

## Greatest 491

### Chapter 491 Zachary's New Mansion

When the sporting director ended his talk with Coach Allegri, Zachary was also finalizing his post-match recovery workout session in the gym. He went through one more repetition of crossbody mountain climbers, followed by starfish crunches and side planks, before concluding his session with a few yoga poses. After wiping his face with a clean towel, he chugged down some water before picking up his gym bag and heading toward the gym's exit.

On the way out, Zachary took a cursory glance around the gym. He noticed that Fernando Llorente was still working out with weights on the other side of the room. Meanwhile, Álvaro Morata, Kingsley Coman, Paolo De Ceglie, and a few others were on the treadmills and the cycling machines. They were all working hard. Most likely, their minds were all full of thoughts of improving their fitness and making it into Juventus' starting line-up as soon as possible.

After nodding to a few of the players more familiar to him, Zachary quickly exited the gym. He entered the showers a few minutes later and took a cold bath.

The shower was quite enjoyable, making him feel quite refreshed after it. Maybe it was because Juventus had defeated AS Roma yesternight or because of the very productive morning gym workout, but Zachary was in a good mood. He couldn't help but hum The Script's famous 'Hall of Fame' hit as he dried himself and organized his hair.

Briefly admiring his reflection in the bathroom mirror, he saw a face that had grown more austere compared to a year ago. His facial features looked sharp, and the muscles over the rest of his body were well-built and defined as if carved from stone. His hard work in the gym over the past few months had obviously paid off, and he was in the best shape he'd ever been.

After getting dressed, Zachary heard the phone ring. Picking it up, he realized the call was from his interior designer. He immediately pressed the accept button and held it against his ear.

"Hello, Zachary!" A vibrant feminine voice sounded from the other end of the line.

"Hello to you too, Sofia," Zachary replied. "How are you?"

"I'm okay," she answered. "I'm calling to inform you that I have already finished work on your villa. You can come to look at it at any time. And please don't forget to prepare the rest of my payment. Thank you."

"Okay," Zachary answered, feeling his spirits brighten. "I'll wire the money immediately after looking at the house. Thanks for the hard work."

"You're welcome. So, when are you free to look at the house?"

"I would like to look at it today," Zachary said. "If it's okay with you, I can come to Pinerolo and look at the house in about one and a half hours."

"That's perfect," she intoned. "Let's meet at the villa at around 10:30 AM. I can hand back the keys to you, and then you can prepare to move in."

"Excellent!"

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Zachary was quite eager to move into the house. So, after ending the call with the interior designer, he quickly wrapped up everything and exited the training center.

Outside, in the parking lot, he linked up with Angelo Mattiello, his driver/interpreter. The two of them then wasted no time driving out of the Vinovo and heading to Pinerolo, Piedmont. They arrived one and a half hours later and found the interior designer eagerly waiting for them in front of the house.

The interior designer was a tall, middle-aged beautiful lady with short blonde hair and a huge bust. Her chest was for the world cup, so potent and threatening to burst out of her tank top. Zachary even suspected that she had artificial implants.

"Thank you for coming quickly, Zachary," she said with a smile. "As I said, I have already completed everything. The villa is ready for your viewing."

"Thank you," Zachary said. "Let's take a look at it."

"Okay."

With that said, their party of three quickly headed into the house. After stepping inside, Zachary was shocked and speechless, even though it wasn't his first time in the villa.

By sheer reflex, his eyes lit up after they took in the sparkling old-fashioned parquet floor that had been polished beyond measure. And then, there were the lustrous walls adorned with various paintings. They were like something out of a world-famous art exhibition. They reflected the morning light and caused the entire place to glow and exude a refreshing feeling. Then, moving on to the furnishings, including the elegant furniture, the chandeliers, the beds, the woolen carpets, the curtains, and the flower vases — everything had been well selected, cleaned, smoothened, and placed immaculately all around the house.

Just walking through the 14-room villa and allowing his eyes to expand and take in the magnificent ambiance of the place, Zachary could feel a real sense of peace flooding his soul. The interior designer had really outdone herself within a short period of five days. With a touch of her skilled hands, she had magically transformed Zachary's villa into a palace. It was like one of those celebrity cribs that Zachary had only seen on TV during his previous life. It was so homely, stunning, and pleasing to the eyes.

"So, how do you find the place," Sofia, the interior designer, asked as they walked into another bedroom.

"Quite good," Zachary replied honestly. "You've really transformed the place. I'm more in love with it. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Sofia replied as they walked out of the well-furnished bedroom. As they started descending the stairs, she continued, "By the way, your fitness trainer was the one that installed all the equipment in the fitness area. You should also look at it."

"Okay, let's head to the basement," Zachary agreed. He wasn't surprised as he was the one that sent Bjørn Peters, his fitness trainer, to install the fitness equipment a few days ago.

The party of three quickly descended the stairs before arriving at the door of the fitness area. On pushing it open, Zachary's spirits immediately brightened again.

The gym was luxurious and well-equipped with all the machines that could satisfy any professional footballer out there. Be it dumbbells, barbells, medicine balls, cycling machines, treadmills, etcetera — they were all in the room. Just looking at them, Zachary could feel his heart racing as he imagined the productive hours he would spend working out in the comfort of his own home. He no longer needed to spend long hours in external gyms but would perform most of his physical workouts in his own house. He couldn't help and sigh, again and again, feeling that being rich was the best sensation in the world.

"That should conclude the tour of the villa," the interior designer said, interrupting Zachary's musings. "If everything is to your satisfaction, please transfer the rest of my money to me, and then we can conclude this deal. Is that fine?"

"Yes, of course," Zachary said with a smile. "I really like what you have done with the place. Give me a few minutes to wire your money."

"Okay, thanks," she replied cheerfully and clapped her hands.

Her reaction amused Zachary, but he chose not to comment. Instead, he returned to Angelo's car and quickly worked on transferring the money to her. He wanted to conclude the deal immediately. Then, he would have all the freedom to vacate his hotel room and shift to his new 14-room mansion the following day after training. He was really looking forward to living in a mansion that he could only dream of during his previous life.

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## Chapter 492 Moving House

After wiring the money to the interior designer, Zachary felt like he'd unloaded a heavy load off his shoulders. He eagerly shook hands with her before saying his goodbyes and sending her out of the villa. He then returned to the villa's sitting room and settled in one of the comfy and lavish sofas before contemplating his next course of action.

Coach Allegri had allowed all the team players a day off after their victory against AS Roma the previous night. So, he had an entire day ahead of him without team training. He figured he could use all that free time to purchase a few more necessities before moving house.

Thankfully, the interior designer had done most of the required furnishing. Electronics like fridges, microwaves, cookers, washing machines, television sets, and other essentials like crockery, and beddings, among others, were already in the house. So, Zachary only needed to purchase a few minor stuff, like toiletries and towels, and then he would be set and ready to enjoy his new life in his brand-new home.

Additionally, Zachary thought of how he had discarded most of his training gear, clothes, and shoes before he left Trondheim to join Juventus. Thus, he reasoned that he needed to urgently buy new items if he wished to live comfortably in Turin. And being a day off for the squad, he could also utilize it to complete that very task he'd been putting off for quite some time.

"So, I guess I have to spend a good number of hours shopping today."

While considering the long hours of shopping he had to endure, Zachary also quickly thought of Camilla. She was so good at selecting great items from shops, and she would be of great help if she had some time. She would be the best person to offer great advice and help Zachary purchase quality items.

"I wonder how she's doing," Zachary wondered, fishing for his phone from his pocket. "I better call her and tell her about how I finalized the mansion purchase procedures. Maybe, she will agree to come over and help me out while I settle in the new place."

Zachary immediately dialed Camilla's number. However, the international call didn't connect. Only the electronic voice rang into Zachary's ears, mentioning that: "the number you're trying to reach isn't available at the moment."

Zachary, of course, didn't give up after one try but quickly dialed her number through WhatsApp. And voilà, the call indicated that it had connected the next moment. He waited for a few seconds, and Camilla's voice sounded from the other end of the line.

"Hello, Zach!" She said. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is fine. What about yours?"

"My morning is also going well."

"Are you okay? Have you recovered?"

"I think so," she said, sounding a little strange. "You don't have to worry about me. I'm doing okay."

"Okay," Zachary said.

"By the way," she said before Zachary could continue, "I'm glad you called. I also wanted to talk to you about something."

"Okay. Shoot! I'm all ears."

"My mom was worried about me. You know, with all that happened."

"Yes..." Zachary was a bit lost with where the conversation was going.

"So, she came over to visit me — and off base, without making plans, we up and decided to go on the trip. As I speak, we are now in Prague, visiting my childhood neighborhood. After departing from here, we might tour a few other places before returning to Norway."

"Oh, okay," Zachary said. "A trip should be good for you. You need time to unwind, especially considering what you've been through."

"Exactly."

"But what about work?"

"I filed for a leave of absence. My bosses were understanding, and they readily agreed. So, I'll be away from work and Norway for quite some time. That also means we won't be able to talk quite often over the next few weeks."

"Okay, so that also explains why I couldn't reach your number."

"Yes."

"How long are you planning to spend traveling with your mom?"

"Not sure yet," she replied a bit hesitantly. "But my leave of absence only lasts two months. So, my travels won't last longer than that."

"Okay," Zachary said, letting out a breath. "I have also just completed the purchase of a mansion and was planning to invite you for a visit. But it seems that's no longer possible."

"So, you're finally moving out of the hotel room," Camilla said with a chuckle. "Congratulations."

"Thanks."

"But unfortunately, I can't visit your new mansion any time soon. That'll have to wait until after my trip."

"That's okay. Just focus on enjoying your travels. I'll also be busy with the club over the next two months. But, of course, I'll still miss you."

"Is that so?" Camilla chuckled. "I'll also miss you. Anyways, I'm still on the road. Let's end our conversation for now. Love you."

"Love you too," Zachary responded. "Remember to tap on me when you're available to talk. Okay?"

"Okay, goodbye," Camilla agreed and ended the call.

Zachary glanced at the phone for a few seconds before shoving it back into his pocket. His gut feeling was telling him that there was something off about Camilla's abrupt decision to travel with her mom. But after a few seconds of contemplation, he decided to push the negative feeling to the back of his mind. Then, without further ado, he stood up from the sofa and exited the house through the side exit.

"Boss!"

On seeing Zachary emerge from the house, Angelo Mattiello, who had been waiting by his white Citroën, smiled. He stepped forward and asked, "Have you finished organizing everything here?"

"Yes," Zachary replied, smiling back. "The interior designer completed everything. So, all that is left is to buy some clothes, toiletries, and shoes. Then, I'll be set and ready to shift into the new house

Angelo took a glance at the house and nodded. "What about the security system? Did you have one installed?"

"There's one already installed," Zachary replied. "As you can see, there's a CCTV camera at the gate and all the entrances. That should be enough to scare off the thieves."

"But to be on the safe side, you should still have the system updated," Angelo advised. "You can hire a security company to upgrade the entire system, and then you can be sure you're safe whenever you're in your house."

"Do you know how long this takes to upgrade the security system?"

"I'm not sure," Angelo answered, shaking his head. "You need to call a security company, and they will give you all the details."

"Okay, I'll do that later," Zachary said. "I hope the security system upgrade doesn't affect my schedule. I really wish to move into the house tomorrow."

Angelo smiled. "You must remain patient as security is a must, especially for homes of prominent professional footballers in Italy. Spending just a few more days in a five-star hotel won't kill you."



Zachary chuckled after hearing that. "Indeed, you're right. I'll wait for the security company's verdict before deciding when to move into the house. That aside, I also need to hire a maid to work as the housekeeper, a security guard to man the gate, and another male laborer to manage the gardens and clean the pool regularly."

"That's easy," Angelo said. "You can search on the internet for people that fit your criteria. I'll also keep a lookout for any trained house helpers over the next few days. If I find some, I'll inform you."

"Thanks," Zachary said with a smile. "Since we have finished everything here, let's head out and do some shopping."

"Okay," Angelo agreed. "We can go to malls like Parco Dora Centro Commerciale and Area 12 Shopping Center. You'll find everything you need there."

"Great. Let's go."

With that said, Zachary immediately boarded Angelo's Citroën, and off they went, heading back towards the center of Turin. Roughly forty minutes later, they arrived at Parco Dora Centro Commerciale and thus officially started their day's shopping trip.

While wearing a hood, a cap, and dark shades to keep his identity a secret, Zachary moved from shop to shop, buying clothes and other essentials. Although he didn't manage to conceal his identity the entire time, he still utilized his shopping time well and bought various sets of designer clothes, shoes, training gear, and other stuff for the house. And by evening, he had already filled Angelo's car with shopping bags.

He ended his shopping spree feeling accomplished and had Angelo drop him at his hotel. The hotel staff helped him carry his shopping bags to his room as he enjoyed an early dinner. Then, after completing his meal, he exercised for a few minutes in the gym before returning to his hotel room for the night.

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Over the next few days, Zachary returned his focus to training. He spent most of the time at the Vinovo, attending team sessions under the strict supervision of his coaches.

As for the plan to move into the new villa, Zachary had postponed it to Friday, which was the day when the security company had promised to finish installing the security system. He was patient since he didn't wish for any disturbances after he'd shifted into his brand-new house.

Aside from training, Zachary didn't forget his language classes. Every evening, he would head to the language school and spend hours cramming and trying to pronounce Italian words. He was really focused on his language studies as he wanted to learn the language as soon as possible.

Due to the busy schedule, the days passed quickly for Zachary as he trained and studied Italian. He didn't even have time to meet Emily, his agent, who had been asking him for a meeting. He was so fixed, and before he knew it, it was Thursday, the eve of the day he would shift into his new house.

Fortunately for Zachary, there were no scheduled Italian Serie A matches for that weekend. There was also no team training starting Thursday, as most Juventus players had already departed to play the Euro Championships and international friendlies. So, Zachary, being a player without international duties, eagerly welcomed the time off and decided to utilize it to settle into his new home.

After waking up early on Friday morning, he quickly arranged his belongings before checking out of the hotel. He then had Angelo hire a small van that transported his stuff to his villa. As for him, he traveled in Angelo's Citroën and also arrived at his new home by 9:00 AM.

Standing before his house again, he could hardly contain his happiness. A soft smile outlined his face as he really felt blessed to be a highly-paid professional footballer playing for Juventus. He was glad that he no longer had to fit himself in a small hotel room but would instead start enjoying life while staying in his 14-room villa.

Chapter 493 Thoughts about which Country to Represent

493 Thoughts about which Country to Represent

The following day was a Saturday. And being a weekend without Italian Serie A matches, it was a relaxing one for Zachary, who had just moved into his new mansion.

He awoke to the rays of the already-risen sun streaming through the shy gap of the window curtain and shining into his eyes. Squinting slightly, he pivoted his gaze on the elegant clock hanging on the opposite wall as he shook off the remaining dregs of sleep.

The next moment, his heart shook with amazement as he learned it was already 10:00 AM. It seemed the comfort afforded by the new mansion was already impacting his work ethic. Without realizing it, he'd slept for so long and even delayed his morning exercise routine.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Zachary's phone started vibrating from the bedside table, breaking him away from his thoughts. Picking it up, he realized the incoming call was from Emily, his agent. He immediately pressed the accept button and positioned the phone against his ear.

"Hello, Emily..." Zachary spoke into the phone a bit hesitantly. He felt guilty, especially after putting off the meeting with Emily for quite some time.

"Hello, Zachary!" Contrary to Zachary's expectations, Emily's voice was as vibrant and sweet as ever over the phone. With a light chuckle, she continued, "How is the morning of my most important client? Everything going on well?"

"My morning is fine, and everything is okay on my side," Zachary responded, a relaxing feeling sweeping over him. "How about you, the best football agent in the world? How are you doing?"

Emily chuckled again. "My morning is fine as well. Did you finally move into your mansion?"

"Yes," Zachary responded. "I moved in yesterday."

"So, I guess congratulations are in order."

"I guess so. Thanks."

"How's the new place?"

"It's great," Zachary said. "However, it's also a bit too quiet as I'm still alone in the house."

Emily laughed. "Just get a wife," she said jokingly, "The place will no longer feel lonely."

Zachary replied with a chuckle but chose not to comment.

"Anyways," Emily continued, "We need to meet ASAP. I need to talk to you."

"Okay. Can we meet at my house? Is that okay with you?"

"Yes, that's okay," she replied.

"Excellent! I will tell Angelo to pick you up. Where are you at the moment?"

"B&B Hotel Torino. I'll be ready to head out at around eleven."

"Great," Zachary said. "Then, I'll tell Angelo to pick you up at 11:00 AM. See you in about an hour."

"Just a moment before you hang up!" Emily hurriedly said. "I'll be coming with Kristin. She's your publicity secretary, and we need to start involving her in some of our work-related conversations. Don't you think so?"

"Good idea," Zachary said. "I have no problem with her coming here. And that reminds me: Coach Bjørn Peters, my fitness trainer, and his wife, will also be coming here around midday. Maybe, we can all have lunch together and celebrate my moving into the new house."

"Coach Bjørn Peters!" Emily mumbled. "The coach from Norway, whose wife you hired as a chef?"

"Yes," Zachary intoned, "They'll be staying with me, just for convenience. With them around, I also won't have to stay alone in such a big house."

Zachary had already requested his fitness coach and newly-hired chef to move in and stay with him in the new mansion. And fortunately, Coach Bjørn Peters and his wife agreed to the invite after insisting on taking a pay cut as the coverage for rent. They had thus officially become the other occupants of Zachary's brand-new mansion and would stay with him until further notice.

"I think that's a great idea," Emily said after a few seconds. "Having your fitness trainer and chef staying with you will make life easier. They will be in an excellent position to manage your diet, sleep, and training regimens better."

"That's the whole idea," Zachary agreed. "Having them here is a blessing for me. Moreover, they will only be occupying a small section of the house. They won't inconvenience me in any way."

"Great!" Emily said. "I have to dress up and prepare for our meeting. Let's talk more when I arrive. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

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After hanging up, Zachary jumped out of bed. He quickly went through his fifteen-minute morning yoga routine before washing up and donning a fresh and brand-new Nike tracksuit.

Zachary then enjoyed a quick breakfast, which included nutritious foods like milk, cereal, fruits, and bacon. After completing the meal and placing the dirty dishes in the dishwasher, he settled on one of the comfy sofas in the living room to await Emily's arrival.

Leaning back into his seat, he took a moment to admire the lavish sitting room of his new home. The next moment, he felt completely relaxed as his eyes took in the sight of the morning sunrays dancing off the paintings, the vases, and the elegant furniture. And once again, his entire being swelled with satisfaction at the realization that he was already one of the few proud owners of mansions priced more than a million Euros in Italy.

"I can't be satisfied with only this," Zachary reminded himself. "I have got to keep on working hard. I must make more money and buy more assets around the world."

Smiling slightly, he decided to watch TV while awaiting Emily and Kristin's arrival. He picked up the remote and immediately switched on the TV. And just then, the speakers came alive with the sound of ESPN's eleven o'clock sports show.

"In other news," the beautiful sports presenter said, "There will be no matches for the English Premier League, the Italian Serie A, the Spanish La Liga, and other top leagues in Europe, as players take on international duties this weekend. In the Euro Championships, scheduled to be played later today, Poland will play Germany, Finland will face Greece..."

Zachary wasn't so focused as the presenter read out the fixtures for international matches. His manner was calm and relaxed as all the mentioned football games had nothing to do with him - a player yet to decide which country to represent. But just as he was about to switch the channel, a specific detail in the fixtures caught his attention.

"In the African Cup of Nation qualifiers," the TV presenter intoned, "The Democratic Republic of Congo will be facing off against Ivory Coast in Kinshasa at 4:30 PM Central African Time..."

Zachary's heart immediately skipped a beat. "DR Congo is playing against Ivory Coast," he thought. "That's my dad's country against my biological mother's country. I can technically represent either of the two."

While bathing in the warm autumn sunshine streaming through the wide door and the large windows, Zachary sat there and continued watching the sports show. But his thoughts were in turmoil as he entertained the idea of quickly selecting a country to represent.

As a footballer with the support of the system, Zachary desired to win every major title out there. He wanted to win the Champions League, the Italian Serie A, the English Premier League, and above all, the World Cup.

He obviously understood that he could win most of the club football titles by joining great sides. For instance, he could try to win the Serie A and Champions League with Juventus. And if he needed a change and wished for another league title, he could sign with another club from another top European League.

However, in the case of the World Cup, Zachary had limited options. He didn't just hope to represent any team in any part of the world but a country from Africa. His wish was to once upon a time make history by helping an African side win the World Cup. At one point during his career, he yearned to stand on the World Cup podium and hold the trophy with African teammates. That was his innermost desire — a yearning that caused him to be reluctant to commit to DR Congo, his homeland with limited prospects.

As a person with knowledge of the future, Zachary knew well that the prospects of Congolese football were grim. The management of the country's football team would remain sub-par, and the quality of the squad would decline over the next few years. And due to those considerations, Zachary couldn't picture himself winning any title while representing his country of birth.

However, Ivory Coast, the birth country of his biological mother, was a different story. In the present and the future, the Ivorians had talented footballers like Nicolas Pépé, Wilfried Zaha, Ibrahim Sangaré, Eric Bailly, Salomon Kalou, Serge Aurier, and the highly experienced Yaya Touré in their squad. And with such deadly and highly tactical options in their line-up, Zachary could picture himself accomplishing something with them if he represented Ivory Coast.

He was confident that with the addition of his skills aided by the system, the Ivorian squad would gain the necessary firepower to qualify for the World Cup a few times and move far within the world-famous FIFA tournament. The possibility was definitely there as the Ivorian side had more prospects as a team compared to DR Congo, his homeland.

"But how do I get in touch with the Ivorian Football Federation? Do I write them an email, or do I call them?"

Zachary shook his head and cast out the notions from his head. Then, after leaning back into the sofa, he quickly thought of his former teammate Eric Bailly, whose fate had taken on a different trajectory, especially after signing for Rosenborg.

"That guy is also going places," Zachary thought. "His fate has surely changed for the better."

Everything started at Rosenborg.

Influenced by Zachary, a training maniac, Eric Bailly had begun working hard during his first months in Trondheim. His commitment to football had paid off quickly, and he had attracted the attention of Tottenham after winning the Europa League the previous season. But that wasn't the end of his success story. After signing with Tottenham, the Ivorian quickly won a starting position and continued performing impressively. He was even already listed among the most promising young defenders in the premier league.

"He should be able to help."

Zachary decided to call Eric Bailly after the conclusion of the AFCON qualifiers the following day. He hoped his former teammate would link him to the Ivorian Football Federation. And if they accepted him as a player, Zachary would be able to kick-start the international side of his career. He would no longer have to stay home during international breaks since he would have a country to represent.

"Ding! Dong! Ding..."

The doorbell rang, breaking Zachary out of his musings after a short while. It seemed that Emily and Kristin had finally arrived. So, without wasting time, Zachary quickly walked to the door to let in his beautiful agent and publicity secretary. He was eager to have a heart-to-heart, especially with his agent, concerning the new endorsement deals that had just been offered to him by various international brands.

Chapter 494 A Relaxing Day with Acquaintances

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On opening the door, Zachary's eyes lit up as they took in the visages of his two beautiful visitors. As expected, it was Emily and Kristin on the doorstep, glowing with warmth under the rays of the morning sun.

"Welcome, ladies," Zachary quickly said with a smile. "It's nice to see you again." He stepped forward and hugged the two ladies one after the other. Then, after exchanging some inconsequential small talk, he invited them to enter his new home.

Just in passing, Zachary gave them a once-over as they walked by him and entered the house. As usual, Emily looked gorgeous in a formal grey lady's suit and a blue blouse that emphasized her elegance as a lawyer and football agent. On the other hand, Kristin had gone casual and donned a long-sleeved pink



blouse, tight denim jeans, and white sneakers. But, even in those relaxed clothes, the Norwegian girl still looked stunning, especially with her cheerful smile that was as bright as the midday sun.

"This place looks really amazing," Kristin said after stepping into the living room a few seconds later.

"The furnishing is just right, and the ambiance superb. You even have a Victorian Viennese Carved Clock on your wall! Truly extravagant! How much did you spend on the interior design of this place?"

Smiling slightly, Zachary said, "Most things were originally in the house. I only hired an interior designer to do the final touches. So, I didn't spend much."

Kristin chuckled and inclined her head to hold Zachary's gaze. "It seems you don't wish to disclose the money you spent. But I can still gauge that you coughed out a lot."

"Not necessarily," Zachary argued with a slight shake of his head. He then turned towards Emily, who was all along standing quietly by the side, and asked, "Do you want a tour around the house?"

"Not yet," Emily hurriedly said. "I'll tour the house after we finish our meeting. Let's start with the important matters first."

"Okay," Zachary agreed.

Emily nodded with a smile. Then, turning towards Kristin, she hurriedly said, "Kristin! You can take some time to tour around the house as I discuss some issues with Zachary. We'll call you when we require your input."

"Okay," Kristin replied, her eyes lighting up. She then turned towards Zachary and asked, "Are there any places around the house that are off limits?"

"None." Zachary shook his head. "Treat this as a home away from home and move wherever you want."

"Okay, thanks," she said excitedly. "Then, I'm off. Enjoy your discussion." Without waiting for a response, she quickly walked out of the living room and disappeared through the exit leading to the kitchen area.

"She seems to be in a good mood," Zachary said after seeing Kristin disappear. "It seems she's adapting well to life in Turin."

"Yes, she is," Emily agreed with a nod. "She had an easy time fitting into the communities in Turin as she speaks Italian well. From what she has told me, her studies are also progressing well. Her only complaint is that she has little to do as your publicity secretary."

"Oh!" Zachary was surprised. "Does she require more tasks in addition to managing my social media accounts? And will she have more time to complete the additional tasks?"

"Yes, to all questions," Emily said. "Before she left Trondheim, you had promised to make her your personal assistant, with additional tasks that included managing your schedule. Knowing all that, she applied for a part-time program at the university to create more time for more responsibilities. But you, as her employer, have not fulfilled your promise. You have not given her additional tasks that fit her role as a personal assistant."

"Oh, okay." Zachary nodded. "So, what do you suggest?"

"Let's just give her the additional responsibilities," Emily proposed with a smile. "For instance, you mentioned that you're looking for house helpers, such as a maid and a security guard. With Kristin working as your personal assistant, you don't need to search for them yourself. You can delegate the task to her instead of wasting your valuable time on it. I'm sure she will be able to complete it diligently with her skills."

"Is that so?"

"That was just an example," Emily quickly continued, "but there are many more ways a personal assistant can help you out. She can help organize your schedule, arrange meetings, remind you of important tasks, act as your first point of contact for callers, deal with emails, manage your mansion, and pay the necessary bills on time. As you can see, you, a professional footballer with a tight schedule, definitely need a personal assistant to handle all those miscellaneous tasks. There's no way around it. Otherwise, you'll tire yourself out if you try to do all those small tasks yourself."

"I understand," Zachary said, nodding. "Then, it's okay to give her more responsibilities. Let her start her job by searching for skilled and reliable house helpers to work in this villa. After completing that, she can

slowly take on the rest of the miscellaneous tasks around me. But one question. Now that she's my personal assistant, does she have to stay here?"

"That's not necessary," Emily hurriedly said. "She's your personal assistant, not your wife. She can just come here whenever there's a need. Other times, you can communicate remotely, for instance, by phone, when assigning her tasks."

"Okay, I understand," Zachary said.

"Great," Emily said. Turning around and settling down in one of the sofas, she continued, "That's that. So, let's quickly talk about the endorsement deals. I previously communicated how Vector X, a sportswear manufacturing brand, was willing to endorse you. As I said, they are serious about stealing you from Nike. So, tell me! Do you still want us to consider their proposal?"

"No!" Zachary shook his head. "Let's not consider it."

Emily's eyes widened. Then, her eyebrows twisted together, and she asked, "Why?"

"We still have a contract with Nike," Zachary answered, holding his agent's gaze. "Let's be patient until we complete our remaining two years with them."

"Oh!" Emily seemed disappointed. "Do you understand that you're losing out on a deal with an approximate base income of six million per year? Moreover, there are other benefits that come with the endorsement deal. For instance, the company promised you a 50% offer of all the profits from your 'very own' Vector X branded merchandise sales. Do you understand how much that money is?"

"Yes, I do," Zachary said, sighing. "I'll probably be missing out on a few hundred million Euros. But I still don't want us to jump ship and abandon Nike in the middle of our contract. Let's be patient for the moment, and see how things develop. Maybe, Nike may offer us a better deal in the near future."

On hearing the response, Emily observed Zachary for a few seconds before sighing and nodding. Forcing a smile, she said, "Okay, let's hope you're right, and Nike will give us a great offer soon. Otherwise, we'll regret not taking this deal."

"Fear not," Zachary consoled, his voice softening. "As long as I continue performing well on the pitch, more juicy endorsement deals will come our way. For now, I'm just preventing us from turning into unreliable jerks who abandon partners abruptly before the end of the contract duration."

"Okay," Emily said, nodding. "I understand. I'll stop all dealings with Vector X with effect from now."

"Thanks," Zachary said. "And I'm sorry for abruptly changing my mind."

"It's okay," Emily said, her smile turning more natural. "I'm your agent, and my only role is to execute your will. So, you don't need to feel sorry after changing your mind over any particular deal. It's your right as my client."

"Okay, I understand," Zachary said, nodding. He then continued discussing a few other issues with his agent while waiting for the arrival of his other guests.

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As planned, Zachary welcomed Coach Bjørn Peters and his wife to his home at midday. After greeting the others, the Peters couple quickly got into the groove — and together with Emily and Kristin, they agreed to celebrate Zachary's completion of the purchase of his house that very day.

For that occasion, Inger, Coach Bjørn Peters' wife, was the chef. She prepared a wide array of exotic and delicious dishes, which the others enjoyed at lunchtime. Then, after lunch, they all returned to the living room and spent the rest of the evening there.

While within the comfort afforded by Zachary's lavish seating room, they enjoyed drinks and talked about many goals, big and small. They even made plans to start a gym in Turin, hoping to attract clients by relying on Zachary's fame.

Their discussions were quite enjoyable, and they only managed to exhaust most topics long after the sun had set. They then called it a day, and with that, Emily and Kristin said their goodbyes and left the villa, intending to return to their respective places of residence for the night. The Peters, on the other hand, immediately occupied one of the rooms and thus commenced their agreed-upon habitation of Zachary's villa. And that was how Zachary's relaxing day with acquaintances ended.

## Chapter 495 Preparing To Return To Action

After moving into the new villa, Zachary settled into a productive routine. Over the next few days, he would wake up early at around six and either jog around his beautiful neighborhood in Pinerolo, Piedmont, or go through a gym session within the comfort of his home. Then, a bit later, after enjoying a lavish breakfast prepared by Inger, his newly-hired professional chef, he would have Angelo drive him to the Vinovo, where he would spend hours attending Juventus' team training sessions.

In the evening, after putting in a few hours of his own personal training to hone his ball skills and free-kick technique, he would head to the language school and spend ample time learning Italian. The classes would end at around nine, and he would then have Angelo drive him back to his villa, where he would quickly return to his bedroom and jump into bed for the night.

Day in, and day out, Zachary didn't waste any waking moment in the slightest. He was so focused on improving himself as a person and a footballer that he even forgot to reach out to Eric Bailly for a few days. He only recalled that he'd forgotten to call his former teammate after his Thursday classes ended early and his schedule opened up slightly.

That day, he arrived home at around 7:00 PM and then enjoyed a sumptuous dinner prepared by Inger, his newly-hired professional chef. After the meal, he returned to his room and cleaned up before settling on his bed and dialing Eric Bailly's number through WhatsApp.

"Hello, Zach!" Eric Bailly was quick to reply. "Long time no talk, big man. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing fine, Eric," Zachary replied. "What about you? How is life at Tottenham taking you?"

"I can say quite well," Eric said with a chuckle. "I have already managed to make the first team. So, I'm having a blast playing in the Premiership. The only regret is that you didn't choose to join Tottenham with Kasongo and me."

Zachary also chuckled in response. "It wasn't time for me to join the Premier League. That's why I couldn't join Tottenham."

"Oh!" Eric Bailly sounded surprised. "Does that mean you'll join in the future?"

"Maybe, maybe not." Zachary didn't dare to give a definite answer as he'd just joined Juventus. Sighing slightly, he continued, "For now, I'm still focused on enjoying my time here in Turin. Let's put club football aside. Congratulations on defeating DRC over the weekend. I saw on the news that you won by two goals to one in Kinshasa."

"Thanks," Eric Bailly said. "And I'm sorry about my team defeating your home country. We just had to win, as we really wish to qualify for next year's African Cup of Nations."

"No problem, man," Zachary said dismissively. "You don't need to apologize. There's always a winner and a loser in football matches. And this time, my country was on the losing end. End of story."

Eric Bailly chuckled in response.

"Eric!" Zachary said. "I need a favor."

There were a few seconds of silence before Eric Bailly's voice sounded again. "Well, that's surprising. What do you need help with?"

Zachary took a deep breath and told Eric about his biological mother and how she was from Ivory Coast. Then, building from there, he also informed Eric about his wish to represent the Ivorian football side in as few words as possible. He then ended his short narrative by requesting his former teammate to help him contact the Ivorian Football Federation.

"Oh, my!" Eric Bailly exclaimed after hearing Zachary's request. "Do you really wish to represent Ivory Coast? Are you not joking with me?"

"Not at all," Zachary assured. "I'm being serious here. I have not played for any country before. So, if the Ivorian Football Federation is willing to take me up, I'll gladly represent them. I need to play for an African team that has prospects."

"This is excellent." Eric sounded excited. "I'm getting goosebumps just picturing you in Ivory Coast's orange jersey, partnering with Yaya Touré in midfield. Damn! With your addition, we would go places, and winning the African Cup of nations or advancing to the late stages of the 2018 World Cup would no longer be just a dream."

"I'm glad you're so welcoming of me," Zachary said, surprised by Eric Bailly's enthusiasm. "So, can you contact the Ivorian Football Federation on my behalf?"

"Of course, I'll contact them," Eric agreed readily. "In fact, let me contact the president immediately as this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Ivory Coast. I would regret it for the rest of my life if any other country happened to poach you due to my dilly-dallying. Just give me a few minutes. Okay?"

"Okay," Zachary agreed. "Call me after you get a response. And thanks."

"No, don't thank me," Eric hurriedly said. "I should instead be the one thanking you for choosing to represent Ivory Coast. Just wait a few minutes, and I'll get an official response from the Ivorian Football Federation president."

Without waiting for Zachary to respond, Eric Bailly ended the call. It seemed he was in a hurry to call his home country's football governing body president.

Zachary, on his part, decided to busy himself with going through a yoga routine as he waited for Eric Bailly's response. He went through various relaxing yoga poses on the carpeted floor of his lavish master bedroom while listening to hip-hop music in the background.

Roughly a dozen minutes passed in a flash, and just when Zachary was about to execute the cow pose again, his phone rang, thus breaking him out of his routine. He picked it up and pressed the accept button without glancing at the screen.

"Hello, Zachary! It's me again." Eric Bailly's voice sounded as Zachary held the phone against his ear. "I have just gotten a response from the Ivorian Football Federation president."

"That fast!" Zachary exclaimed. "You were able to get a response quickly, even this late at night."

"Yes," Eric agreed. "As I said, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Ivory Coast. So, the president had to give me a response as quickly as possible, even if it meant waking up all the top brass of the country."

"Is that so?" Zachary was a bit amused. "So, what was the verdict?"

"Of course, it's a yes from the top brass of the Ivorian Football Federation," Eric answered with a light chuckle. "The entire Ivory Coast, the president of the football governing body, and the rest of the football officials in the country all wish for you to represent them in international competitions. Those were the president's very own words."

"That's great," Zachary said, letting out a breath. "So, what's needed for me to join the Ivorian Football team? Is there a lot of paperwork required?"

"Yes, there is," Eric said. "You must process your citizenship papers before you can represent Ivory Coast. But that's just a minor issue for a player with your standing. After I talked to the Ivorian Football Federation president, he promised to delegate some people to help you process your papers. So, you don't need to waste time trying to prepare the paperwork to represent Ivory Coast yourself. Instead, the Ivorian officials will help you complete all the required procedures and, later on, inform you when everything is ready. Moreover, your biological mother is Ivorian, and you already qualify as an Ivory Coast citizen by descent. So, the process will be quite fast and simple, and you might even be able to represent Ivory Coast during January's African Cup of Nations."

"That's great then," Zachary said. "Thanks."

"No problem," Eric said. "The Ivorian officials will contact you, most probably tomorrow. They'll give you more details concerning the necessary procedures."

"Okay, I will wait for their call."

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After ending the call with Eric, Zachary took another warm shower before jumping into bed for the night. He slept like a log and only managed to wake up when the clock hand had just pointed to the seven o'clock mark.



m He quickly went through his morning routine, including yoga, cleaning up, and breakfast, before heading to the Vinovo to attend that day's team training session. He then spent the rest of the morning going through various teamwork drills under the strict supervision of his coaches.

At midday, as he took a break from training, he finally received the expected call from the Ivorian officials. After making some small talk, they asked him for his biological mother's details and contact information, which he eagerly disclosed. Then, they requested his own details before ending the call with a promise to work on all his paperwork within two months.

Zachary, who was in maniac training mode, obviously pushed the matter of Ivorian citizenship out of his head immediately after placing the phone to the side. He joined the rest of his teammates for lunch at the canteen before attending the afternoon team training session with them. He worked hard for the next hour, only stopping when the coaches called a halt to the day's training.

Settling on the sides for a post-training water break, Zachary's started thinking about Juventus' tight schedule for the following few weeks.

It was one hell of a schedule for sure, as Zachary and the other Old Lady players would have to tough it out with Sassuolo in an away Serie A match the following day before heading to Greece and playing against Olympiacos in the Champions League on Wednesday, four days later. But that was not the end. After the Olympiacos game, team Juventus would play US Palermo (at home), Genoa (away), and Empoli (away) within a small window of a week before ending their busy schedule with other home games against Olympiacos and Parma on the 4th and 9th of November, respectively.

Zachary and the rest of the Juventus players were obviously in for a hard time, as they had to play seven matches in just over three weeks. They were all under immense pressure and had thus been training more intensively compared to the weeks prior.

Fortunately, the training on that day, which happened to be a Friday and the eve of Juventus' game against Sassuolo, had just ended early at around 3:00 PM. Thus, after attending Coach Allegri's pre-match tactical meeting, Zachary, who was tired as a dog, decided to return home and rest. He was hoping to relax and enjoy his afternoon within the safe confines of his villa so that he would be fresh and ready to play against Sassuolo the following evening.

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As scheduled, Juventus' match against Sassuolo kicked off at 8:45 PM the following evening in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The action within the Mapei Stadium, Sassuolo's home ground, heated up quickly, and it wasn't long before the teams started launching relentless attacks against one another.

One minute, the cheers of the visiting fans would hit a thunderous zenith as Juventus launched attacks through their highly-creative players, like Zachary, Andrea Pirlo, Carlos Tevez, and Fernando Llorente. But a few moments later, it would be the Sassuolo fans singing at the top of their voices as their team attacked Juventus with an indomitable impetus.

Obviously, both teams wished to draw first blood and score the first goal to gain an advantage early on in the game. They thus continued playing attacking football, going at each other like mad and causing the tension in the stadium to soar to unbelievable levels.

Spirited counters and wing runs became the order of the evening, and due to the highly offensive football on display, the game became fast-paced. The team formations also turned almost worthless as the playing field heated up with tension. And in such a manner, the time passed quickly, and soon it was the 27th minute.

At that moment, it was the Sassuolo players on the ball. They were trying to launch another offensive against Juventus with snappy exchanges through the middle. However, a misplaced pass by Simone Missiroli, their central midfielder, rendered their efforts fruitless and sealed their fate of losing possession.

"Whoosh!"

Arturo Vidal, the Juventus defensive midfielder who happened to be close by, immediately pounced toward the loose ball. He slid forth and prodded the ball toward the right flank with the tip of his outstretched boot. And with that effort, he set loose Stephan Lichtsteiner and initiated another lightning-fast counter.

Stephan Lichtsteiner, on his part, controlled the ball mid-stride before continuing his mad dash toward the other side of the pitch. He cut through the flanks like an incarnation of the Flash while prodding the ball forward. His pace was for the world championships, and he effortlessly raced past two opposing players before squaring the ball to find Zachary in the middle.

As usual, Zachary was composed, fast, and decisive while receiving the ball. Taking it in his stride, he feigned going right before going left to lose an opponent. Then, with a slight shift of pace, he skipped past another Sassuolo player before expertly threading the ball forward to find Fernando Llorente.

Fernando Llorente, who happened to be in fine form, of course, didn't disappoint. He skillfully edged past an opposing center-back to connect with Zachary's pinpoint pass. He then squared his body and curled the ball over the goalkeeper and into the back of the net.

Llorente's 28th-minute goal allowed Juventus to gain the advantage, and the score was then 1:0 in favor of the team from Turin. As a result, the almost impossible task of coming back from behind against the best team in Italy lay on the shoulders of the Sassuolo players. They had to attempt to score at least a goal while continuing to defend well to keep the Juventus attackers at bay. Otherwise, they would obviously lose the game on their home ground and thus disappoint their home supporters.

\*FWEEEEEEE\*

With the sound of the referee's whistle, the game recommenced. And as expected, the Sassuolo players pressed forward, immediately launching an offensive against Juventus. Their urgency on the ball was evident in their playing style, and anyone watching the game could tell that team Sassuolo yearned to score an equalizing goal as soon as possible.

However, as the Sassuolo players pressed forward, they left spaces behind, and more opportunities began to open up for Juventus on the counter.

The highly creative Old Lady attacking players, like Zachary, Tevez, and Stephan Lichtsteiner, took advantage of the situation and almost extended their lead on multiple occasions. They even came close to scoring during the 43rd minute as Carlos Tevez's audacious bicycle kick smashed off the post before bouncing out of play.

After the half-time break, the game continued, and the pressure from the Sassuolo players grew more relentless. By relying on brilliant wing play and long ball tactics, they backed the Juventus players into their own half and forced them on the defensive during the opening ten minutes of the second half.

But just as supporters began to think that Juventus was about to concede a goal, a sudden change occurred on the pitch. Zachary, who had mostly stayed quiet during the opening minutes of the second

half, exploded with brilliance. He dispossessed Francesco Magnanelli close to the border of the final third before kicking the ball to his left to find Patrice Evra on the left flank.

But Zachary didn't stop at that. Before Evra could receive the pass, he whirled around and then took off towards the other side of the pitch, hoping to be involved in the attack.

"Pa..."

Evra, on his part, effortlessly brought the ball under control on the left flank. Then, racing forward, he exchanged a couple of one-twos with Zachary, who was running in sync with him, as he speared into Sassuolo's half at breakneck.

Stepping into the final third, Evra was not selfish. Instead, he chose to slow down and pass the ball to Tevez, who had just floated into an unmarked pocket of space on the left side of Sassuolo's box.

Tevez effortlessly connected with Evra's through ball before whirling around and passing to Fernando Llorente. The latter took a single touch before flicking the ball back to Zachary, who had positioned himself immaculately close to the edge of the box.

"Whoosh!"

Judging the angle of the approaching pass, Zachary pounced forward. He didn't even bother to control the ball but just blasted it and sent it on a curling trajectory toward the inside of the far post. His shooting technique was flawless, and he beat the keeper to score Juventus' second goal during the 64th minute.

With the goal, Juventus gained momentum. They attacked and defended spiritedly during the remaining minutes of the game. They also played as a unit and denied Sassuolo any chance to score even a single goal. As a result, they managed to maintain their 2:0 lead and win the game after six minutes of added time.

After the game ended, the Juventus players were all in a celebratory mood. They had just accomplished their seventh consecutive win in the Serie A and further strengthened their position at the top of the Serie A. As a result, they gained confidence as a team and worked even harder over the next few days.

While training, the days passed quickly, and Wednesday arrived. The Juventus players, who had finished all their preparations, took an early morning flight to Greece and played against Olympiacos Piraeus in the evening.

Maybe, it was because of the traveling or the tight schedule, but the Juventus players weren't at their best against the Greek side. They started on the back foot after conceding an early goal during the 5th minute. But an impressive two late goals from Zachary and Andrea Pirlo during the 77th and 91st minutes, respectively, allowed them to win their 3rd successive Champions League fixture for that season.

The Juventus players then returned to Turin the day after the game. After resting for a day, they trained intensively for three days before welcoming Palermo to Turin. Backed by the support of their home fans, they dispatched their opponents with goals from Arturo Vidal, Fernando Llorente, and Zachary Bamba, thus further cementing their pole position on the Serie A table.

But that was not the end of their tight schedule. Three days later, on Wednesday, 29th October, they played against Genoa away from home and won by two goals to one. For that game, Zachary didn't score. But he still provided the two assists that resulted in the two goals scored by Tevez and Llorente for Juventus.

Then, two days later, on a rainy Saturday evening, Juventus played against Empoli away from home. For that game, the Old Lady players were brimming with spirit. They easily thrashed the opponents by three goals to zero after Andrea Pirlo, Zachary, and Álvaro Morata found the back of the net during the 14th, 57th, and 72nd minutes, respectively.

Juventus' insanely tight schedule then continued with a return Champions League game against Olympiacos on Tuesday, 4th November. But even after Coach Allegri fielded a second team, Juventus still went ahead to win the game 1:0 with an early goal from Simone Pepe.

Having rested for more than four days, Juventus' first-string players were back in action against Parma on Sunday, 11th November. They played an impressive game and easily thrashed the opponents by nine goals to zero.

Fernando Llorente, Carlos Tevez, Zachary Bamba, and Álvaro Morata all scored braces, while Stephan Lichtsteiner completed the one-sided demolition of Parma with a late goal.

And with that, the Juventus players had successfully completed their insanely seven-match tight schedule and remained unbeaten. They still had a perfect run in both the Champions League and the Serie A, without a single loss or a draw. As a result, they were a hot topic in Italy and the rest of Europe, with many famous media outlets citing how they had just accomplished the most perfect start of the season in over a decade.

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#### Chapter 497 Zachary's Impact on the Team

Following Juventus' 9:0 thrashing of Parma FC, the entire Juventus club was in a celebratory mood. Be it the coaching staff, the club managers, the fans, the medics, and even the cleaning staff — they were all glowing with radiant smiles on the Monday after the game. Anyone walking around Juventus' facilities at the Vinovo could tell that there was something different and extraordinary about the club due to their enthusiasm and brimming spirits.

"I can't believe we're still unbeaten even after playing eleven Serie A games and four Champions League matches. We're almost about to make history." Coach Allegri's ears picked up a conversation between two ladies dressed as cleaners as he approached his office on Monday afternoon.

"Your information is not right," the other cleaning lady hurriedly reminded. "We're not just unbeaten in all our games. Instead, we've accomplished a perfect run, meaning we haven't lost or drawn a game. As you can see, there's a big difference between an unbeaten and a perfect run."

"Oh, my bad!" The other middle-aged cleaning lady nodded. "That's even more impressive. With Zachary Bemba joining us, our squad has become invincible. I don't think even the current Barcelona or Real Madrid squads can acquire a point from us. If we chanced upon them, we would thrash them by three or four goals to one."

"You're right," the other lady agreed, nodding like a hen pecking grain. "Barcelona has Messi, and Real Madrid has Ronaldo. But we do have Zachary. I'm also of the view that we would defeat them easily."

"Yeah..." The other lady concurred. But just as she was about to continue, she spotted the nearby coach Allegri and let out a little yelp. "Coach! Good afternoon!"

The other lady also reacted and followed suit with a greeting. "Good afternoon, coach!"

Coach Allegri smiled on seeing the reaction of the two ladies. They were standing at attention, like a pair of well-trained soldiers greeting their commander. "Good afternoon to you too, ladies!" He returned their greeting with a smile. "How is your day?"

"Our day is going well," one of the ladies responded. "We're just taking a small break before returning to work."

"Okay, wonderful." Coach Allegri chuckled. "Don't mind me. I'm only passing by. Just carry on with your conversation."

He nodded at them before smiling and continuing on his way. Behind him, he could still hear muffled whispers between the two ladies. But he didn't give any more notice to them and sped up, heading towards his office.

A few minutes later, he entered his office and quickly settled in his chair. He then booted up his laptop and started reviewing the sports news published by reliable media houses.

Slowly but surely, his smile grew more pronounced as he noticed that all the Italian press was praising Juventus' form. Famous newspapers, like the La Gazzetta dello Sport, Tuttosport, and the Gazzetta del Popolo, were all writing about how Juventus was doing wonders. They explained how the team had beaten all opposition since the start of the new season and then rated the Juventus players based on their respective contributions to the team's perfect run.

Zachary Bemba was, of course, the player with the highest rating on Juventus' squad. Based on the fact that he'd already scored ten goals and provided twelve assists in 10 out of 11 Serie A appearances while also netting seven goals (with two hatricks on different occasions) in the Champions League, most newspapers awarded him a record rating of 9.3/10. The newspapers also explained how Zachary was the most creative and efficient player in Juventus, with the ability to bring the best out of his teammates and make them tick.

"Truly remarkable! These articles are right on the money."

Coach Allegri nodded to himself after reading the information about Zachary. He totally agreed with the newspapers since he understood Zachary's capabilities quite well.

After Zachary had settled into the Juventus squad, he didn't just help the team by scoring goals. Instead, he'd utilized his never-say-never attitude and hardworking ethics to induce an over-the-top competitive spirit within the entire squad. As a result, the players, especially the attackers, were more focused than ever, often putting in more hours of training than before. And due to their diligent efforts and yearning to match Zachary's level, they quickly transformed into better versions and began putting on more consistent and remarkable displays during matches.

An example was Carlos Tevez, the Argentine who had already scored nine goals in the Serie A. His edge and brilliance on and off the pitch were exceptional over the previous few games, and in just about eleven games, he had already netted almost half the total number of all his goals from last season.

But he wasn't the only one that had improved after Zachary's arrival. There was also Fernando Llorente with seven goals and Álvaro Morata with five goals. They had turned into goal machines due to two reasons. Firstly, they were working harder than before on and off the pitch. And secondly, they were getting good service from Zachary during matches.

"Having Zachary on the team is really a blessing."

Coach Allegri sighed and returned to reading the news on his laptop. For the next few minutes, he took in all the published information quietly, only frowning, smiling, or shaking his head at times. Then, just as he was about to end his reading session, a new headline that had abruptly manifested on the home page of Tuttosport's website caught his attention.

"Just in," the headline read, "Zachary Bemba, Juventus' 19-year-old wonder boy, nominated for the Golden Boy award."

"Yes! This how it should be." Coach Allegri smiled as his eyes took in the headline. He was obviously not surprised that Zachary was on the 40-man shortlist for the Golden Boy award, an accolade first established by the Italian paper - Tuttosport.

Had he not been on the list, then Coach Allegri would have immediately deduced that the entire voting committee was blind and incompetent.

"Let's see who else is nominated."



Quickly reading the article, Coach Allegri took in more details about the Golden Boy nominations. Aside from Zachary, the other young players nominated included Liverpool's Raheem Sterling, Calum Chambers of Arsenal, Luke Shaw of Manchester United, Everton's John Stones, and Eric Dier of Tottenham. Then, there was Domenico Berardi (Sassuolo), Bernardeschi Franco (Fiorentina), Kingsley Coman (Juventus), Keita Baldé Diao (Lazio), Mateo Kovacic (Inter), and many others to make up the 40-man shortlist.

However, as far as Coach Allegri was concerned, none of those names could hold a candle to Zachary. The coach believed they were there as decorations on the list to accompany Zachary, the rightful winner of that year's Golden Boy award.

After reading the article, Coach Allegri turned his attention to other issues. He worked on training plans and read scouting reports until evening arrived. Then, just as the sun was about to sink below the western horizon of Turin, he wrapped up everything before exiting the training center and heading to the J Hotel for a team dinner.

The club officials had organized the dinner for two reasons. Firstly, the players would be heading for international duty over the next few days. So, the get-together was a way of sending the players off in good spirits. Secondly, the club management wanted to take advantage of the dinner party and officially recognize the efforts of those players who had gone above and beyond to help Juventus accomplish a perfect run in both the Champions League and the Serie A. In other words, they would utilize the dinner as a ceremony to award Juventus' best-performing players for the first quarter of the season.

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Meanwhile, Zachary also arrived at the entrance of the J-Hotel's restaurant at around six in the evening. He was obviously not at the place to buy a meal but to attend Juventus' team dinner.

On stepping inside, Zachary's heart skipped a bit. Pausing in his step, he glanced at the immaculately arranged dinner tables before slowly sweeping his gaze across the room to observe his teammates.

"Damn! I'm really underdressed." That was the only thought that appeared in his mind the next moment.

The rest of his teammates, including the often-casually dressed players like Carlos Tevez, Kwadwo Asamoah, and Giorgio Chiellini, had all donned their impressive suits for the dinner party. They all looked sleek and dapper as they moved around, mingling with each other in the restaurant.

But what about Zachary? The man himself had not given his attire much thought since, as a new player, he wasn't aware of the usual dress code for Juventus' team dinners. He just put on a tucked-in white shirt with blue jeans and gentle black shoes before throwing a black leather jacket on top to complete his get-up. He, of course, looked sleek and fashionable since the attire matched his physique. But the only issue was that he had become the odd man out after walking into the dinner party venue.

"Eh, Zachary, you've arrived! Welcome."

A familiar voice sounded behind Zachary as he walked further into the restaurant. Turning around gracefully, not to knock into anyone, he came face to face with Patrice Evra, who was also in a sleek black suit. For the occasion, the Frenchman had gone above and beyond to dress up. His hair was well-combed, his shoes well-polished, and it was as if he was about to receive a Ballon d'Or or attend the Oscars.

"How are you, Patrice?" Zachary greeted him with a smile.

"I'm fine," he replied, giving Zachary a once over. "Zachary, you really look smart. Your outfit is unique, and it adds charm to your entire persona. Keep it up, bro." He ended his compliments with a thumbs-up.

"Quit messing around, Evra!" Zachary reprimanded. "We were together after the match yesterday when the director invited us for a team dinner. Why didn't you remind me that the dress code was a suit?"

Evra chuckled and said, "I'm not your wife. Neither am I your fashion designer. Why should I remind you? But that isn't the main question. Aren't you aware that the dress code for work dinners is always a suit? I thought it was common knowledge."

In response, Zachary sighed and shook his head. "I only thought this was a small dinner with the main theme of eating. That's why I didn't bother to dress formally."

"Then, sorry to you, my friend," Evra said, patting Zachary's shoulder. "But worry not! No one around will hold your poor choice of fashion against you. Come; let's find where to sit."

Zachary smiled ruefully before following Evra to one of the tables. He'd already accepted his fate of standing out as the 'odd man out' at the dinner party since he could not just up and depart to change attires.

#### Chapter 498 Team Dinner

Shortly after settling on one of the tables, Zachary busied himself with exchanging small talk with the rest of his teammates. Players like Arturo Vidal, Andrea Pirlo, and even Gianluigi Buffon, the highly experienced captain, approached his table and offered their greetings one after the other. And like Evra, a few, who were more familiar with Zachary, even teased him about his choice of outfit for the dinner party.

Zachary, of course, was on his best behavior during the party. He returned their greetings with a smile and didn't get irritated because of their teasing. His heart was like that of a Buddha, without any ripples as he sat there, letting the club's festive mood wash over him.

A few minutes later, all the players took their seats around the dinner tables, and the party officially commenced. The waiters and waitresses swarmed in and started serving the food and drinks. And with that, the bunch of well-dressed Juventus players busied themselves with their food while at times toasting to each other and exchanging some small talk.

It was as if the celebratory mood was weaving all the players, coaches, technical staff, and club officials together as the most magnificent tapestry. They didn't stop chatting and laughing as they feasted. Anyone watching from a distance could see they were having a good time and bonding as a team.

"Ding! Ding! Ding..."

Suddenly a couple of rhythmic clinking chimes sounded as the dinner party was in full gear. With a slight tilt of the head, Zachary immediately noticed that Fabio Paratici, the Juventus sporting director, was the source of the sounds.

Under the artificial lighting in the room, the director exuded a magnificent and proud aura as he rose from his seat. Smiling slightly, he swept his gaze across the room as he continued tapping a spoon against his glass, obviously with the intention of attracting the attention of the others in the room.

"Buonasera a tutti voi!" He started off his speech by greeting everyone present in Italian. Then, smiling again, he continued spewing Italian words, most of which Zachary could not understand, before switching to English after a few more minutes.

"For the benefit of some of our brothers here that don't speak Italian, I'll switch to English for the next part of my speech," he said with a chuckle. "As I just said, we have been impressive as a team over the past few weeks. Our competitive edge has grown to never-before-seen levels, and our team spirit has soared, allowing us to win all our fifteen opening games in the Champions League and the Italian Serie A combined. I can't even begin to express how happy we're as the club management with such results. In light of that, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to you all - the players, the coaches, and the technical staff for the job well done. Cheers to you all!" He raised his glass to toast to everyone around.

"Cheers!" All the players, coaches, and technical staff returned the toast with bright smiles before gulping down their drinks.

Fabio Paratici smiled and continued, "I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the best performers for Juventus during the just concluded month of October. Match in, match out, they are the people who have contributed the most to our success during the first quarter of the season. They are the heroes of the club who have worked tirelessly to help us accomplish a 15-match perfect run this season. When I read your name, please step forward and receive your award from the chairman."

"First and foremost on the list," Fabio smiled, "Let's begin by recognizing the efforts of our head coach - Massimiliano Allegri. His tactics have been spot-on, allowing us to win all our games since the start of the season. Ladies and gentlemen! Let's put our hands together for our head coach as he steps forward to receive his award."

"Pa, pa, pa..."

The thunderous clapping and applause resounded across the room as Coach Allegri stepped forward and picked up his accolade. With a bright smile, the coach shook hands with the chairman and director before quietly returning to his seat.

"Next," Fabio continued, "I would also like to take the opportunity to recognize the MVP for Juventus for the first quarter of the season, who has been exceptional on the field of play. Firstly, he scored ten goals and provided twelve assists in just ten Serie A appearances. Secondly, he has already netted seven goals in three UEFA Champions League appearances with hattricks against Malmo and Atlético Madrid. But

that is not all. Just coming in today, he has also made the shortlist for this year's Golden Boy award. Ladies and gentlemen! Please put your hands together for Zachary Bemba, Juventus' MVP for the month of October."

"Pa, pa, pa..."

The applause was even more thunderous as Zachary stepped forward to receive his accolade. He proudly marched across the room in his blue jeans and leather jacket and stood before Andrea Agnelli, the club chairman.

"Congratulations," the chairman said, taking Zachary's hand for a firm handshake. "Keep up the good work." And with a stretch of the hand, the president handed Zachary his award.

"Thank you," Zachary said with a smile. He then received his award from the outstretched hand of the chairman before whirling around and returning to his seat.

At that moment, he felt very accomplished. His spirits were flying high after the club recognized his efforts. As a result, his smile became even more radiant as he settled back in his seat.

"Man, congratulations," Patrice Evra whispered from beside him.

"Thanks," Zachary replied after placing his accolade on the table.

"But why didn't you inform me that you were on the nominee list for this year's Golden Boy award?" Evra inquired.

"Why should I inform you?" Zachary asked with a smile. "It's not as if you're my girlfriend."

Evra grinned. "So, that's how you retaliate. But congs anyway. I'm really happy for you. Keep working hard, and you'll soon ascend to the top."

"Sure, thanks again," Zachary whispered before returning his focus to Fabio, the sporting director, who was still continuing with his speech.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" Fabio said. "Although we've already achieved a 15-match perfect run, we shouldn't grow complacent. Instead, we must continue working hard on and off the field to ensure we don't lose any games throughout the season."

"This communication is just in from the chairman and the entire board," Fabio continued after sweeping his gaze across the room. "If we're to finish this season without losing any game in the Serie A, each player will receive a bonus of one million Euros while the technical staff will each receive 100,000 Euros."

Whispers emerged around the room when the sporting director announced the bonus money. But the director ignored them and continued, "So, ladies and gentlemen! Continue working hard to ensure that we win all games this season. Then, the money will be yours. And please never forget that, as Juventus, the sky is our only limit. May god bless you, and continue enjoying yourselves." The president then sat down as the applause resounded across the room again.

"So," Evra said to Zachary after the applause subsided, "Do you think we can achieve an unbeaten run this season?"

"I think it's possible," Zachary replied after chugging down his non-alcoholic cocktail. "On paper, we're the best team in the Serie A. And in theory, we should be capable of defeating all opposition within Italy. So, we only need some luck to achieve an unbeaten run."

"You seem confident," Evra said after taking a sip of his own drink. "But don't forget that there are circumstances beyond our control sometimes. Losing a few games is normal even though we're the best team."

"That's why I said we need some luck," Zachary intoned. "But if we're to achieve an unbeaten run, all that bonus money will take a great dent in Juventus' financials. I hope the executives know what they are doing."

Evra smiled. "If we were to achieve an unbeaten run, then there would be no need to worry about the financials. The club would gain back the money through improved television rights deals, sponsorships,

and endorsements, plus increased ticket and shirt sales. They wouldn't be making any losses if we went 38 matches unbeaten."

"Is that so? Then, I guess there's no need to worry. The executives must know what they're doing." Zachary said before returning his focus to his food.

Evra, on his part, stayed silent, seeming to be thinking about something for a few seconds. Then, he said abruptly, "Most of us are heading off for international duty tomorrow, and as you know, I'm representing France. What about you? Are you going to play for DRC?"

"No." Zachary shook his head. "I'll be staying in Turin to train. I have no international duties yet."

"Are you not eager to play internationals?" Evra asked. "I'm sure that many countries, including France, would welcome you into their squads. So, why aren't you choosing a country to represent?"

"I have already chosen a country to represent," Zachary replied with a smile. "But I just don't wish to disclose it for the moment."

"Oh, okay," Evra said, nodding. "Then, I wish you luck wherever you'll be. I really hope to see you in the 2018 World Cup. It's just a pity that I'll most likely have retired from international duty and won't be able to compete against you."

Zachary chuckled but said nothing in response. He'd already chosen to represent Ivory Coast during International competitions. They were a team with a lot of promise and would even win the AFCON would surely increase, and just maybe, they might change their fate and qualify for the competition. the following year. So, as long as he added himself to the equation, their 2018 World Cup prospects They might even do wonders at the tournament and reach the late stages of the World Cup. Those were his innermost hopes.

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#### Chapter 499 New Training Plans

After leaving the dinner party, Zachary returned to his villa. He waved to Angelo, his driver for the night, and then traversed the walkway cutting across the lush gardens as he slowly made his way toward the villa's side entrance.

As he walked forward, the gentle autumn breeze tickled against his face, soothing his emotions and casting a spell of serene tranquility over him. His face broke into a smile, and he took a few moments to observe the scenery around him.

He could see the water in his swimming pool glowing under the bright glow of the security lights in the distance. Then, whirling around, his eyes took in the tall trees spread around his entire estate. Their green leaves shimmered under the luminous glow of the moon above as they swayed back and forth under the influence of the wind.

Continuing to look around, Zachary took in the flowers, the walkway with rows of lamp posts on either side, and then the villa, which was like a castle out of a fantasy movie. At that moment, he felt that everything was perfect, and his fondness for his newly purchased villa increased to a higher level.

Smiling slightly, Zachary decided not to continue dawdling in the compound any longer. Instead, he traversed the walkway and arrived at the side entrance of his villa quickly.

He didn't bother to ring the doorbell but just punched in the security code to open the door. It opened with a whoosh, and he quickly stepped into the house, leaving the door to swing shut behind him.

After walking for a few more seconds, he arrived in his living room and noticed that Coach Bjørn Peters and his wife, Inger, were still awake. They had been lounging on the sofas while watching TV. But on seeing him arrive, they quickly turned around to greet him.

"You're back," Coach Bjørn Peters exclaimed, standing up from his seat. "How was the team dinner?"

"The dinner was great," Zachary responded with a smile.

"I can see that," Coach Bjørn Peters said, turning his gaze to the glittering accolade in Zachary's hand. "You even won another award. Which one was it?"

"October player of the month for Juventus."



"Then, congratulations," Coach Bjørn Peters said. "You truly deserve the accolade. You have been doing impressively on the pitch over the past few weeks."

"Thanks," Zachary replied before turning his gaze to Coach Bjørn Peters' wife. She was a tall, beautiful lady with red hair and bright blue eyes. Nodding at her, Zachary greeted, "How are you today, Inger?"

"I'm fine, Zachary," she replied with a smile. "Do you want me to fix you a late-night snack?"

"No, no." Zachary hurriedly shook his head. "I ate a lot at the dinner party. I don't have any room for more food in my small stomach."

Inger chuckled and nodded in understanding. "I get you," she said. "I guess the party should have been quite enjoyable."

"It was okay," Zachary said and placed his accolade on a nearby table. Then, settling down on the sofa, he continued, "I managed to eat my fill and talk to my teammates outside the training field. So, I guess it was enjoyable."

"That's good," Inger said.

"Zachary!" Coach Bjørn Peters chimed in before his wife could continue. "A few days ago, you mentioned that you would utilize the next ten days without Serie A football to start an intensive training regimen to improve your agility, body coordination, and ball skills. Is that still your plan?"

"Yes," Zachary replied. "I wish to improve my dribbling, ball control, and pace with the ball. And to achieve all that, the first thing to do is to work on my coordination and agility."

"Okay," Coach Bjørn Peters said. "But I must inform you that improving agility and coordination takes time. It's a gradual process, and you need to work on it consistently over a period of more than six months to see initial results. So, as your fitness trainer, my advice to you is this. Let's start by including a few exercises targeted toward improving your agility and coordination in your current routine."

"In the beginning, our main training objective will be to stimulate your body to acclimatize to your new regimen without affecting your performance on the pitch. We won't do anything intensive except for lighter routines of Ball or Balloon Toss, Jumping Rope, Balance Exercises, Juggling and Dribbling Drills, Cone Weaves, and Shuttle Runs."

"Then, later on, like after a month or two," the coach continued with a smile, "we can increase the intensity of the exercises and add in more routines, like swimming and targeted weight lifting, to improve your core strength. As long as we follow such a plan, you should be able to feel your coordination and agility improving in about six months."

"Can't we shorten the timeline?" Zachary asked.

"No," the fitness trainer's voice was firm. "In fitness training, patience is crucial to success. We've got to set achievable goals and work on them consistently for months or even a year to accomplish good results. Otherwise, if we're to rush, we might tire out your body and make you injury-prone. And that's what we want to avoid here. Our sole objective should be to gradually raise your fitness while also maintaining your productivity on the pitch during football games."

"Okay, I understand." Zachary nodded. "Let's begin early tomorrow and follow your plan. I really hope to improve my ball skills and agility as soon as possible. I wish to be more effective on the pitch and more clinical in front of the goal."

"You surely will with time," Coach Bjørn Peters promised. "As long as you keep working hard off the pitch to improve your athleticism, you'll soon become deadly. Not even the top defenders in the Serie A will be able to keep up with you."

"I hope so," Zachary said, nodding. He'd decided to work harder than usual to quickly improve his overall skills and, in so doing, enhance his chances of scoring hattricks against top teams in both the Champions League and the Serie A. Then, he would be closer to completing the system's new mission and obtaining Ronaldinho's Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic.

"We also need to ensure that your diet keeps up with your training," Coach Bjørn Peters said after a few seconds. "So, I'll discuss the training plan with Inger later, and she will arrange an appropriate diet to match your training goals. Please, ensure that you follow Inger's instructions while selecting the foods to consume over the next few months. Okay?"

"That's a given," Zachary said. "I'll follow her instructions to the letter." He'd hired Inger as his dietician and chef to manage his diet so he would achieve better results during training. So, he wasn't about to ignore her instructions.

"Okay, guys," Zachary said, standing up. "Let's talk again tomorrow. I'm now going to bed."

"Okay, have a good night," the Peters couple replied more or less in unison. "See you tomorrow."

"Have a good night too. Bye."

Zachary responded to their goodnight wishes before quickly stepping out of the living room area and heading up the stairs. He arrived in his bedroom a few minutes later and immediately entered the bathroom to take a warm shower.

After cleaning up and drying himself with a towel, he donned his nightwear and settled on his bed. He then picked up his phone from the bedside table and dialed Camilla's number.

The next moment, the dial tone sounded, indicating that the call was about to connect. But after a few seconds, an electronic voice reverberated in Zachary's ear, expressing that the number he was trying to call wasn't available.

Quickly opening his WhatsApp, he sent her a hello. But again, the messaging app quickly showed a single tick on the mailed text, indicating that she hadn't received the message. She was most likely offline.

"Is she really okay?" Zachary pondered.

Over the past two weeks, Camilla hadn't even talked to Zachary once. She'd only sent a text through WhatsApp a week ago, saying she was still traveling with her mom somewhere in Poland. Then, after that, she'd gone silent again, leaving Zachary to wonder whether she was really okay.

"Maybe, she's in a place without network coverage," Zachary mulled as he placed the phone back on his bedside table. "She might be in a jungle, on a nature tour, or on the road in a rural area. I'll have to wait for her to call."

Sighing slightly, Zachary quickly forced himself to push Camilla's matters to the back of his mind. He had many other issues on his mind, including his planned investments, endorsement contracts, and above all, his career and training plans. So, considering all those worries and his busy schedule, he wouldn't allow himself to spend much time contemplating matters he couldn't control.

"I should sleep early," Zachary decided and jumped into bed. However, he didn't sink into slumberland immediately after entering between the sheets. Instead, his mind continued drifting, and he thought about a few more matters that transpired during his first three weeks in his new villa.

After he'd taken Emily's advice and delegated more assignments to Kristin, the Norwegian girl became more effective. She was already effectively handling all the miscellaneous tasks for Zachary, including organizing his schedule, paying bills, representing him in the not-so-important meetings, and so on and so forth. But that was not all she'd achieved over the past few weeks.

Ten days ago, she'd finally hired house helpers for Zachary. They had quickly taken their posts and were already helping out in the daily maintenance of the villa. As a result, Zachary no longer needed to hire outside help to clean the house or wash the laundry. He was already self-contained due to Kristin's efforts.

"Okay, I should sleep now," Zachary decided again. "I need to start on my new training regimen early tomorrow."

And with that, Zachary closed his eyes and sank into a peaceful slumber soon after.

#### Chapter 500 Twelve-Day International Break

For Zachary, days without Serie A football meant more time for training and honing his skills. So, as his teammates left for their respective international duties, he immediately began following his new training regimen.

Under the guidance and supervision of Coach Bjørn Peters, his fitness trainer, he went through drills to enhance his agility and coordination day in and day out. Anyone watching his training could tell that he was as focused as ever. He wasn't cutting corners or taking things lightly as he trained over the next few days.

That time around, however, Zachary made sure not to overwork himself. He followed Coach Bjørn Peters' advice and would only train for half a day.

As such, Zachary would do gym workouts, cardio, or other conditioning exercises early in the morning, from around six to ten. After that, he would rest for about an hour before running cones and working on his ball skills. And lastly, he would train his free kick technique before ending his day's training with a warm-down routine at around midday.

In the afternoon, after having his lunch, it was time to work on improving his other aspects. He would head to the language school and spend the rest of his day studying Italian. Then, after that, he would return home and spend time reading, following the sports news, or watching movies within the relaxing atmosphere provided by his villa.

And with all that relaxation time on his hands, it wasn't long before he started feeling well-rested and in bright spirits. As a result, he was really beginning to appreciate the captivating idea of taking time off from his often-hecktic schedule.

Aside from training, learning Italian, and relaxing during the twelve days without competitive football, Zachary also spared some time to complete a select few of his long-planned investments.

He met his investment consultant on Monday, 17th November, just five days before his return to football action. And with her help, he utilized a few million Euros out of his saved 15-million signing bonus and spent the money on buying more shares from promising companies all around the globe.

Within a short two days window, he invested another one million Euros into Tesla, four million Euros into Netflix, and four million to buy a 2.9% stake in Leeds United, the struggling football club playing in the English Championship. But he didn't just stop at that. He also went against the expert advice of his investment adviser and splashed out four million Euros on bitcoins before ending his investment craze.

Of course, after spending all that money, he was only left with roughly a million Euros in his bank account. But that didn't worry him in the slightest, as he was still making more money on a weekly basis.

He was calm and collected since he had his roughly 636,000 Euros a month salary, playing bonuses, and juicy endorsements to fall back on. Additionally, there was still the seventeen million he demanded from

Juventus as the balance from his 32-million signing bonus. So, as far as he was concerned, he wouldn't go broke even if he tried his utmost.

Wednesday, 19th November arrived right after Zachary finished making his investments. After attending that day's language classes, he returned home early at around 4:00 PM and immediately switched on the TV. Minutes later, he started watching Ivory Coast's match against Cameroon.

Since Zachary had already decided to play for Ivory Coast, he wanted them to win. But after sitting in front of his TV, he soon realized that his hopes wouldn't turn into reality.

Ivory Coast played well, launching relentless attacks through their agile forward players like Yaya Toure, Gervinho, Wilfried Bony, and Salomon Kalou. They were the better team on the playing field. However, even after doing all they could to create opportunities, they still failed to break down the tenacious Cameroonian defense. As a result, the game ended 0:0 after four minutes of injury time.

But even with such a result, the Ivorians were quite happy as they had managed to qualify for January 2015's African Cup of Nations as second in their group. As a result, they would be heading to Equatorial Guinea two months later to compete for Africa's most prestigious football trophy.

Having watched the Ivory Coast game, Zachary returned his focus to his training and Italian classes. He busied himself with his planned routines as two days passed in a blink, and Friday arrived.

Fortunately, by then, all his teammates had returned from their international duties. He turned his attention to Juventus' official planned schedule, hoping to join the rest of the squad to prepare for the away Serie A match against Lazio. He was ready to return to action with a bang and continue performing impressively for Juventus.

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On Friday, the team held a light training session in the morning to hone the tactics for the following day's match against Lazio. Then, at three in the afternoon, Coach Allegri summoned all the players to the tactics room for the pre-match briefing.

"Let me take this opportunity to welcome you back from the international break," the coach said after all the players had taken their seats. "I hope you all enjoyed your time while representing your respective countries. Did you?" The coach swept his gaze around.

"Yes, we did," most of the players replied more or less in unison.

"Good!" The coach nodded. "I know that most of you must be tired after playing matches in various localities spread around the globe. But as professionals, you have to toughen up and start focusing on your club duties. And even though we only managed to train for a few hours today, we must still do our best against Lazio tomorrow. We must not lose. And we must not come out of the fixture with a measly draw. Instead, we must pull out all stops to defeat the opponents and maintain dominance at the top of the Serie A table. Are you with me, guys?" The coach roared.

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

"Are you with me? Are you ready to defeat Lazio tomorrow evening?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied again.

"Good." The coach smiled and nodded. He then spent the next few minutes complementing various players before talking about tactics and how to approach the game against Lazio the following evening. He spoke for an hour and then ended his pre-match briefing by announcing the line-ups.

On his list were the usual first-string players, like Zachary, who had rested for almost two weeks during the international break, Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal, Claudio Marchisio, and all the others who had been performing impressively over the past few weeks. And as expected, there was no Patrice Evra, the Frenchman who'd suffered an injury while playing for France a few days prior.

After announcing the line-ups, Coach Allegri didn't continue holding up the players for long. He quickly reminded them to be on time the following day before sending them back to their respective homes. He hoped they would utilize the evening to rest well and prepare mentally for Juventus' away game against Lazio the following day.