his interpreter with the task of purchasing for him several Italian textbooks. As a result, trying to read the seemingly alien Italian books became another additional task he had to complete on a daily basis.

With such a hectic schedule tying him down, Zachary didn't feel the passing of time. One morning he woke up and was about to start going through his yoga routine before 'reading' his Italian textbook. Then suddenly, his phone started vibrating from a nearby table in the hotel room.

Zachary stepped forward and immediately scooped it up from the table. After glancing at the screen, he learned that the call was from Antonella Busso, Fabio Paratici's secretary. She was the charming lady who had helped arrange his executive room at the J Hotel.

"Hello, Miss Antonella," he spoke after pressing the accept button and holding the phone against his ear. "Nice to hear from you again."

"Hello, Mr. Bemba," The lady at the other end of the line said, her voice professional. "How's your morning? Are you enjoying your stay at the J Hotel?"

"My morning is perfect," Zachary responded. "And the hotel has everything I need. As you said, it's a very comfy place."

"I'm glad you like it," she said. "Now to the main point of why I'm calling you early in the morning. Mr. Paratici, the sporting director, has just instructed me to inform you that it's already Monday, the 28th."

He hopes you can attend the team training at the Vinovo as you had promised. The training begins at 9:00 AM."

"Okay," Zachary said. "I got the message, and thanks for reminding me. I'll be at the training ground on time. You can tell the sporting director that."

"Great," the lady on the other side said. "I wish you all the best during your first training as a Juventus player. And if you need anything, don't hesitate to contact me. I'll try to the best of my abilities to assist you, especially since the sporting director has tasked me with helping you settle into the club."

"I'll remember that," Zachary said. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," the lady at the other end said before ending the call.

Chapter 429: Italian Football Culture  
The rising sun in the east of Turin was as glorious as ever. Its golden and shimmering rays immediately enveloped Zachary in a shawl of warmth after he exited his hotel that morning. He donned his cap and squinted his eyes to adjust to the natural illumination while looking around.

"Now, where is this guy?" He mumbled to himself and glanced at his brand new Rolex watch. The stylish dauphine hands had already pointed to the 8:20 AM mark, meaning he only had approximately forty minutes to get to the Vinovo. If he didn't start moving soon, he would be late for his first official training with Juventus and possibly annoy his new coaches. And that made his heart race with anxiety.

"Zachary!" Suddenly, a shout drew his attention. He inclined his head and immediately noticed Angelo Mattiello, his guide and interpreter, jogging towards him from the other end of the hotel building. He seemed out of breath as if he'd been running a marathon.

"What happened?" Zachary questioned when the Italian man finally stood before him. "You're late, and you're out of breath! Did something go wrong?"

Angelo breathed in deeply before saying, "Sorry, Zachary. I had a mechanical failure on the way. That's why I couldn't get here on time. But, I have now resolved the issue, and we can be on our way."



"I see," Zachary said, nodding. "I need to get to the Vinovo in about twenty minutes. Or else I'll be late for my first training."

"Don't worry," Angelo assured, smiling assuredly. "I'll get you there on time. Come; follow me. Let's head to the car and set off immediately."

"Okay," Zachary nodded and followed after his guide. Before long, they arrived at the hotel's parking lot and easily located Angelo's car. It was a white Citroen C3 in the shape of a sub-compact SUV. They quickly got into the car, and off they went, easing into the main street and driving off towards the Vinovo, Juventus' training center.

Over the past six days, Zachary had been busy. He hadn't gotten an opportunity to tour Turin since he had spent all his time training or reading Italian textbooks. That was why his eyes remained glued to the scenery flashing outside the car's window while taking in the refreshing cityscape of Turin.

He felt like he was in a dream, watching the grand boulevards and the beautiful historical architecture spread beside and beyond the streets. Gradually, his mood became complicated, and he sighed. He couldn't help but recall how he'd only been able to enjoy such magnificent scenes through television or photos on the web during his previous life.

Due to his previous incarnation's pauper status, he could never have foreseen that he would ever visit a famous European city such as Turin. But surprisingly, he obtained a new life that eclipsed all his expectations. He'd already made it big and obtained legal status to live in the renowned Italian city. Moreover, that was as a Juventus player, earning millions of Euros per year and able to choose any famous neighborhood as his place of residence. If that wasn't a dream come true, then what was it? He was obviously proud of his achievements.

Zachary's only regret was that he couldn't share such a happy life with his grandma, his sole guardian, who had looked after him since childhood. Even in a new life, he couldn't prevent her death. It was as if the unfortunate incident was destined, and she had passed away before she could witness him joining one of the top European clubs. That caused Zachary to occasionally experience a turmoil of painful emotions bubbling up within his core. Fortunately, he had learned to suppress them through exercising or busying himself with other things.

"We're here," Angelo said as he steered the car around a roundabout and approached the fenced expanse of fields and buildings that made up the Juventus training center. A few seconds later, he went

through security without any trouble and then spoke again, "As I promised, It only took us nineteen minutes to arrive here. You should be able to get to the training turf before nine."

"Great! Thank you," Zachary said, glancing at his watch. It was already 8:42 AM, implying that he still had more than fifteen minutes to prepare and head to the training ground. He would surely make it if he utilized his time well.

"I also want to alert you that the club doesn't allow people who aren't staff members or players on the training grounds, especially during official training sessions," Angelo said, steering the car onwards and towards the front structures of the training center. "So, I'll have to wait for you outside while you train. But that shouldn't worry you. Most members of the coaching staff, except Allegri, speak English. They'll be able to guide you through the training sessions without any problems."

"I understand. Thank you," Zachary said, glancing outside the car window. The next moment, his eyes widened as he took in the surprising spectacle composed of the crowd of fans and journalists waiting outside the training center. The excitement about them was already shooting into the azure morning sky as they observed Angelo's moving Citroen with glittering eyes.

"This is unbelievable," Zachary mumbled. He had a feeling that if it wasn't for the fence and security personnel keeping the supporters at bay, they might have even rushed towards the car to check which Juventus player had just arrived.

"You haven't seen anything yet," Angelo said, seemingly catching on to Zachary's thoughts. "The size of the crowd will be even more stunning as the big matches approach. For instance, if Juventus is about to face off against AC Milan, you'll always find hundreds of fans crowding around the entrance. The excitement around football is that crazy in Italy."

"Oh!" Zachary exclaimed. At that moment, he again comprehended the difference between the football cultures of Turin and Trondheim. The stark contrast was quite clear to him after he arrived in Italy.

While he was still a Rosenborg player, it was rare to find fans crowding around the training ground on a Monday morning. There was always a laid-back attitude about the fanbase since the Norwegians in Trondheim would only gain a bit of interest in Rosenborg's circumstances when a big match was approaching. Of course, that's aside from a few exceptions.

But in Turin, circumstances were totally different. After interacting with his guide for seven days, Zachary learned that football was everything for most Italian men. Their love for the sport could border on the fringes of insanity as it was their hobby, their passion, and a big part of their culture.

Before doing anything else in the morning, they would read the La Gazzetta Dello Sport or Il Corriere Dello Sport print or online to get updates on which player did this and that, who was sold to another team, who declared he was happy, mad, or sad. Plus, they would have apps and alerts on their smartphones so as to avoid the prospect of even missing one tiny detail concerning the sport they loved. Thus, it was natural for them to stalk their favorite football stars to the training grounds. It wouldn't even be a surprise if a few supporters followed a footballer to his home to get an autograph. That was how much they adored the footballers playing for their clubs.

"I hope you already know the way to the locker rooms and training grounds," Angelo said after parking the car. "If not, I can ask one of the security guys to guide you there."

"Don't worry," Zachary said. "I'll find it myself. See you later." He said before picking up his gym bag and exiting the car.

The next moment, his appearance elicited a peak wave of excitement among the crowd of fans.

"Dio mio! It's Zachary in the flesh..."

"Zachary, an autograph!"

"Zaccaria! Ti vogliamo bene..."

The supporters all went crazy and started yelling in both Italian and English as they waved at him. Zachary, of course, maintained a smile and responded to their enthusiastic shouts with a wave of his hand. But since he only had about fifteen minutes to prepare for training, he couldn't waste time fulfilling their requests for autographs. He politely excused himself before jogging towards the locker rooms of the famous training center.

A minute later, he arrived before the door of the dressing room. He breathed in deeply before pushing it open and stepping inside. A wave of relaxation swept over him after noticing that there wasn't even a single soul in the spotlessly clean room. Most likely, all the other players were already on the turfs about to commence training. As a result, he could prepare without interruptions from his new teammates.

"But this is also not a good sign," he mused, walking towards the locker with his name and the number 'ten' printed on it. "I might be the last one to arrive for training. I better hurry."

The fact that he, a new player, was still in the dressing room, even when less than fifteen minutes remained before the designated time for the training session, jolted his heart, sending it into a whirlpool of unease. He hurriedly changed into his brand new training garments, which he'd received from Juventus six days prior. Then, in a matter of seconds, he stepped into his glittering brand new green pair of Nike Mercurial Superfly boots before throwing the rest of his stuff into his locker. After locking it, he finally breathed a sigh of relief since he still had about ten minutes to spare before the training commenced. He'd finally achieved a total state of relaxation as he no longer feared that he would be late on the first day of his official tenure at Juventus.

But just then, as he was about to turn away from his locker and step out of the locker room, his sharp ears picked up the rhythmic tapping of boot studs on the floor. His heart skipped a bit, and he naturally turned to face the source of the sound.

"Eh!" Zachary exclaimed as the silhouette of a familiar footballer he'd seen countless times on the screens during his previous life appeared before his vision. The player in question looked fierce and with a no-nonsense aura about him. His sturdy physique, protruding chest, and strong arms gave him the appearance of a miniaturized version of King Kong crammed into a human body. And although his height was a bit on the short end, just at about 5'7 feet, he seemed like a person who could easily take down a pro-wrestler if given a chance.

"Hello, Carlos Tévez!" Zachary spoke first, attempting to break the ice in the most polite tone he could muster. "I'm Zachary Bemba, your new teammate. It's nice to meet you." He extended his hand towards the Argentine striker.

Chapter 430: First Meeting with New Teammates  
Tévez raised both eyebrows and tilted his head to glance at Zachary. He regarded him for a few seconds with intense scrutiny before nodding and saying, "Nice to meet you, too, Zachary Bemba. I have heard many incredible things about you. Welcome to Turin." He took his hand for a very firm handshake.

"Thank you, Carlos," Zachary said, smiling. He was both delighted and relieved after the striker had accepted his gesture of goodwill. "Let's work well together as teammates in the future."

"Just a moment before you get ahead of yourself," Tévez said in very fluent English. "Let's get one thing straight. You're not my teammate or a teammate of anyone on the Juventus squad until you go through the traditional initiation ceremony for all new players. Got it?"

Zachary's eyes narrowed as a flicker of doubt arose within his mind. "There's an initiation ceremony! Didn't I go through it when the management unveiled me in front of the fans and the press six days ago?"

Tévez let out a soft chuckle on hearing that. "One thing you should understand is that the management is management and the team is the team. They are two different entities making up the club. Even after going through the initiation by management, you'll still have to go through the one for the team. Otherwise, you'll remain an outsider."

"I see," Zachary said, holding the Argentine's gaze. "Carlos! I also wish to clarify one fact with you before we speak about anything else. About the number ten shirt..."

"No, no, no," Tévez interrupted before Zachary could finish the sentence. "You don't need to explain. I have played professional football for more than a decade. I understand how the industry works. A person has to step aside when a talented player joins a team. That's the ruthless and competitive nature of football. And I won't hold any grudge against you for such an insignificant matter. That would be very immature of me."

"Thank you for your understanding," Zachary said, breathing another sigh of relief. "I'm really starting to feel that we can become good teammates."

"That's a possibility," Carlos concurred in a somehow vague manner. "But, don't forget that the number ten shirt is iconic among the Juventus fans, players, and coaching staff. So, remember to work hard and play your best football during your next few seasons at Juventus. Otherwise, many people in Turin will always be on your case for disgracing that glorious number."

"Thanks for the reminder," Zachary said. "I'll take it to heart. But Carlos! We better head to the training ground. We're almost running late for training."

Tévez eyed Zachary with a strange expression. "Didn't I clarify that you won't be teammates with anyone before your initiation? Just follow me. I'll take you to meet the rest of the squad and the coaches. They are currently in the room for technical meetings." Without waiting for Zachary to respond, he turned around and started walking away. His pace was quite fast, and within seconds, he was already stepping out of the dressing room.

"Wait!" Zachary said, chasing after the Argentine forward after a few seconds. "What about the training? Wasn't it supposed to commence at 9:00 AM?"

"Don't worry," Carlos said without turning back. "The training will start after the meeting."

"Really?" Zachary was skeptical since he'd gotten the message about the training session from Fabio, the one and only sporting director.

"I'm not trying to trick you," Carlos said, finally stopping in his tracks and turning to face Zachary. "I was already in the tactics room with the others. But Coach Allegri sent me to fetch you after he got word that you had arrived at the training center. Moreover, you have to understand that there's always a mandatory team meeting before every first training session of the week."

"Oh, okay." Zachary smiled awkwardly. "Then, let's go. Thanks for helping me out."

Carlos nodded and immediately turned around to resume his journey through the hallways of the training center. Zachary naturally matched his steps, and before long, they arrived before a closed door that was the entrance to the tactics room.

"We're here," Carlos announced and knocked on the door. Without waiting for a response, he pushed it ajar and motioned for Zachary to follow him inside with a hand gesture.

Zachary naturally followed after him and stepped into the room. The next moment, he was slightly intimidated as his eyes took in the many famous faces he had seen countless times on television during his previous life. With a single glance around the room, he spotted celebrated players like Gianluigi Buffon, Giorgio Chiellini, Leonardo Bonucci, Patrice Evra, Paul Pogba, Claudio Marchisio, Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal, and Álvaro Morata, among others. They were all quietly seated at various tables arranged

around the room. But what unnerved Zachary the most was that they had all turned to glance his way when he stepped through the doorway.

"Damn, this wouldn't have happened if I wasn't late," Zachary screamed inwardly. At that moment, he felt like he'd turned into a walking tourist attraction due to all the eyes on him. He inwardly vowed never to put himself in such an awkward situation again.

"Zachary! You're finally here!" Suddenly, a voice exclaimed, drawing his attention. He tilted his head and noticed that it was a balding middle-aged man with a prominent aquiline nose who had spoken. He was Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach, specifically in charge of the first team of Juventus.

"Welcome, welcome," the coach continued speaking in English while standing up from his seat to greet Zachary. "Please, feel at home as this is your club. And allow me to introduce you to the rest of the coaching staff and your new teammates..."

With Coach Trombetta taking the lead, the awkward silence in the room naturally dissolved, and the atmosphere turned harmonious. The other coaches and players stood up to greet Zachary, and in a few words, they welcomed him to the club in a friendly manner. It was as if they had forgotten the four goals he'd scored against them during the previous campaign of the Europa League. But, of course, there was always an exception to every case scenario. And that day was no different.

When Zachary finally greeted Gianluigi Buffon, an unexpected incident transpired. The famous goalkeeper's countenance turned stony, and he held on to Zachary's hand much longer than was necessary. Without caring for the atmosphere around him, he narrowed his eyes and said in strained English, "Zachary! Tell me honestly. Was it your sole intention to draw the last man foul from me during our Europa League match last season? Or did you genuinely wish to bypass me and score?"

"Eh!" Zachary was taken aback by the question. He hadn't expected an experienced keeper like Buffon to ask him about a minor issue from last season.

"Well?" Buffon pressed for an answer while still holding on to Zachary's hand. Since he was a keeper, his grip was quite powerful, and naturally, Zachary couldn't wriggle out of it.

Zachary smiled awkwardly, finding the whole situation a bit absurd. He turned to the rest of his new teammates, hoping they would resolve his plight peacefully. However, his heart couldn't help but sink into an abyss of worry, especially when he realized that all the previous cordial players in the room were staring at him with ice-cold expressions. They were no longer smiling but looked like they couldn't wait to beat him up.

"Ragazzi! Penso che sia abbastanza!"

Just then, the familiar voice of Coach Allegri reverberated across the otherwise silent room, causing Zachary to breathe a sigh of relief. On cue, as if all the players had gotten a signal, they started laughing and grinning as if they had just heard the funniest joke. In just seconds, their expressions turned cordial again as if they were the friendliest humans on Earth.

"Hahaha," Buffon chuckled, drawing Zachary into a hug. "I got you on that one. Did you think that I was about to beat you up?"

Zachary was, of course, at a loss of how to respond to the circumstances. He remained silent as he hugged his new captain.

After a moment, Buffon released Zachary and stepped back. "On behalf of the entire Juventus squad," he said with a smile, "And in my capacity as captain, I welcome you to Juventus. Let's work well together as teammates from now on." He extended his hand to Zachary.

Zachary smiled and took the hand. "Thanks a lot, captain, for giving me that unique welcome," he said. "I also hope that we work well together."

"Cough! Cough!" Suddenly, someone coughed, interrupting the harmonious atmosphere. It was Paul Pogba, who was standing a few meters away. "I think you guys are forgetting something," the Frenchman said with his trademark grin. "Isn't it customary for all new players to go through initiation before the captain welcomes them to the club?"

"Oh!" Buffon exclaimed. "There, I go with my rashness again. Zachary!" The goalie turned towards him with a smile. "I'll have to withdraw my welcoming remarks until you go through the ritual to initiate you into the squad."



"Initiation!?" Zachary was at a loss again. He was confused, especially since he hadn't followed most of Juventus' matters for long. So, he hardened his resolve and decided to inquire. "What's this initiation ritual that everyone is talking about?"

"Of course, you'll have to entertain your senior teammates by singing a song of your own choosing," Pogba chimed in before Buffon could reply. "All new players must go through the ritual before the commencement of training today."

"Really?" Zachary was again a bit skeptical. He glanced toward the coaches, who were quietly watching the proceedings at a table positioned at the front of the tactics room. "Is this really necessary?" He asked again.

Coach Maurizio Trombetta nodded and said, "This is an age-old tradition at Juventus. Every new player has to go through it to become part of the Old Lady family of Turin. There's no escaping the ritual, no matter how big a player you were before arriving at Juventus."

"This is crazy!" Zachary sighed.

"You don't have to worry," Pogba consoled with his signature wide grin. "Aside from you, we have four other new teammates going through the ritual. That should give you confidence and allow you to put up a wonderful performance."

"Is that so?" Zachary said. "And who are these four players?"

"Kingsley Coman, Morata, Patrice Evra, and Roberto Pereyra," Pogba replied, rubbing his hands together as if in anticipation. "You five should be able to give us the concert of the year today."