

Greatest 671

Chapter 671 The System Upgrade is Complete

671 The System Upgrade is Complete

The day after the World Cup trophy parade passed quietly in Abidjan. The bustling city seemed to have taken a collective breath after savoring Ivory Coast's recent World Cup victory.

Zachary, the man of the moment, remained holed up in his house on the city outskirts, immersing himself in his mangas while waiting for the system to complete its 72-hour upgrade.

He did spare some time to talk to Kristin during meals, and as usual, their conversations were light and filled with a shared sense of companionship. But most of his time was spent with his beloved mangas, a simple pleasure that provided him solace amidst the storm of his rising fame and the demanding requirements of the football profession.

On the morning of his second day in Abidjan, Zachary woke up late to the familiar sound of the system's notification. His heart quickened as he realized the system had finally completed its upgrade.

He sat up in bed and readily summoned the translucent system interface. It flickered before him like a hologram from a sci-fi movie, a blend of the futuristic and the fantastical that had become an integral part of his life.

As he scanned the home menu, he was relieved and surprised to see that the system had reached its maximum level, upgrading from Level 5 to Level 6.

Complicated feelings welled up within him. This system had been his constant companion since his rebirth, guiding him from a mediocre player to the world-class athlete he had become.

The realization that the system had reached its final level made him feel like their journey together was moving into its closing stages. He sighed, a mix of nostalgia and determination in his breath, and turned his attention to the other contents on the system interface.

This time, there were not many changes after the upgrade. The interface was cleaner and more intuitive, but the core functionalities remained unchanged.

The most significant change he noticed was that he could now access his rewards for the World Cup mission. His eyes lit up as he saw the rewards: three SSS-grade elixirs and the Random Technique Upgrade totem.

These were incredibly valuable, capable of raising his attributes and making his skills even more lethal just before his transfer. They would be crucial to the next stage of his career if his move to Liverpool worked out as planned.

As Zachary continued navigating the system interface, he finally noticed a new benefit on the system interface. He could now purchase any skills he wanted from the System Shop, provided he had the required Juju points. However, this option wasn't particularly beneficial at the moment.

He had already mastered various skills, such as the Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic of Ronaldinho, making him a formidable threat to any defender on the field. These techniques were already seamlessly integrated into his unique playing style, so he wasn't keen on acquiring more from the system, at least for the moment.

Yet, he wouldn't shun this new benefit, especially since the future was always uncertain. There might come a time when he would need a completely different skill set to overcome a tricky situation. At that time, the system shop and his Juju points would be his saviors.

Pushing these distracting thoughts aside, Zachary turned his attention to the SSS-grade elixirs. These were the rewards from the system for his outstanding performance at the World Cup. He couldn't wait to see how they would boost his abilities once he consumed them.

Zachary felt optimistic as he still had over two weeks left until the 2018-19 English Premier League season-opening games. Even better, he wouldn't need to join Liverpool's pre-season tour since he had just played in the World Cup finals.

This meant he had ample time to consume and digest all the rewards from the system before training arduously and allowing his body to acclimatize to its improvements over the next two to three weeks. There was really nothing stopping him from consuming the elixirs.

But first, he needed to settle his affairs before consuming the elixirs. The last thing he wanted was to make Kristin worry in case something unexpected happened.

With his mind made up, he dismissed the system interface with a mental command and took a deep breath before stepping into the shower. As the warm water washed away the remnants of sleep and tension, he geared up mentally for the crucial day ahead. Today would be another pivotal day on his journey to reach the peak of greatness.

After his shower, he slipped into his favorite pair of jeans and a cozy T-shirt. Stepping out of his bedroom, he was greeted by the warm embrace of the morning sun flooding the house with light.

As he entered the living room, he found Kristin seated on one of the sofas, engrossed in a book. Her presence brought a sense of normalcy and calm to the house.

Seeing him, Kristin greeted warmly, "Good morning, Zachary. How did you sleep?"

He smiled, feeling the familiar comfort of her voice. "I slept well, just like a baby."

Kristin closed her book, her eyes sparkling with warmth. "That's good to hear. Would you like some breakfast?"

Zachary sighed inwardly, feeling a pang of guilt. "Kristin, you don't have to cook for me. You're my PA, not my chef. I asked you to hire a chef when we arrived, remember?"

Kristin waved away his concern with a gentle smile. "Zachary, it's no trouble at all. We're only here for a short time, and I enjoy cooking. Plus, hiring someone new could compromise your security. I'd rather handle it myself."

08:17

Zachary knew she was saying this to ease his guilt, but he appreciated her dedication. "Thank you, Kristin."

As she made her way to the kitchen, Zachary settled himself at the dining table. He didn't have to wait long. In just fifteen minutes, Kristin reappeared, carrying a tray with fried eggs, slices of bread, a banana, and a cup of hot milk. She placed it before him, and he thanked her once more before digging in.

Kristin sat across from him, a soft smile playing on her lips. "Yesterday was quite eventful," she began. "A lot of local journalists wanted to come in and interview you. I had to refuse them, and the military escort helped chase them away. Otherwise, they might have forced their way in."

Zachary nodded, chewing thoughtfully. "You've worked hard, Kristin. Continue refusing any interviews. I don't want media attention while enjoying my only vacation of the year."

Kristin promised with a nod. "I will. You deserve the rest."

A comfortable silence settled between them as Zachary continued his breakfast. Then, Kristin broke it with a hint of excitement in her voice. "Speaking of plans, Lorenzo has already traveled ahead to Bukavu. He's preparing for our arrival, ensuring the place is secure."

Zachary nodded, already aware of Lorenzo's meticulous preparations. "That's good. We should prepare as well. We'll be traveling to Bukavu tomorrow morning."

Kristin smiled and replied, "Understood. I'll make sure everything is ready."

Zachary quickly finished his breakfast and looked up at Kristin with a grateful smile. "Thank you for the food, Kristin."

Kristin chuckled. "Glad you enjoyed it. How was it?"

"Tasty enough that I might just have to change your job from PA to personal chef," Zachary teased, a playful glint in his eyes.

Kristin laughed, her eyes alight with the compliment hidden behind his words. "I wouldn't want to take Inger's place," she said, picking up the dishes. She headed towards the kitchen, but Zachary quickly stopped her.

"I'm feeling a bit fatigued," he said. "I'm going to continue resting for a few hours. Please make sure I'm not disturbed."

Kristin looked at him, a flicker of concern crossing her face. She probably wondered why he was breaking his routine to sleep during the day, but she didn't voice her doubts. Instead, she smiled warmly. "Of course, Zachary. I'll make sure you're not disturbed."

"Thank you," he replied, giving her a reassuring smile before heading back to his room. Now that he had given an excuse to Kristin, he was ready to consume the SSS-grade elixirs and see how they would improve his abilities.

Zachary locked the bedroom door behind him to ensure privacy and settled on his bed. He summoned the system interface, the ethereal screen flickering into existence before him.

After a few more taps, he navigated to the system inventory, where the life-like icons of the SSS-grade mental conditioning elixir, the SSS-grade vitality-enhancing elixir, the SSS-grade Spatial Awareness Conditioning elixir, and the Random Technique Upgrade Token filled the slots.

Suppressing his excitement, Zachary began by tapping on the icon of the vitality-enhancing elixir, which appeared in the shape of a tiny banana.

As his finger left the interface, the small banana popped out of the screen, and he caught it deftly in his hand. Without wasting a second, he swallowed it, knowing he had to consume it within five seconds of its appearance.

Chapter 672 Ascending to New Heights

672 Ascending to New Heights

A refreshing sensation welled up within Zachary's entire body, spreading like a tide after he swallowed down the SSS-grade vitality-enhancing elixir.

He felt a profound relaxation as if his skin and muscles were under the care of the best masseuse in the world. But just as he was getting used to the comfortable feeling, sharp pains assaulted him from all over his body.

Zachary quickly picked up one of his T-shirts and bit down on it to stifle his cries. He collapsed on the bed just as popping sounds emerged from his body, seeming as if his bones were cracking and reassembling at a rapid pace.

The pain was excruciating, unlike anything he had ever experienced. His muscles and joints itched painfully as the elixir worked its magic. The SSS-grade version was potent, and the distress it caused was almost unbearable.

But Zachary had faced death once. He summoned every ounce of his willpower to endure the agony. His vision blurred with tears, but he held on, gritting his teeth against the pain. Seconds stretched into an eternity, but finally, the pain began to subside.

He took a moment to catch his breath, the T-shirt falling from his mouth, damp with sweat and saliva. He got up from the bed and marveled at the changes coursing through his body.

His muscles felt denser, his bones sturdier, and his movements more fluid. It was as if he had been reborn, his physical capabilities enhanced to a new level beyond what any ordinary human could ever dream about.

With a deep breath, Zachary knew he wasn't done yet. He still had two more elixirs to consume and was ready for whatever came next.

The vitality-enhancing elixir had tested his willpower. But he had emerged more vigorous and more resilient. Now, he was prepared to face the challenges the other elixirs would bring.

Summoning the system interface once more, determination burned in his eyes. His next goal was the SSS-grade mental conditioning elixir, designed to refine his cognitive abilities and improve his mind's control over his body.

This elixir would even negate the side effects of the potent vitality-enhancing elixir he had just consumed. Without hesitation, he summoned the SSS-grade mental conditioning elixir, which appeared in the shape of a small apple, and readily swallowed it.

This time, no sharp pains were assaulting his body. Instead, a jolt akin to an electric shock emerged from the base of his spine, moving upwards along his back before hitting his brain like a bolt from the blue.

Zachary's mind immediately blanked out, and he lost his perception of his surroundings. He felt empty, unable to form even a conscious thought for what seemed like an eternity. Fortunately, his mental tenacity allowed him to push through until the weird sensations gradually began to ebb.

Slowly, his perception of the outside world began to return. He blinked his eyes and found that he had already collapsed on the floor.

Breathing in to center himself, he picked himself up from the floor, only to realize that his mind and senses had become sharper. His thoughts were more coherent and faster, and his memory seemed to operate with photographic preciseness.

He could recall the finest details of his surroundings without looking, from the texture of the carpet under his feet to even the minute set up of the chairs he had seen in his living room early that morning. His sense of time had also improved; moments felt more substantial, giving him more control over his reactions and decisions.

Zachary felt an unprecedented clarity and focus. His mind was a sharpened blade, ready to cut through any mental fog or distraction. He could feel the difference in his connection to his body as if every muscle, nerve, and fiber was perfectly attuned to his will.

The previously vivid side effects of the vitality-enhancing elixir had also disappeared, replaced by a harmonious balance within his system. He could sense his heightened physical capabilities and knew he could control them with newfound exactness.

After savoring the changes he had experienced, Zachary glanced at the time on his phone. It was only nearing midday. Relieved, he realized he hadn't been out for long and still had some time to consume the last elixir.

Zachary once again summoned the system interface, navigating to the system inventory. Only the life-like icons of the SSS-grade Spatial Awareness Conditioning elixir and the Random Technique Upgrade Token remained.

He focused on the Spatial Awareness Conditioning elixir, knowing it would be his next test for the day. This elixir would enhance his perception of space and movement, making him more adept at navigating the field and avoiding defenders. It would grant him an almost preternatural awareness of his surroundings.

He readily summoned the SSS-grade elixir, which took the form of a small ginger root. Without hesitation, he swallowed it, feeling its slightly rough texture slide down his throat.

The effect was almost immediate, and he felt his head spinning. But with the experience from the other elixirs, he held on with pure willpower and managed to settle himself on the bed before he could fall back to the ground.

His head throbbed, and his thoughts turned messy as he lost perception of his surroundings again. Gradually, he felt disconnected from the world, as if his awareness had been pushed out of time and space and into some blurry, bleak dimension.

Negativity began to creep into his mind, but as the discomfort became almost unbearable, the weirdness passed. His perception of his surroundings returned. Moreover, it was much more acute than ever.

His eyes were sharper, and he could even see a tiny spider weaving almost translucent cobwebs in the corner of the ceiling. His hearing was more sensitive; if he focused, he could hear Kristin turning the pages of a book in the living room.

His sense of smell had also heightened, allowing him to detect the faint odor of the shirt he had worn that morning. The Spatial Awareness Conditioning elixir had worked wonders, and his senses had risen to unprecedented levels.

Zachary narrowed his eyes, wondering whether he could still be classified as human. Everything about him was becoming extraordinary because of the system, like the incredible stuff of movies. He didn't really know what he would eventually turn into.

Breathing deeply, he suppressed the weird thoughts and returned his focus to his immediate objective. His goal was now to achieve peak greatness in football, and he wouldn't let anything stop him.

Next, he had to use the Random Technique Upgrade Token. But before that, he first summoned the system interface to check his current attributes.

The holographic screen flickered before him, and he navigated to the attribute section. His stats were displayed in detail, showing marked improvements in several areas.

*USER STATS (Breakdown)

->Physical Fitness (Av. Rating: SSS)

Balance and Coordination: SSS

Agility: SSS

Strength: SSS

Stamina: SSS

Endurance Points: 159,950/160,000 (SSS)

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

Ball Control: SS+

Dribbling Skills: SS+

Passing Accuracy: SS+

Body Control: SSS

->Game Intelligence: (Av. Rating: SS+)

Spatial Awareness: SSS

Tactical Knowledge: SS

Risk Assessment: SSS

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

Soccer Passion: SSS

Composure and Mental Strength: SSS

Coachability: A+

Self-Motivation: SS+

->X-Factor (Av. Rating: SSS)

Consistency Factor: SSS

Luck Factor: SS+

Supernormal Factor: SS+

Match Winning Factor: SSS

Zachary smiled as he took a look at his attribute page. His physical and mental stats were now off the charts.

His "Strength" and "Balance and Coordination" attributes, which had been stuck at the SS+ level for quite some time, had experienced a breakthrough, shooting up to the SSS grading.

The maximum cap of his SSS-grade endurance had also increased from 110,000 to 160,000 points. Zachary felt a surge of pride; these significant transformations would help him take his game to the next level and allow him to become a demon on the pitch.

But these weren't the only benefits he gained from consuming the three SSS-grade elixirs.

His Game Intelligence attributes, including Spatial Awareness and Risk Assessment, had also shot to the SSS grade, while his Tactical Knowledge lagged just a bit behind at the SS level. His other mental abilities had also improved, making Zachary feel like he'd experienced transcendence.

Turning to his soccer technique stats, Zachary wore a relieved expression.

Usually, after consuming potent elixirs like the vitality-enhancing elixir and putting his body through significant transformations, his technique attributes—such as Ball Control, Dribbling Skills, Passing Accuracy, and Body Control—would experience a slight decline, falling by a grade or two.

However, because he had consumed the vitality-enhancing elixir alongside the mental and spatial awareness conditioning elixirs, these attributes had instead experienced improvements. Even his Body Control had shot to the SSS grade.

The combination of elixirs had created a synergistic effect, harmonizing his physical enhancements with his mental acuity, thus stabilizing and even enhancing his technical abilities.

Zachary couldn't contain his joy. He didn't have to deal with the usual side effects of consuming the vitality-enhancing elixir this time.

Moreover, he suspected that if he went through targeted training over the next few weeks, some of his soccer technique stats might improve even further as the effects of his improved cognitive abilities continued to work wonders. These were the benefits of SSS rewards from the system.

Chapter 673 Sparks in the Darkness

673 Sparks in the Darkness

With renewed focus, Zachary turned his attention to the Random Technique Upgrade Token. This was the final piece of the puzzle, the last step in his planned transformation for the day.

Summoning the coin-like token, he watched it appear in his hand, glowing with an otherworldly light. He knew that using this token would randomly upgrade one of his techniques, potentially giving him an edge that most players could only dream of.

Taking a deep breath, he activated the token. The light it exuded intensified, enveloping him in a warm glow. A surge of energy coursed through his body, targeting his neural pathways and muscle memory. His mind buzzed with new information, and blurry images flashed with his every thought as one of his core techniques was refined.

The process lasted only a few moments, but Zachary felt a profound change when it was finally over. He accessed the system interface to see which technique had been upgraded.

A flicker of disappointment flashed through his eyes as they landed on his Soccer Technique section. He had hoped to raise his Dribbling Skills to the SSS grade first. Instead, the random upgrade token raised the level of his "Ball Control" stat to the SSS grade.

Nevertheless, he readily suppressed his disappointment. He sighed, understanding that the change was still beneficial to him.

"Ball Control" was a foundational skill that could do wonders if trained to an incredible level, like the SSS grade. It was the bedrock of all technical skills, enabling better dribbling, passing, and shooting. With impeccable ball control, one could effectively dictate the game's tempo, making them more formidable on the field.

Zachary observed his stats for the last time before dismissing the system interface with a mental command. He felt a deep sense of satisfaction as he rose from his bed.

He had pushed his limits and emerged sturdier, more capable, and more determined than ever. His journey was far from over, but he was better equipped to face whatever lay ahead.

He stole a quick glance at his phone and saw that it was almost 1:00 PM - just about time for Kristin to call him for lunch. In need of a refresh, he headed to the bathroom for a brisk shower, shedding off the day's weariness and sweat.

Emerging from the shower, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and couldn't help but notice the transformation. His complexion seemed smoother, his muscles more defined, and his eyes held a fierce determination reminiscent of a battle-hardened warrior. Tying back his braided hair with a scrunchie, he suited up in a fresh Nike tracksuit, ready to face the rest of the day.

Emerging from his bedroom, he spotted Kristin putting the finishing touches on lunch, just as he had anticipated. She extended an invitation to join her for the meal, and soon, they were seated at the table, relishing the delicious food.

After the satisfying meal, Zachary expressed his gratitude to Kristin and then excused himself, making a beeline for his secluded gym at the rear of his residence.

His immediate goal was to engage in exercises targeted at helping his body adapt to his newfound abilities. Despite the assistance provided by the mental conditioning elixir in this area, Zachary still yearned to employ traditional gym routines to further enhance his mastery over his physical faculties.

The gym was stocked with modern training equipment, thanks to the meticulousness of Kristin and Bjørn Peters, his fitness trainer. The two of them had taken the time to travel to Abidjan while he was still in Turin and had filled the place with all the necessary equipment.

Zachary readily entered the room and started exercising. He didn't overwork himself but did light exercises, only aiming at improving his body control and coordination at a manageable pace.

He began with a few balance drills, using a Bosu ball to challenge his stability. He then moved on to agility ladders, weaving in and out to enhance and grasp his footwork and quickness.

Afterward, he did single-leg squats and lunges while maintaining perfect form to refine his core strength and balance. Finally, he spent time on the resistance bands, working on his lateral movements and explosive power.

As the evening arrived, he finished his training session and left the gym feeling accomplished. After hydrating with several glasses of water, he headed to his bedroom, where a refreshing shower awaited before he dove into bed for a quick nap.

His awareness drifted into slumberland until a sudden knock on the door jolted him awake. He opened his eyes and immediately noticed the evening darkness that had already descended outside. Hastily rising from his bed, he walked to the door and pulled it open, only to find Kristin standing there.

"You've been asleep for nearly three hours, and it's nearly eight now," she said, her voice soft. "Dinner's all set. Come, let's eat together."

"I'll be there soon," Zachary replied, returning to his room. He splashed cold water on his face at the sink, allowing it to rejuvenate him fully. Feeling more alert, he headed to the dining room, ready to enjoy the meal and Kristin's company.

As they ate, their conversation gradually turned to their plans for the next day, their journey to Bukavu, and how long Zachary intended to stay there.

"We'll spend two nights in Bukavu," Zachary said, "and then head back to Turin to wait for Emily to finalize the negotiations with Liverpool. As long as we get the green light, I can sign the new contract, and we can start the moving process."

Kristin nodded thoughtfully. "We'll need to apply for English visas since Britain isn't in the Schengen area."

"I'll leave all that to you, Kristin," Zachary said, smiling. "If the move to Liverpool works out, I trust you'll handle everything."

Kristin smiled and was about to reply. But just then, the power flickered, and the house was plunged into darkness.

The sudden change startled them, but Zachary quickly reached for his phone to use the flashlight. Standing up from the table, he said, "It should be the occasional power outage, the load shedding that sometimes happens in Abidjan. Let's check the generator."

Kristin complied, and they moved through the darkened house together, their steps cautious. The generator was in the shade outside the back of the house, and the night air was cool and refreshing.

As they arrived before the generator, Zachary started fumbling with the controls, trying to get it to start. But as someone only obsessed with football, he failed.

Kristin stepped closer, saying, "Let me help." As she stretched out her arm, their hands brushed against each other, sending an unexpected jolt through Zachary. He subconsciously glanced at her, their eyes meeting in the dim light. The closeness, the touch, it all felt electric.

Zachary's heart raced as Kristin's fingers deftly navigated the generator's controls. The darkness around them seemed to magnify the intimacy of the moment. He could hear her soft, steady breathing and feel the warmth of her body close to his with his newly enhanced perception. The cool night air contrasted sharply with the heat rising between them.

"Here, try this," Kristin said, her voice barely above a whisper. She guided his hand to a lever, their fingers interlacing briefly.

Zachary swallowed hard, his throat suddenly dry. "Okay," he managed to say, his voice a bit hoarse. He followed her instructions, and with some effort, the generator roared to life, and the lights flickered back on.

They stood there for a few more seconds, bathed in the soft glow, their faces inches apart. The tension was almost tangible now, an invisible thread pulling them together. Zachary could see the reflection of the generator's light in Kristin's amber-brown eyes and how her lips parted slightly as she caught her breath.

"Thank you," Zachary said, his voice barely more than a whisper. He was vividly aware of how really close they were and the charged atmosphere between them.

Kristin smiled softly. "It's what I'm here for," she replied, her voice equally quiet.

For a moment, neither of them moved. The world outside seemed to disappear, leaving just the two of them standing in the glow of the generator. The air was thick with unspoken words and feelings they had long buried, a magnetic pull that neither could ignore.

Zachary felt his resolve wavering. He wanted to lean in, to close the gap between them, but he hesitated, unsure of how Kristin would react. She seemed to sense his internal struggle, her eyes searching his face for answers.

"Kristin," he began, his voice shaky, "I..."

But before he could finish, Kristin took a small step back, breaking the spell. She glanced away, a slight blush creeping up her cheeks. "We should probably get back inside," she said, her tone returning to a more professional demeanor.

Zachary nodded, feeling a mixture of relief and disappointment flooding through him. "Yeah, you're right."

They returned to the house in silence, the moment of closeness lingering between them. Once inside, the normalcy of their surroundings seemed almost jarring.

Zachary couldn't shake the feeling that something significant had just happened, something that had the potential to change everything.

As they returned to the dining room, the conversation quickly shifted back to their plans. They discussed logistics, travel arrangements, and the upcoming negotiations with Liverpool.

Everything seemed just as before. But the electric moment by the generator remained at the forefront of Zachary's mind, a tantalizing hint of possibilities that could have been.

Chapter 674 A Journey of Memories and New Beginnings

674 A Journey of Memories and New Beginnings

The next day, Friday, July 20th, 2018, dawned bright and early for Zachary and Kristin. By 8:00 AM, they were already airborne, on the private plane Kristin had chartered, heading toward Bukavu.

The flight was uneventful, for the most part, allowing Zachary to relax and gather his thoughts. However, as they approached Kavumu Airport in Bukavu, the plane encountered turbulence due to windy weather. The descent was shaky, but fortunately, the skilled pilot navigated the aircraft smoothly, and they touched down on the runway at around 11:30 AM.

Exiting the plane, Zachary and Kristin were immediately greeted by the sunny Bukavu weather. They slipped on their shades to shield their eyes from the glare and headed toward the waiting vehicle beyond the runway. Moving discreetly to avoid drawing attention, they walked briskly across the tarmac while maintaining quick and purposeful steps.

At the designated VIP exit, they found Lorenzo, Zachary's bodyguard, waiting with two armed African men beside an SUV and a military pick-up. Lorenzo greeted them warmly, welcoming them to Bukavu with the ease of a local.

Lorenzo then took their luggage, and Zachary, noticing the armed men, asked Lorenzo in Italian, "What's with the two armed men?"

Before Lorenzo could respond, Kristin interjected in Italian, "They're some of the mercenaries hired by my grandfather to guard the academy project workers in Bukavu."

She then switched effortlessly to French, greeting the men with familiarity before introducing them to Zachary.

"This is Augustin Tsumbu," she said, pointing to one of the men, "and this is Andre Kankonde."

Both men seemed excited to see Zachary, greeting him enthusiastically. Zachary responded warmly, and the men's initial hesitance melted away. They even asked for his autograph, which he graciously provided.

After a few more minutes of chit-chatting with Kristin and Lorenzo, Zachary hopped into the SUV alongside Kristin. Lorenzo took the wheel while the two armed men jumped into the pick-up.

The pick-up led the way, with Lorenzo close behind. He and Kristin occasionally hashed out details about their plans while Zachary remained silent, taking in the sights of Bukavu flashing by outside the window.

The bumpy dirt roads of Bukavu brought back a flood of memories for Zachary. He remembered living here with his grandmother, but now she was gone. Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, he focused on the journey ahead.

Minutes passed, and as they approached Bukavu City, Zachary instructed Lorenzo to stop at a flower shop. Lorenzo complied, purchasing a bouquet of fresh flowers.

The journey resumed, and soon, they branched off from the main dirt road, taking an even bumpier path. Minutes later, they arrived at Zachary's grandmother's farm, a spread of about four acres, now somewhat overgrown and neglected. The workers Zachary had hired to maintain the place seemed to have abandoned their duties.

The sight of the bushy farm and the great-looking bungalow he had built three years ago filled Zachary with nostalgia and sadness. The place felt desolate without his grandmother.

Kristin sensed Zachary's somber mood and inquired softly, "What's the plan, Zachary? The workers you hired aren't even here."

"Give me a few minutes," Zachary responded, grabbing the flowers from the car. He strolled around the house to the banana plantation behind it, where his grandmother's grave was nestled.

The path was familiar, yet each step felt heavier as he neared the grave. The plantation was quiet, the only sounds being the rustle of leaves and distant bird calls.

Finally, he reached the simple headstone that marked his grandmother's final resting place. Kneeling before it, he placed the flowers gently on the grave, a wave of emotion washing over him.

"Grandma," he whispered, his voice breaking slightly, "I'm back."

He stayed there for a while, lost in memories and silent conversations with the woman who had meant so much to him. The wind rustled the banana leaves above, a gentle reminder of the life that continued to grow around him.

When he finally stood up, he felt a renewed sense of purpose. His grandma was gone, but he had resolved to do something significant to honor her memory. He couldn't let the farm, the place she had cherished and cared for, fall into neglect.

Returning to the front of the house, Zachary found Kristin, Lorenzo, and the two armed men waiting. Kristin gave him a comforting look before asking, "Do you want to stay at your grandma's house for now?"

Zachary quickly shook his head. The harrowing sight of his grandmother's property in such a state was too much to bear. He didn't want to spend another hour in Bukavu. Without responding to Kristin's question, he asked, "Has the plane already left?"

Kristin seemed confused. But she replied, "No, I booked it for three days. It's waiting at Kavumu Airport until we head to Nairobi. But the pilot and crew might have gone to a hotel."

"Call the pilot and ask if he's ready to fly to Nairobi immediately," Zachary said urgently, pointing to the neglected surroundings. "I don't want to stay here."

00:11

Understanding his distress, Kristin nodded and stepped aside to make the call. After about five minutes, she returned with good news. "The pilot and crew are still at the airport. They only need to refuel and do a few checks, and the plane would be ready to go."

Relieved, Zachary looked at his grandmother's farm one last time before climbing into the SUV. The armed men again led the way in their pick-up, with Lorenzo following in the SUV. Zachary and Kristin sat in the back seat, the silence heavy with unspoken plans.

Finally, Zachary broke the silence. "I've been thinking about what to do with my grandma's farm. I want to buy more land around it and quickly build the first football academy in DR Congo to commemorate her."

Kristin raised an eyebrow. "Won't that conflict with the academy we're building in the Bukavu City center?"

Zachary shook his head. "Even if we build ten academies in Bukavu, it wouldn't be enough for all the young people here who dream of becoming footballers. This new academy will be the main one, and the one in the city center will become a branch. I'll fund the entire project."

Kristin nodded, impressed. "I'll inform my grandfather. With the funds available, we can start the project soon."

"Thank you," Zachary said, feeling a weight lift off his shoulders.

The journey continued uneventfully, and they eventually arrived at Kavumu Airport to find the pilot, crew, and plane ready. Thanks to Kristin and Lorenzo handling all the travel procedures, they quickly boarded, eager to leave Bukavu and travel to their final stopover in Africa: Nairobi.

As the plane took off, Zachary stared out the window, watching Bukavu disappear beneath the clouds. His mind buzzed with plans and hopes.

He was determined to honor his grandmother's legacy through the academy, offering young people the opportunity to pursue their dreams. It was the perfect way to pay tribute to the woman who always believed in him. As the aircraft soared toward Nairobi, Zachary felt a newfound resolve to turn his dream into reality.

The following flight from Kavumu to Nairobi was remarkably smooth, allowing Zachary to unwind and reflect. Upon landing at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport at 2:31 PM, the sun was still high in the sky, casting a warm glow over the tarmac.

Kristin, whose meticulously organized plans had been disrupted by Zachary's abrupt decision to leave Bukavu, turned to him with a question.

"Do you want us to travel straight to Turin, or would you prefer to spend a few days in Nairobi?" she asked.

Zachary's sour mood had already dissipated after the peaceful flight. He smiled and replied, "Let's spend a few days in Kenya. Think of it as a short vacation before I dive back into my routine of training and matches."

Kristin nodded and began making calls as they exited the plane. They continued into Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, but their peace was interrupted as they went through procedures when Zachary started attracting attention. A few fans recognized him, their excited yells drawing more onlookers.

The always-vigilant Lorenzo kept the fans at bay until airport security arrived to guide Zachary out safely. He sighed as he entered the hired car, reflecting on the demanding nature of celebrity life. Even on vacation, he couldn't escape the eyes of his fans.

After the initial commotion, Zachary was relieved to reach their hotel, where they would spend the next few days. It was the luxurious Giraffe Manor, a place where elegance met the wild spirit of Africa. The unique charm of the hotel, with giraffes poking their heads through the windows, immediately set a relaxing tone.

But that was only the beginning, as their following adventure in Kenya's National Parks was even more remarkable. From witnessing the Great Migration at Maasai Mara to marveling at the majestic elephants against the backdrop of Mount Kilimanjaro at Amboseli National Park, each day was filled with awe-inspiring moments.

Their journey culminated at Lake Nakuru National Park, where they were treated to a vibrant display of flamingos and rhinos, making their experience in Kenya's rich biodiversity immersive and unforgettable.

The peaceful ambiance around the parks allowed Zachary to unwind and savor the experience. It was so enchanting that he spontaneously decided to prolong their visit. However, on the fifth evening, while enjoying dinner with Kristin and Lorenzo at the hotel, Zachary received an eagerly anticipated call from Emily.

"I've finished the final negotiations with Liverpool," she said, her voice brimming with excitement. "They are ready to finalize the contract. They hope you can travel to Liverpool as soon as possible to go through the medical and complete the transfer procedures."

Zachary's heart raced with excitement. "That's great news, Emily. I can travel to Liverpool next week."

"Perfect," Emily replied. "The people from Liverpool FC will soon contact Kristin to arrange your travel. Be ready."

As Zachary ended the call, a wave of anticipation washed over him. His vacation in Africa had been a welcome respite, but now it was time to return to his professional life and embrace the new opportunities awaiting him in Liverpool.

Chapter 675 A New Dawn

On Monday, July 30th, 2018, just as the golden hues of dawn painted the Nairobi skyline, Zachary Bemba stepped out of Giraffe Manor, savoring the final moments of his tranquil vacation.

As he settled in the waiting SUV, the World Cup champion, Golden Ball victor, and Golden Boot winner felt a mixture of excitement and anticipation bubbling within him. He was on the cusp of something monumental, as today was the day he would embark on a new chapter in his illustrious career.

Accompanying him were his trusted companions: Kristin, his personal assistant, and Lorenzo, his ever-vigilant bodyguard. An excited atmosphere surrounded them as the SUV smoothly navigated through the bustling streets of Nairobi, making its way to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

The journey through the city was mostly uneventful, but as they approached the terminal, fans and photographers swarmed towards them, eager for a glimpse of the global footballing icon.

The past few days had been rife with media gossip in Nairobi, and it was common knowledge that Zachary was in Kenya. So, he wasn't surprised or overwhelmed by the attention.

He graciously waved back and smiled at the enthusiastic fans, even stopping briefly to sign autographs and take selfies. Despite the early hour, he could already feel the explosive energy among the waiting crowd, especially since rumors of his monumental move to Liverpool already had everyone buzzing.

At the airport, Zachary received VIP treatment, breezing through security and into the first-class lounge of Qatar Airways. By mid-morning, they were airborne, leaving the African continent behind as they sped towards Manchester Airport.

The first-class cabin offered luxurious comfort, with spacious seats that reclined into beds, gourmet meals, and personalized service. Kristin and Lorenzo sat across from him, engrossed in their thoughts and activities.

As they settled into the flight, Zachary turned to Kristin. "Why are we heading to Manchester instead of Liverpool?"

Kristin smiled. "Liverpool John Lennon Airport doesn't handle intercontinental flights from East Africa. Manchester is the closest major airport."

Zachary nodded in understanding. "For a moment, I thought Emily had tricked us and made me sign for one of the Manchester clubs," he joked, a smile playing on his lips.

Kristin chuckled, shaking her head. "No such tricks, I promise."

They laughed and soon returned to their own activities.

The long flight allowed Zachary a respite to reflect on his achievements and the challenges ahead. The transition from Juventus to Liverpool was a monumental step, promising new opportunities and immense pressure.

But he felt more prepared and skilled than ever, having utilized the system rewards to enhance his footballing abilities. He was ready to embrace his new role at a new club in a new city.

Hours passed, and eventually, the plane touched down at Manchester Airport just as the sun dipped below the horizon. Liverpool's representatives were waiting to ensure a seamless transfer from the aircraft to the airport exit.

But even then, a few fans still recognized Zachary as he exited the terminal and began snapping photographs, their excitement palpable. Fortunately, the Liverpool representatives seemed too experienced at handling such situations. They briskly whisked him and his entourage away, settling him in a sleek black car before the commotion could get out of hand.

The convoy then took off, and the drive to Liverpool, though short, was filled with quiet anticipation. Zachary gazed through the window at the passing countryside, taking in Cheshire's lush green fields and quaint villages. The picturesque landscape offered a serene contrast to the whirlwind of emotions within him as he mentally prepared for the next few days.

As dusk fell, they arrived at The Titanic Hotel, a luxurious hotel in the heart of Liverpool. The historic building, blending its grand architecture and modern amenities, was a fitting residence for the next chapter of Zachary's journey.

Zachary's room offered a stunning view of the Mersey River, its waters reflecting the twinkling city lights. As he settled into the plush surroundings, he allowed himself a moment to breathe and take it all in.

The weight of his grandmother's legacy, the excitement of his upcoming transfer, and the serenity of his current surroundings blended into a harmonious sonata of emotions.

After taking a relaxing shower, Zachary decided to order room service. Within minutes, a polite knock echoed through his room, and as he unlocked the door, a courteous staff member dressed in the hotel's immaculate uniform entered with a silver trolley.

"Good evening, Mr. Bemba," the server said, smiling warmly. "Tonight, we have a special recommendation to welcome you to this great city: a traditional British roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and seasonal vegetables. It's a favorite here at the Titanic Hotel."

Zachary thanked the server and watched as the meal was elegantly arranged on the table. The aroma was enticing, and the presentation was impeccable.

He sat down to enjoy the hearty dish, savoring each bite. Although he was away from the football club—and without any upcoming games, he still adhered to his disciplined lifestyle, opting for fresh fruit juice instead of alcohol.

After dinner, Zachary glanced at the clock and noted that it was just reaching 9:00 PM. He booted up his tablet and connected to the internet to pass the time.

The internet was buzzing with rumors of his imminent move to Liverpool. Someone seemed to have leaked the news, and journalists had already gotten some details about his salary and contract terms. It was surprising how the English media was so good at digging up gossip.

Just as he was immersed in reading an article, his phone rang. It was Emily.

"Hey, Zachary," Emily greeted, her voice brimming with excitement. "Everything is set for tomorrow. I just wanted to discuss a few important points in the contract."

"Sure, Emily. What's new?" Zachary asked, leaning back in his chair.

"Well, most of the terms and clauses remain as we discussed. But there are a couple of updates. First, I managed to secure you a signing bonus of £30 million, which will be paid in batches of £7.5 million over the four years of your contract," Emily explained.

"That's fantastic news, Emily!" Zachary replied, genuinely impressed. "You've outdone yourself again."

Emily continued, "And if you perform well during your tenure and Liverpool triggers the Automatic Extension Clause for an additional year, you'll be entitled to an extra £7.5 million, bringing your total signing bonus to £37.5 million."

"Emily, you're amazing! Thank you for getting me such a great deal," Zachary said, his excitement evident.

"I'm glad you're happy with it. There's one more thing. I managed to negotiate the image rights. You'll retain 70%," Emily added.

Zachary was thrilled and thanked her again, not forgetting to add a few flattering remarks. They then discussed a few more details before Emily wrapped up the conversation. "Rest well, Zachary. Tomorrow is a big day."

"Thanks, Emily. Goodnight," Zachary replied, feeling gratitude for his dedicated agent.

He brushed his teeth and soon dove into his bed. The night passed peacefully, and he slept like a magnate in the luxurious hotel.

The morning dawned crisp and clear. After enjoying a hearty breakfast, Zachary was escorted to Liverpool John Lennon Airport for a symbolic arrival orchestrated by the club representatives. He found it amusing, considering he had already spent the night in the city.

The scene that greeted him was nothing short of extraordinary. Thousands of Liverpool fans had already gathered, but the representatives were skilled and managed to sneak him into the airport without drawing the attention of the enthusiastic fans.

Soon, his symbolic arrival was set, and he stepped out to show himself to the crowd. What happened next could only be described as thunderous explosions of excitement. The gathered Liverpool fans started waving banners and chanting his name. The media thronged, cameras flashing, capturing every moment.

As Zachary came out of the airport, Liverpool FC's ambassador, Kenny Dalglish, and CEO, Peter Moore, were there to greet him. Kenny's warm handshake and Peter's welcoming smile instantly made Zachary feel honored and at home.

He felt the weight of expectations as he digested the knowledge that these two big shots from the club were there only to welcome him. But he was not intimidated, knowing he had the skills to meet their expectations.

A brief press interaction followed. Zachary stood before a sea of microphones and flashing cameras, his face reflecting humility and excitement.

"Welcome to Liverpool, Zachary!" a journalist shouted. "How do you feel about joining such a historic club?"

"I'm thrilled and honored to be here," Zachary began, his voice steady and confident. "Liverpool is a club with a rich history and incredible fans. I'm eager to contribute to the team's success and bring more trophies to this great club."

Another reporter asked, "What are your immediate goals at this club?"

Zachary smiled, "My main goal is to integrate well into the team and work hard to achieve our collective objectives. Winning the Premier League and Champions League would be incredible, and I'm ready to give my all."

Chapter 676 The Beginning of a New Chapter in Liverpool

The press interaction ended soon, and Zachary was immediately whisked away from the airport to Liverpool's training complex, Melwood, where Emily awaited him. They again quickly reviewed a few more clauses of his contract, discussing the finer details like performance bonuses and other personal terms.

After an hour, Zachary was satisfied with the terms and felt a sense of relief as the formalities were nearly complete. He was a person of the football field and didn't like going through such extended formalities, but he understood it was an essential step in his career.

Next on the agenda was a thorough medical examination at Spire Liverpool Hospital. Under the watchful eye of Dr. Andy Massey, Zachary underwent a series of tests. The medical team, efficient and professional, left no stone unturned, ensuring that Zachary was in peak condition.

The recent consumption of SSS-grade elixirs had enhanced his skills and attributes, but Zachary was relieved to find no noticeable but bizarre transformations in his body. The needles pierced him as expected, and his blood was still red. The only abnormality the doctors found was that his body was at its very peak, like that of someone who maintained a monk-like disciplined lifestyle.

"Zachary, you're in remarkable shape," Dr. Massey commented while observing the results. "How do you manage to stay this fit?"

Zachary smiled. "A disciplined lifestyle and lots of hard work."

The medical staff laughed and made a few jokes about his extraordinary fitness levels, but the atmosphere was light and friendly. With the medical procedures behind him, Zachary was then taken to Anfield. The iconic stadium and its rich history were the perfect setting for his official welcome.

As Zachary stepped onto the pitch, he was greeted by the sight of the towering stands and the echo of past glories. The stadium was empty now, but he could almost hear and feel the crowd's roar and the weight of their expectations. This was where legends were made, and he was ready to become one of them.

Soon enough, Zachary met with more of Liverpool's top brass, including Sporting Director Michael Edwards and COO Andy Hughes. They welcomed him warmly, their enthusiasm mirroring the excitement of typical Liverpool devotees.

"Welcome to Anfield, Zachary," Michael said with a smile. "We're thrilled to have you here."

"Thank you, Michael. It's an honor," Zachary replied, shaking his hand firmly.

Andy Hughes chimed in, "Let's show you around. There's a lot to see."

The tour commenced, starting with the trophy room. Zachary's eyes lit up as he took in the sight of the club's illustrious collection. The gleaming silverware included the Premier League trophy, multiple Champions League cups, and several domestic cups.

"These trophies represent our history and the hard work of every player who has worn the Liverpool jersey," Andy explained.

Zachary felt a deep sense of pride and responsibility as he gazed at the trophies. He was now a part of this storied institution. It was a surreal moment, realizing that he had joined one of those clubs he could only watch on TV but never dreamt of joining during his previous life.

As they moved on, the walls were adorned with posters and memorabilia of Liverpool legends like Kenny Dalglish, Steven Gerrard, and Ian Rush. Each image told a story of glory and numerous battles fought and won.

"You're walking in the footsteps of giants," Michael said, noticing Zachary's awe. "But we believe you have the potential to create your own legacy here."

Zachary nodded, feeling the weight of their expectations. But his determination was also surging. He wanted to live up to these legends and carve his name into the club's history.

The tour soon ended, and they headed to a private room at Anfield. Surrounded by club officials and his entourage, including Emily, Kristin, and Lorenzo, Zachary settled on the long table to sign his contract with Liverpool FC. Cameras clicked, and flashes popped as he put pen to paper, finally making his transfer official.

As he finished signing, Michael shook his hand. "Welcome to the Liverpool family, Zachary."

"Thank you. I won't let you down," Zachary replied, his voice filled with conviction.

The club's website and social media channels exploded with the news, welcoming him to Liverpool. A photoshoot followed, where he posed with a Liverpool jersey, beaming proudly.

Afterward, Zachary enjoyed a late lunch with the big shots, discussing the club's future and his role in it. The atmosphere was warm and encouraging, with everyone expressing their anticipation for the upcoming season.

Later in the evening, the day culminated in a press conference. Zachary faced a room packed with journalists, his heart pounding with nerves and excitement. He took a deep breath and stepped up to the podium before expressing his excitement about joining Liverpool.

As he finished conveying his thoughts, a reporter raised a hand. "What are your goals for this season, Zachary?"

Zachary's eyes gleamed with determination. "To lift trophies," he declared. "From my days at my first club, Rosenborg, to my time at Juventus, my goal has always been the same. And now, it's no different here at Liverpool."

Another journalist asked, "What attracted you to Liverpool?"

"The club's history, the passion of the fans, and the ambition of the team were all major factors. Liverpool is a club that strives for greatness, and I want to be a part of that journey..."

He answered questions with confidence and humility, winning over even the most skeptical reporters. Finally, as he left the conference room, he was met by a select group of Liverpool fans.

The fans were hyper and excited to see him, and Zachary knew he couldn't disappoint them. He took time to sign autographs and pose for photos, endearing himself to the supporters who would soon be cheering his name from the stands.

Eventually, Zachary left Anfield with Emily and the rest of his entourage in one of Liverpool's sleek black cars. Accompanied by security organized by the club, they made their way through the city. The city lights of Liverpool twinkled around them, a vibrant reminder of the new life awaiting him.

The traffic at this hour was light, a stark contrast to the bustling streets of Turin, where Zachary had spent the last few years playing for Juventus. He found the relative calm refreshing, a welcome change from the constant congestion he had grown used to.

They arrived back at The Titanic Hotel around 8:00 PM. Emily suggested they have dinner at the hotel restaurant to celebrate the day's success. Zachary agreed, feeling exhausted from the long day yet also excited about the prospect of beginning the next stage of his career in Liverpool.

With the decision made, they walked through the hotel's grand lobby, the rich decor and elegant ambiance making Zachary feel at ease. The Titanic Hotel's design, with its nods to Liverpool's maritime history, added a sense of grandeur to their surroundings. The staff guided them toward the restaurant, where the soft lighting and stylish furnishings created a warm, inviting atmosphere.

They settled at a table by the window, offering a stunning view of the Mersey River. Zachary noticed a few curious glances from other diners, but for the most part, they were left to enjoy their meal in peace. He appreciated the quiet, feeling a sense of normalcy amidst the whirlwind of his transfer.

The menu offered a variety of dishes, but Zachary, ever disciplined, chose a lean grilled chicken breast with a side of quinoa salad, ensuring he stayed on top of his fitness regime. Emily opted for a sea bass dish, while Kristin and Lorenzo selected steak and vegetables. They toasted with sparkling water, maintaining Zachary's no-alcohol policy.

As they began their meal, the conversation naturally turned to their recent move from Turin to Liverpool. Emily, cutting into her sea bass, broke the silence. "Today was exciting—but also challenging," she said with a smile. "It's good it ended successfully."

She looked at Zachary. "How did you find everything? Are you starting to like life in Liverpool?"

Zachary chuckled. "The welcome was overwhelming, especially during the symbolic arrival at the airport. The fans, the stadium, the football culture—everything is incredible. And I must say, the traffic here is much more manageable than in Turin."

Kristin nodded with a smile. "If the traffic stays like it was today, getting around will be much easier."

"And speaking of getting around," the always-quiet Lorenzo then chipped in, "We'll need to arrange to move your important belongings from Turin to Liverpool, including your medals, awards, and other personal items."

Zachary nodded. "Yes, I'll need my World Cup medal, Golden Boot, and Golden Ball moved as well. They're still in a vault in Abidjan. Kristin, can you handle that?"

Kristin smiled, her spirited amber-brown eyes reflecting a refreshing determination. "Of course, I'll coordinate everything and make sure your items are safely transferred here."

Emily smiled and turned to Zachary. "Just so you know, my compensation for negotiating your transfer is being handled by the club. You don't have to worry about a thing."

"That's good to hear," Zachary replied. "I really appreciate all the work you've done."

They continued their meal, discussing Zachary's upcoming schedule. Training sessions, media obligations, and promotional events were all on the horizon. It was going to be a busy period, but Zachary felt ready. He was eager to return to the field and contribute to his new team.

As they finished dinner and made their way back to their rooms, Zachary felt a profound sense of satisfaction. The day had been long and eventful, but it marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter in his career. He was now a part of Liverpool FC, ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities ahead.

Chapter 677 Settling In

677 Settling In

The following day, Zachary woke up to the soft glow of sunlight filtering through the curtains of his room at The Titanic Hotel. Glancing at the clock, he realized it was already 8:30 AM. It had been a busy day yesterday, and his body still craved rest, but he knew he had a full day ahead.

He began his morning routine with his customary yoga session, feeling the familiar stretch of his muscles bringing him into focus for the day. A refreshing shower followed, washing away the remnants of sleep and rejuvenating his spirits. Then, once dressed, he joined Kristin, Emily, and Lorenzo for a hearty breakfast in the hotel's elegant restaurant.

The Titanic Hotel's restaurant was a haven of luxury and tranquility. Soft music played in the background, and the morning sun cast a warm glow over the tastefully decorated interior.

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee and baked pastries filled the air. Zachary appreciated the peaceful ambiance, a welcome deviation from the maelstrom of his recent transfer activities.

Over breakfast, they chatted casually about the day's plans and the previous day's excitement.

Kristin was set to leave for Turin to coordinate the transfer of Zachary's belongings, ensuring his move from Juventus to Liverpool would be as seamless as possible. Lorenzo, his bodyguard, would accompany her to oversee the security aspects of the process.

Emily, too, had plans to travel, citing business in London, but promised to return in a few days to check on Zachary's settling in.

After finishing their meal, they prepared to part ways. Zachary hugged Kristin and bumped fists with Lorenzo, thanking them for their help and support.

Emily also received a warm farewell, her promise to return soon offering him some comfort. They then headed to their respective rooms to finalize their travel preparations while Zachary returned to his room to wait for the arrangements from his new club.

Once in his room, Zachary began checking out information about the Liverpool team on the net.

He read about their performance in the preseason tour in the USA and noted with excitement that they had just defeated Manchester United at the Michigan Stadium two days ago. The team's success pumped him up even more and fueled his eagerness to join his new teammates on the field.

Moments later, his phone rang, breaking his concentration. It was Ray Haughan, Liverpool FC's player liaison officer.

00:13

Zachary quickly picked up, and Ray's friendly voice greeted him. "Good morning, Zachary! I'm downstairs, ready to take you to your temporary residence in Liverpool City Center. It's a luxurious apartment arranged by the club, offering you privacy and comfort."

"Thank you, Ray. I'll be down in a few minutes," Zachary replied, appreciating the club's care for his comfort.

Packing was quick as Zachary always traveled light. He threw his tracksuits, running sneakers, gym clothes, football boots, and other essentials into his suitcase. He then double-checked that he hadn't forgotten anything and exited his room.

As he stepped into the hallway, a hotel staff member quickly approached him, offering to help with his luggage.

"Thank you," Zachary said, handing over the suitcase.

"My pleasure, sir," the staff member replied, effortlessly carrying the suitcase and leading the way to the lobby.

Downstairs, Ray Haughan was waiting by two sleek black cars, evidently sent by the club. The hotel employee placed Zachary's suitcase in the boot of one of the cars as Zachary greeted Ray.

"Morning, Ray," Zachary said with a smile.

"Good morning, Zachary. Ready for your new home?" Ray responded warmly.

"Absolutely. Let's get going."

They got into the cars, and soon they were off, leaving the premises of The Titanic Hotel. As they drove through the streets of Liverpool, Zachary noticed the city's morning charm. The traffic was still light at this hour, a welcome change that Zachary was already starting to like about Liverpool.

As they drove, Ray began to talk about the apartment. "The apartment is in the Liverpool City Center, in a neighborhood called Ropewalks. It's a vibrant area with character and full of cafes, restaurants, and shops. The club has arranged for you to stay there temporarily while we prepare your permanent residence, which I promise will be a high-end property that meets all your needs."

Zachary appreciated the details. "Sounds perfect, Ray. I'm looking forward to seeing it."

The journey continued smoothly, with Zachary taking in the sights of his new city. The mix of historic buildings and modern architecture gave Liverpool a unique charm that he found appealing.

Soon, they arrived at the apartment building. Its sleek exterior and expansive glass windows hinted at the unforgettable views that awaited inside. Stepping into the lobby, Zachary was immediately struck by the tasteful decor and undeniable sense of refinement.

Ray led Zachary to his apartment, opening the door to reveal a spacious and elegantly furnished living space. The large windows flooded the room with natural light, and the view of the city skyline was breathtaking. The interior promised comfort and style, with plush sofas, a state-of-the-art kitchen, and a cozy bedroom.

"This is fantastic, Ray," Zachary said, genuinely impressed. "I like the place. Thank you for arranging this."

"You're welcome, Zachary. I'm glad you like it. If you need anything, just let me know. The club wants to ensure you're comfortable and well cared for."

Zachary then barely had time to settle into his temporary apartment before he was on the move again.

After placing his suitcase in his bedroom and splashing water on his face to refresh himself, he locked the door and followed Ray Haughan back out of the building. The next stop was Melwood Training Ground, where a new round of introductions awaited him.

At Melwood, Zachary was introduced to a team of dedicated professionals whose sole focus was to support his performance and well-being. The physiotherapists, nutritionists, and personal trainers would all play crucial roles in ensuring he stayed at the peak of his abilities.

Each meeting with the professionals was thorough and explained how they would work together to optimize his health and performance.

The physiotherapists demonstrated advanced techniques and equipment to prevent injuries and aid recovery. The nutritionists reviewed his dietary plans, tailoring them to his specific training needs as an elite footballer playing for Liverpool. Personal trainers discussed personalized workout regimens to enhance his strength, agility, and endurance.

By noon, Zachary felt reassured by the professionalism and expertise of the Liverpool staff. He knew he was in good hands. But he also couldn't help but wonder what he would do with his own people, like his physical fitness trainer and chef, since the club was already providing him the same services they provided.

After a hearty lunch, Ray Haughan took Zachary on a tour of Liverpool City. They visited vital landmarks, starting with the historic Albert Dock. The beautiful waterfront area, with its rich maritime history, captivated Zachary.

Next, they explored the vibrant Liverpool ONE shopping district, bustling with activity and life. The sight of fans wearing Liverpool jerseys and scarves warmed Zachary's heart. The city's passion for football was evident everywhere, and he felt a growing connection to his new home.

The day progressed, and they visited several other areas where Zachary saw more passionate fans. The city's rich history and spirited community resonated deeply with him, and by the time they finished the tour, he felt a profound sense of belonging.

The day eventually concluded with dinner at the Hope Street Hotel near Melwood. The hotel's historical charm and elegant atmosphere provided the perfect setting for a relaxing meal. Over dinner, Ray and Zachary discussed the day's events and the exciting journey ahead. Ray's enthusiasm and support made Zachary feel welcomed and valued.

After dinner, Ray and Zachary's new bodyguards drove him back to his temporary residence in the Ropewalks neighborhood. The area's vibrant nightlife and artistic vibe gave it a unique charm. Zachary spent the night reflecting on the whirlwind of the past few days, feeling a mixture of exhaustion and excitement.

The next day, Zachary and Ray continued their tour of the city. They visited essential shops, clinics, banks, and schools. Ray introduced Zachary to important places like Barclays Bank, the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, and top schools like Liverpool College.

These visits were crucial in helping Zachary get acquainted with his new environment and ensuring he had everything he needed for a comfortable life in Liverpool.

Later in the afternoon, they returned to Melwood, where Ray handed Zachary a personalized training schedule. This schedule was designed to gradually reintegrate him into full training after his recent World Cup participation. To Zachary's relief, Ray also informed him that all the formalities and tours were almost over, and he could start serious training the next day.

Zachary returned home early and spent the rest of the day resting. He felt a deep sense of satisfaction, knowing that the initial phase of his transition was complete. He was now ready to focus on what he did best—playing football.

On the morning of August 2nd, Zachary arrived at Melwood Training Ground by 9:00 AM, brimming with anticipation. Andreas Kornmayer, Liverpool's head of fitness and conditioning, greeted him warmly. After a brief introduction, Zachary underwent a comprehensive fitness assessment. The tests measured his strength, endurance, agility, and overall physical condition.

The results confirmed what the medical team had noted earlier—Zachary was in remarkable shape. In fact, he was at the very peak of physical fitness even when considering the strictest standards in world football.

Andreas tailored a series of drills to ease him into Liverpool's routines, focusing on gradually improving his already peak fitness. The session included light cardio, strength training, and flexibility exercises. Zachary enjoyed the structured approach, feeling his body respond positively to the regimen.

The training session ended with some light ball work, and as Zachary dribbled, passed, and took a few shots on goal, a smile spread across his face. It felt good to be back on the field, kicking the ball again. The familiar sensation brought a rush of joy and excitement.

Chapter 678 Embracing the Red

The following day was Friday, August 3rd. Zachary arrived at Melwood Training Ground with a spring in his step early in the morning. The fresh, crisp air filled his lungs as he walked through the gates, the already-familiar hum of activity around him. But his optimism quickly turned to a resigned sigh when he spotted Ray Haughan waiting for him near the entrance. He had a feeling that his planned morning training schedule was about to be interrupted again.

Ray, always the epitome of professionalism, greeted him with a warm smile. "Good morning, Zachary. How are you today?"

"Morning, Ray. I'm good, ready to train," Zachary replied, though his tone held a hint of trepidation.

Ray's smile grew wider, sensing Zachary's unease. "I know you're eager to train and get on the field, but there's something important we need to handle first. Follow me."

Zachary nodded, masking his disappointment. As they walked through the pristine corridors of Melwood, the morning calm allowed Zachary to admire the facilities in an even greater detail. The state-of-the-art training equipment, the perfectly maintained indoor fields, and the motivational quotes adorning the walls all spoke to the club's commitment to excellence.

Ray led him to one of the conference rooms. "Today, you'll have to chat briefly with Jürgen Klopp," he said, opening the door and gesturing for Zachary to enter.

Even though he was already one of the best players in the world, Zachary's heart raced. Meeting the legendary manager, even via video call, was both an honor and a nerve-wracking prospect.

Inside the room, a technician was setting up the video conferencing equipment. The large screen at the front flickered to life, displaying the Liverpool logo before transitioning to the video call interface.

"Don't worry, Zachary. Jürgen is very excited to speak with you," Ray reassured him, patting him on the back. "Just be yourself."

Zachary took a deep breath and settled into the chair, staring at the screen. As soon as the connection was made, Jürgen Klopp's face filled the screen, his infectious smile and warm demeanor instantly putting Zachary at ease.

The technician finished his setup and gave a thumbs-up. "All set. The call will start in a few moments."

Zachary took a deep breath and settled into the chair, staring at the screen. As soon as the connection was made, Jürgen Klopp's face filled the screen, his infectious smile and warm demeanor instantly putting Zachary at ease.

"Hello, Zachary!" Klopp's magnetic voice burst through the speakers, filling the room with his characteristic energy. "Welcome to Liverpool! How are you?"

"Hello, Coach. I'm good, thank you. It's an honor to speak with you," Zachary replied, his nerves slowly dissipating.

"The honor is mine," Klopp said, his eyes gleaming enthusiastically. "I've been following your career for a while, from the time you helped Rosenborg win the Europa League, then at Juventus, and lately with Ivory Coast at the World Cup, and I must say, we're thrilled to have you here. You are one great player."

"Thanks, coach, for the compliment," Zachary said, feeling instantly valued and honored. It was good to hear his new coach praise his past deeds.

"How are you settling in?" Klopp asked.

"Everything's going well so far. The city and the people have been very welcoming," Zachary replied.

"Excellent! Now, let's talk football," Klopp leaned forward, his tone becoming more solemn but still filled with warmth. "We're very excited about your role in the team. Your skills as an attacking midfielder are exceptional, and we believe you can bring something special to our squad."

Zachary nodded, his excitement building. "I'm ready to give my best, Coach."

"That's what I like to hear!" Klopp exclaimed. "Our strategy this season will still focus on high pressing, quick transitions, and maintaining a high tempo throughout the game. My plan for you is to play behind the forwards, where you can use your vision and creativity to unlock defenses. How does that sound?"

"Perfect. That's exactly where I feel most comfortable," Zachary replied, feeling a surge of adrenaline.

"Great! We want you to integrate quickly into the team, but we'll also ensure you have enough time to get up to speed with our style. The team is currently in the USA for the preseason, and we've just had a fantastic win against Manchester United at Michigan Stadium," Klopp said, his pride evident.

"I saw the match highlights. The team looked incredible," Zachary said, genuinely impressed.

"Thank you. We have a strong squad, and with you joining, I believe we can achieve great things this season," Klopp said, his confidence infectious. "One more thing, Zachary. Have you thought about which shirt number you'd like to wear?"

Zachary hesitated for a moment before answering. "I'd love to wear number 8 if that's available."

Klopp's smile widened. "Number 8, another legendary number at Liverpool. It suits you. Consider it yours."

"Thank you, Coach. It's an honor to wear that number," Zachary said, feeling a sense of pride surge from deep within him.

"Fantastic! We'll make the official announcement soon. For now, focus on getting to know the facilities and the staff. We'll catch up again when the team returns to Melwood. Welcome to the Liverpool family, Zachary. We're counting on you," Klopp said, his tone both reassuring and motivating.

"Thank you, Coach. I won't let you down," Zachary replied with conviction.

As the call ended, Zachary sat back, a smile spreading across his face. The conversation with Klopp had not only reassured him but also ignited a fire within. He was even more ready to prove himself and become an integral part of Liverpool FC.

Ray, who had been quietly observing, stepped forward. "How was it?"

"Brief but straight to the point. My first impression: The Head Coach is incredible and everything I expected and even more," Zachary said, his mind still replaying the call.

Ray nodded. "That's Jürgen for you. Now, let's get you to your training."

Zachary then emerged from the conference room, feeling even more motivated. Ray Haughan, sensing his excitement, gave him an encouraging nod.

The two made their way through the bustling corridors of Melwood, heading toward the training facilities. The anticipation of getting back into a structured training regimen invigorated Zachary. The pristine surroundings and state-of-the-art equipment filled him with confidence.

Soon enough, Zachary's personalized training for the day began with light gym work to ease him into Liverpool's intense routine. The session started with dynamic stretches, mobility drills, and other exercises focused on core strength.

Under the watchful eye of Andreas Kornmayer, Liverpool's head of fitness and conditioning, Zachary effortlessly moved through the regimen, his impressive SSS-grade fitness levels evident with his every action.

Kornmayer, though, remained meticulous, ensuring Zachary maintained proper form. "Great work, Zachary. Let's move on to some resistance training."

Zachary proceeded to lift weights, focusing on building endurance and explosiveness. The session included squats, deadlifts, and power cleans, each set pushing him closer to peak performance. Despite the intensity, Zachary relished the challenge, knowing it was necessary to adapt to Liverpool's demanding style of play.

By noon, Zachary completed his training and headed to the canteen for lunch. The club's nutritionist, Mona Nemmer, had prepared a meal plan to fuel his body for the upcoming rigorous sessions. He enjoyed a balanced meal of grilled chicken, quinoa, and several fresh vegetables, all aimed at optimizing his recovery and performance.

Later that afternoon, Zachary met some first-team members, those few players who were either recovering from injuries or not on the preseason tour. Nathaniel Clyne and Adam Lallana were among the first to greet him.

"Welcome to Liverpool, mate," Clyne said, offering a fist bump.

Lallana smiled warmly. "Great to have you here. Heard a lot about you."

"Thanks, guys. It's great to finally be here," Zachary responded, feeling the enthusiasm in their words. Although his presence would add to more competition for spots within the midfield and limit their chances on the starting line-up, they still welcomed him warmly.

After the introduction and a little more chitchat, they headed out to one of the training turfs for some lighter ball work. Clyne and Lallana watched from the sidelines as Zachary effortlessly dribbled through cones with deft footwork. His speed and control were evident, and their cheers spurred him on.

"Let's see you take some free kicks," Lallana suggested, pointing to a setup with dummies. "I've heard that you are a specialist in that area."

Zachary nodded, stepping up confidently. He placed the ball down, took a deep breath, and sent it curling over the dummies into the top corner of the net. The sheer joy of striking the ball and the applause from his new teammates filled him with even more pride.

As the evening approached, Zachary ended his training and followed Clyne and Lallana to Anfield for another private tour. The historic stadium loomed ahead once again, its aura almost tangible. They explored the iconic Kop, meticulously delving into the team museum and soaking in the club's rich history.

"Just imagine the crowd's thunderous cheers on match days," Clyne said as they finally stood on the pitch, taking in the grandeur.

Zachary closed his eyes, envisioning the battles to come. "I can't wait to experience it."

Chapter 679 A New Home and Anfield's Embrace

679 A New Home and Anfield's Embrace

The following day, which happened to be Saturday, August 4th, was filled with even more distractions for Zachary from his planned training.

Following a brief morning workout, he was whisked back to Anfield for a series of media commitments. From striking poses in the new kit to starring in promotional videos and conducting interviews for the club's official media channels, it was a morning that could only be described as packed.

Although the frequent disruptions were a bit frustrating, Zachary maintained his composure. His message was clear and unwavering as he answered the media people's questions, "I am here to win and contribute to Liverpool's legacy."

In the afternoon, Zachary visited the Liverpool FC Foundation. Engaging with community projects and meeting local fans and volunteers, he witnessed firsthand the club's commitment to social causes. The experience was humbling, reinforcing his decision to join a club that valued not just success on the pitch but also making a positive impact on the public.

Zachary left the Foundation with a sense of fulfillment. The interactions with the community deepened his connection to Liverpool, making him even more determined to succeed. As the day drew to a close, he returned to his temporary residence in the Ropewalks neighborhood, reflecting on his recent few days in Liverpool.

Each step, each interaction, solidified his place within the Liverpool family. Although the days ahead promised more challenges, Zachary was ready. His new chapter at Liverpool FC had just begun, and he was determined to write a story of triumph and legacy.

The following two days were then filled with intense personal training schedules for Zachary at Melwood. Each session grew progressively challenging, blending technical drills, strength and conditioning, and tactical briefings. Andreas Kornmayer, the head of fitness and conditioning, ensured that Zachary's routines were meticulously planned.

In the mornings, Zachary engaged in high-intensity interval training (HIIT) to boost his cardiovascular fitness and explosiveness. This was followed by technical drills focused on ball control and precision passing. Andreas and Pepijn Lijnders, the assistant manager, supervised these sessions closely, constantly pushing Zachary to refine his skills.

"Keep your head up, Zachary. Always be aware of your surroundings," Lijnders would remind him as they practiced situational drills.

Afternoons were dedicated to strength and conditioning. Zachary lifted weights, performed resistance exercises, and worked on agility drills. The aim was to build his strength while maintaining his agility and speed, crucial for his role as an attacking midfielder.

During breaks between these physical drills, Zachary attended one-on-one meetings with crucial Liverpool staff, including analysts and tactical coaches. They reviewed game footage, dissecting every detail to help him understand his role within the squad. Assistant manager Peter Krawietz, known for his analytical expertise, walked Zachary through clips of Liverpool's recent matches.

"Watch how our midfielders position themselves during transitions," Krawietz explained, showing footage of their recent preseason games. "See how Wijnaldum, Henderson, and Milner are moving. You'll be crucial in our setup—when you finally join them on the field. Your role will include linking the play, creating opportunities, and scoring goals whenever an opportunity avails itself during a game."

They also analyzed footage of top opponents, emphasizing how Zachary's skills could exploit their weaknesses. This meticulous approach allowed Zachary to grasp the tactical nuances and his specific responsibilities within Klopp's system.

Despite the rigorous schedule, Zachary also allowed himself relaxing moments in the evenings. He took the opportunity to explore Liverpool further, visiting landmarks like the majestic Liverpool Cathedral and the immersive Beatles Story Museum. The city's vibrant culture and rich history captivated him, helping him feel more at home.

Time passed, and on the evening of Monday, August 6th, as Ray drove Zachary back to his temporary apartment, he shared some exciting news.

"The squad's back in Liverpool after their 5–0 win against Napoli in Ireland," Ray said, glancing at Zachary with a smile. "They'll face Torino at Anfield tomorrow at 6:00 PM in their last preseason friendly."

Zachary's heart raced. "Will I get to meet the squad?"

"Probably not tomorrow," Ray replied. "You'll be busy in the morning with another task."

"Another media engagement?" Zachary asked, a hint of disappointment in his voice.

Ray chuckled. "Relax, the media engagements are almost over. Tomorrow morning, you'll head out with me to check out the new house the club has identified for you."

Zachary's disappointment faded instantly. "Really? Where is it?"

"You'll see," Ray said with a mysterious grin. "Just be ready by eight."

The night passed uneventfully, and as planned, Ray picked Zachary up from the apartment in Ropewalks at eight in the morning. They drove through the bustling streets of Liverpool, passing iconic landmarks like the Royal Liver Building and the picturesque Albert Dock. The city's blend of modernity and history further intrigued Zachary as they made their way to the neighborhood where his potential new home was.

They arrived in the affluent area of Woolton, known for its leafy streets and upscale residences. The house was a stunning modern mansion, set back from the road with a spacious, well-manicured lawn.

The exterior featured sleek lines, large windows, and a mixture of brick and glass that gave it a contemporary yet warm appearance.

"This is it," Ray said, pulling into the driveway. "What do you think?"

Zachary stepped out of the car, his eyes lighting up with appreciation. Although the property wasn't as expansive as his previous home in Turin, it still hinted at a tranquil atmosphere of luxury and comfort. He walked up the stone pathway, taking in the serene surroundings and the privacy offered by the house.

Inside, the house was even more impressive. The foyer opened into a grand living area with high ceilings, flooded with natural light. The design was modern but cozy, with plush furnishings and tasteful decor. A state-of-the-art kitchen with top-of-the-line appliances, a spacious dining area, and multiple living spaces made the house perfect for relaxation and entertaining.

Ray led Zachary upstairs to the master bedroom, which featured a large balcony overlooking the expansive backyard. The ensuite bathroom was a masterpiece of design, with a freestanding bathtub, a walk-in shower, and elegant fixtures.

"This is incredible," Zachary said, imagining himself unwinding here after long training sessions.

Ray nodded. "The club wanted to ensure you had a place that felt like home before your schedule became intense. There's also a dedicated gym and a media room downstairs."

Zachary's excitement was palpable. "I love it. This place is perfect."

When they finally concluded the tour, Zachary's face was already beaming with genuine satisfaction. The mansion and its sleek lines, spacious rooms, and serene surroundings were everything he could have hoped for.

Despite his wealth, which could easily afford him a more extravagant property in Cheshire's Golden Triangle, he felt no need for excess. This house was perfect, offering comfort and privacy, ideal for someone who would live alone most of the time.

"When can I move in?" Zachary asked Ray eagerly.

Ray reached into his briefcase and handed Zachary a set of documents. "You can move in anytime. Here are the ownership papers. The club has already taken care of everything."

Zachary took the papers, skimming through the contents. The realization that he was now a homeowner in Liverpool flooded him with a welcome feeling of stability. He looked up at Ray, a plan forming in his mind. "How about moving in today? My schedule is about to get intense, and it would be great to settle in before training ramps up."

Ray nodded, agreeing immediately. "That sounds like a great idea. It will be easier to focus on training once you're settled."

With their decision made, Ray drove Zachary back to his temporary apartment in Ropewalks. Zachary quickly packed his belongings, which fit into a single suitcase. He scanned the apartment that had been his home for the past few days for the final time, feeling excited about this new chapter.

The drive back to Woolton was smooth, and Zachary felt a growing sense of anticipation as they approached his new home. Upon arrival, he unpacked his suitcase, arranging his clothes and personal items in the spacious master bedroom. The house already felt like home, and as he walked through its rooms and corridors, he felt genuinely contented.

Later in the afternoon, Ray returned to pick him up for Liverpool's last preseason friendly against Torino at Anfield. As they approached the iconic stadium, Zachary could feel the electric atmosphere even from a distance. Fans were pulsating with excitement, their passion noticeable in the air.

Inside Anfield, Ray led Zachary to the VIP section, where he settled into his seat, eager to watch his new team in action. The stadium was a sight to behold, with its sea of red, the famous "This Is Anfield" sign, and the numerous "You'll Never Walk Alone" banners. Zachary felt both proud and humbled, once again relishing the fact that he was now part of this historic club.

The match kicked off, and Zachary watched intently, analyzing the team's dynamics. Liverpool played with intensity and heart, eventually defeating Torino 3-1. Zachary's excitement grew with each goal, imagining himself on the pitch and contributing to such victories.

After the final whistle, the atmosphere shifted from celebratory to ecstatic as the club prepared to introduce their new star. The stadium lights dimmed slightly, and the announcer's voice boomed across Anfield, introducing Zachary to the crowd. He walked onto the pitch, holding a Liverpool jersey with the number 8 proudly displayed.

The cheers of the crowd were deafening. Fans chanted Zachary's name, their enthusiasm overwhelming. Zachary waved, feeling a profound connection with the supporters.

After a brief walk around the pitch, he spent time signing autographs and posing for photos, soaking in the adoration and passion of the Liverpool faithful. The warmth of their support was unlike anything he had experienced before.

As he interacted with the fans, Zachary thought, "This is just the beginning. I'm here to play football, win, and make history with Liverpool."

Later on, as the evening drew to a close, Zachary returned to his new home in Woolton. The day had flooded him with ever-changing waves of feelings and experiences, but as he settled into his cozy new bed, he felt prepared. He was ready to embrace his new life, confront the forthcoming challenges, and make a significant impact at Liverpool.

Chapter 680 First Team Training with The Reds

680 First Team Training with The Reds

After the preseason friendly against Torino, the Liverpool team took two well-deserved days off to recover from their rigorous preseason schedule. This break meant Zachary still had to wait for a while longer before meeting his new teammates.

However, the upside was that Liverpool FC's player liaison officer, Ray Haughan, no longer interrupted his days with media engagements and formalities.

Zachary seized the opportunity to totally immerse himself in his conditioning training, focusing on high-intensity interval training and simulated match scenarios. His sessions with the club's nutritionist also continued, as the club aimed to keep his diet and recovery optimal as his training intensified.

Time passed swiftly, and Friday, August 10th, finally arrived. This day marked the return of the Liverpool players to training, with the Premier League season opener just two days away on the 12th.

Zachary woke up early, feeling a mix of excitement and anticipation. He breezed through his morning routine—yoga, a shower, and a light breakfast. Just as he finished, Ray arrived at his new mansion in Woolton, ready to drive him to Melwood for his first official team training with Liverpool.

"Morning, Zachary! Ready for the big day?" Ray greeted him with a smile.

"Absolutely, Ray. I can't wait to meet everyone," Zachary replied, his enthusiasm sky-high.

Ray chuckled. "I can tell. Let's get you to Melwood, then."

They left Zachary's house and drove through the leafy streets of Woolton, heading towards Liverpool's training center. The journey took only about twenty minutes, with Ray providing Zachary with some last-minute insights about his new teammates and the training routines. As they pulled up to Melwood, Zachary's excitement surged.

Stepping out of the car, Zachary immediately noticed the difference in the atmosphere at Melwood. The training center buzzed with activity. Players and staff moved about with purpose, a sharp contrast to the quiet days he had spent there alone. The energy was infectious, and Zachary felt a renewed sense of determination.

As he walked towards the training facility, Zachary encountered some of his new teammates for the first time. Jordan Henderson, the team captain, was the first to approach him with a welcoming smile.

"Zachary, right? Welcome to Liverpool," Henderson said, extending his hand.

"Thanks, Jordan. It's an honor to be here," Zachary replied, shaking his hand firmly.

"Great to have you. How was the transition from Italy?" Henderson asked as they walked.

"It's been smooth so far. I really enjoyed my time in Turin. But I felt it was time for a new challenge. Liverpool feels like the right place for me," Zachary said.

Next, he met Roberto Firmino, whose broad smile and warm demeanor instantly put Zachary at ease. "Hey, Zachary! Looking forward to playing alongside you," Firmino said.

"Likewise, Roberto. I've heard great things about you," Zachary responded.

Firmino grinned. "I watched some of your World Cup games. You were incredible. Congratulations on winning it."

"Thank you! It was an unforgettable experience. I still can't believe we beat England in the semifinal," Zachary said, glancing at Henderson with a playful smile.

Henderson chuckled, seemingly not minding the hidden verbal jab. "Yeah, that was a tough match. You guys deserved it, though. Ivory Coast played brilliantly."

As they continued chatting, they eventually reached the locker room. Zachary paused for a moment, taking in his surroundings. The locker room was modern and spacious, with each player having a personalized area complete with their name, number, and gear neatly arranged. The room exuded a sense of history and pride, adorned with photos and memorabilia of Liverpool's glorious past.

Zachary found his locker, labeled with his name and the iconic number 8 jersey hanging inside. Smiling, he settled on one of the seats, ready to change into his training gear. But just then, he paused as several familiar faces, including Sadio Mané, Mohamed Salah, Alisson, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Georginio Wijnaldum, and Naby Keïta, arrived in a group.

Sadio Mané and Mohamed Salah were the first to enter the dressing room. They did a double take upon seeing Zachary and whistled. "New arrival, new arrival!" Mané called out, grinning.

"Welcome, Zachary!" Salah added, extending his hand.

"Thanks, Sadio. Thanks, Mo. It's great to finally meet you guys," Zachary said, shaking their hands.

"We've all seen your skills. You're going to be an incredible addition to the team," Mané said.

"Absolutely. Winning the Champions League and the World Cup...And also being the top scorer and best player in all those competitions. We're lucky to have you," Salah added.

Zachary felt honored to meet African legends like Mané and Salah, whom he had only seen on the screen during his previous life. "Thank you. It means a lot coming from you guys. I'm really excited to be here and contribute."

The group continued chatting as they changed into their gear. Alisson, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Wijnaldum, and Keïta all greeted Zachary warmly, expressing their excitement about his arrival.

"Your World Cup campaign was amazing. How did it feel to win the Golden Boot and Golden Ball?" Wijnaldum asked.

"Everything from that night was like a blur. All I remember is what I felt after we won the World Cup. It was unlike anything I've ever experienced—even surpassing the thrill of clinching the Serie A and the Champions League titles at Juventus. As for the Golden Boot and Golden Ball, they were just the icing on the cake," Zachary replied.

"Although I haven't had the chance to lift the World Cup, I can only imagine," Alexander-Arnold said with a grin. "Winning a trophy of that magnitude must be mind-blowing. But you were incredible during the tournament, and we're looking forward to seeing those skills in action here."

"Thanks, Trent. I'm ready to give my all," Zachary said.

The players then continued chatting as they changed into their gear. The conversation shifted from the World Cup to Liverpool's training schedule and the upcoming season opener against West Ham United. The excitement for the new season was infectious, and Zachary felt a sense of camaraderie and Liverpool's typical fighting spirit already building.

Suddenly, Jürgen Klopp entered the locker room, accompanied by his assistant, Pepijn Lijnders. Klopp's presence commanded instant respect, and the room quickly fell silent. His energy was contagious, his eyes bright with enthusiasm as he faced his players.

"Good morning, everyone," Klopp began, his voice booming with a unique blend of warmth and authority. "I hope you're all feeling rested and ready. Before we get started, I want to take a moment to welcome our new signings properly. You've already met Naby Keïta, Fabinho, and Alisson during the preseason tour."

The players nodded and murmured their acknowledgments. Klopp continued, "Today, we also formally welcome Zachary Bemba to the squad. As many of you know, Zachary had an outstanding World Cup with Ivory Coast and has already shown his class by winning the Champions League twice with Juventus. Let's give him a warm Liverpool welcome."

The room erupted in applause and cheers. Zachary stood up, smiling broadly. "Thank you, Coach. Thank you everyone for the warm welcome. I'm excited to be here and looking forward to working with all of you," he said, addressing his new teammates.

Klopp nodded appreciatively. "Great to hear, Zachary. Now, let's talk about our preseason. We had some fantastic results against Manchester United, Napoli, and Torino. You all showed great spirit and teamwork. But now, it's time to switch our focus to what matters. It's time to prepare for the Premier League."

He paused, scanning the faces of his players. "Our first match is against West Ham in two days. We must be sharp, focused, and ready to give everything on the pitch. So, today's training will be crucial in setting the tone for our season. Let's get to work."

With that, Klopp clapped his hands, signaling the start of the session. The players made a beeline from the locker room, heading towards the training grounds.

Then, once everything and everyone was in place, the training began with warm-up drills led by fitness coach Andreas Kornmayer. Zachary seamlessly integrated into the routine, feeling the familiar burn of high-intensity exercise. He was excited to return to structured club training, pushing himself hard to prove his worth.

As the session transitioned into tactical drills, Klopp and his assistants closely monitored Zachary's every move. The team worked on pressing style and quick transitions, hallmarks of Klopp's strategy. Zachary remained composed and focused solely on following the coaches' instructions and keeping his play simple and effective.

But even then, Zachary's skills and adaptability were evident. He executed each drill deftly, showing an almost masterful familiarity with the tactics.

As the session progressed, he also began interacting more with his teammates, exchanging passes with Henderson, linking up with Firmino in attack, and working on set pieces with Mané and Salah. The chemistry was promising, and Zachary felt deep within his heart that he would make a great team with everyone when he finally stepped onto the field.

Another hour passed, and the training session finally came to an end. Klopp gathered the team for a brief address.

"Excellent work today, everyone," Klopp said, his voice filled with genuine appreciation. "I saw a lot of good things out there. Our movements off the ball were swift, and our passing precise. But remember, it's all about building on this every day. Keep this intensity, this focus, and we'll achieve great things this season."

The players nodded, feeling the weight of his words. "Now, rest up, recover well, and come back ready for another session in the afternoon," Klopp concluded.

Finally, the players were dismissed, and Zachary returned to the locker room with his new teammates. He was exhausted but exhilarated. The training had been intense, but he had held his own and felt that he had already started earning the respect of his new teammates and coaches.

As he settled back in the locker room, his mind raced to the next challenge. If he could keep up his performance during the afternoon and tomorrow's training, he could secure a spot in Liverpool's squad for the season opener against West Ham United. That was his goal for the moment.