

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

Chapter 1 - Rewind!

"KOKOKORIKO"

Zachary Bemba was woken from a deep slumber by the crowing of a rooster. His eyes abruptly rolled open, glazed over with the remnants of a dream or rather a nightmare.

Zachary was first aware of the coolness of the air and its fresh fragrance. It was nothing similar to the foul polluted air he'd grown accustomed to in the suburbs of Kinshasha City.

He was lying on an abnormally small mattress that seemed to have been crafted by inserting spiky grass into rigid sacks. It was very uncomfortable and hurt his back when he stirred.

Zachary blinked as his eyes adjusted to the dim lighting in the room before propping himself up and orienting himself to the surroundings.

He was in a room with gray clay walls and a grass roof over his head. Small khaki curtains hid the shabby small window on one side of the cramped chamber—just leaving a shy peek of the banana plantation beyond. One wooden stool and a roughly made bench stood at the foot of his small bed.

[WTF!? Isn't this my small hut back in my ancestral village?]

[Why am I back here?]

He seemed to be hallucinating about his childhood residence back in Bukavu. He had stayed with his grandma until he was sixteen before he gained some small achievements in his soccer career and then went on to waste his life.

[I am not dreaming!] He exclaimed inwardly after pinching the dark brown skin on his forearm.

The last thing that he could recall was drowning and struggling for a single breath of air in the deep waters of the Congo River. The experience was deeply traumatizing for him.

Zachary had failed to pay back a debt he owed to a local drug lord in Kinshasha and was left to drown in the river by the thug's sycophants. He should have already died and on his way to hell, but here he was, alive and well.

[Could I have gone back in time? Could I have gotten a second chance?]

"Hahaha..." Zachary's laughter was a high cold cackle, piercing the silent atmosphere.

"I've got to stop following those soaps and web novels," Zachary mumbled while trying to suppress his laughter.

But suddenly, from the small open window came a form. Levitating a foot off the dirt-laden coarse floor was an ash-grey translucent silhouette that shimmered with a hazy glow. Slowly, it came into focus as an object looked at through a telescope, but this phantom was close, very close, just a few meters away.

Now Zachary could see the form of a man, with a silvery ragged line across his neck standing in his room. His skin was the color of charcoal and matched his bottomless soulless eyes. He wore a crown of leaves and grass, plus a tattered regal gown on his person.

Zachary's first impression of him was that he was just a hallucination and thus shook his head, trying to disperse his image from his mind. He was calm as this was not the first time he was getting delusions. His hallucinations had

been getting progressively less amusing over the years due to his abuse of drugs.

Despite his efforts, the phantom was still there, before him, laughing and performing a sort of wild – prehistoric dance around his small room.

Zachary wanted to run fast for safety—out of the small wooden door, but instead remained where he was. Let's face it; there was only one thing he could do in such a situation: Pray the phantom wouldn't kill him.

But suddenly, the phantom stopped its manic laughter and started studying Zachary with the unwavering attention of a predator.

The phantom's soulless eyes crept him out to the point of nearly peeing in his pants. But he clamped down on his fears and prayed that the almighty God (if there was one) could help him out of the situation.

"Young man!" Zachary heard the phantom's deep voice resounding like a thunderclap directly within his mind. It spoke to him without moving its chapped lips.

"I have felt your sadness and regret."

"I can sense your deep desire to do something for this forsaken land of ours. Your ancestors have sacrificed a lot to give you another chance. Remember; don't waste it! I will be watching you." The voice of the phantom was as chilling as ice at absolute zero, devoid of any emotion.

Before Zachary could register the meaning behind the words, the phantom began growing steadily less solid like it was being rubbed out of existence by some invisible eraser. One minute it was there, and the next, it was gone—vanished.

[What is happening!?] Zachary was shocked stiff by the development.

[I need to stop smoking Cannabis sativa.] He resolved.

"Hallucinating about my death, going back in time to my childhood, and meeting a ghost. If not marijuana, what could it be?" He mumbled while trying to calm his still bubbly emotions.

But at that instant, he heard a voice that should have been buried deep in his past.

"Zachary, wake up and go fetch some water," the high-pitched voice belonged to his grandmother. It was like he remembered: comforting as it wrapped around Zachary and whisked him off to a world where the sound was the power that could change everything wrong in the world.

Zachary's eyes moistened as he jumped out of his bed and limped towards the door of the small hut. He felt some pain in his left leg but ignored it as he was eager to see the old lady who had looked after him from childhood. His grandma was the rockstar of his world, his anchor, his safe place. But he had lost her prematurely.

Just opening the door made Zachary's breathing rapid and shallow. He could feel his pulse pounding in his temples as he stepped out of the grass-thatched house.

"I am really back," he mumbled while looking at the banana plantations and pastures around him. Their homestead was on a hill allowing Zachary to see down the slope covered by the virulent greens. Cows mooed quietly in one corner of a paddock nearby, and the squeals and snorts of fat pigs came from a pen some distance away from the house. Hens pecked at the soil with clockwork rhythm while goats grazed eagerly in the meadows. Zachary's grandma's farm was massive, spreading across a good four acres.

"This is a utopia," Zachary grinned while focusing his attention on his grandma.

A tall woman, all lean and skinny and with greying hair, was washing clothes a few meters away from his doorstep. She was humming a hymn and took no notice of Zachary when he was observing her. She was his grandmother, alive and well.

For a moment, the emotions Zachary had buried deep inside his mind came flooding forward, threatening to drown him in an endless abyss of regret and confusion. But as he continued looking at his grandmother's form that was as real as anything tangible around him, his mood lifted.

[Let this be real.] He inwardly prayed as he resisted the urge to rash forward and lift the woman into a hug.

If this was just a dream, Zachary didn't wish to wake.

He was highly suspicious that he had gone back in time to when he was just fifteen years old.

His hopes soared on thinking about the possibility. There were many things Zachary regretted and a lot more he could change. If there were even a slim chance that he had traveled back in time, he would use all his wasted opportunities to soar into the skies. And just maybe, he would make better decisions and become one of the greatest footballers of his generation. That had been his previous life's wish.

Zachary turned back and headed into the house. He needed a few minutes away from his grandmother to clear his head. But then, he noticed the mind-numbing pain that tortured his ankle bones and muscles whenever he moved. [Visitt novelbin\(.\)co/m](http://visitt.novelbin(.)co/m) for the latest updates

And then he remembered.

He'd gotten involved in a bike accident around the time he was fifteen during his previous life. The accident had been so bad that it'd basically tore most of the ligaments in his left foot. That'd been the beginning of the end of his

soccer career. He had gone on to fail the trials of his school team due to the injury and then started wallowing in endless distress. He then took to drugs to suppress his sorrow and was later expelled from his high school.

What followed was a period of being out on the streets in Kinshasha for a few months. But luckily, he was picked up by a retired footballer on the DRC National Team. With his help, he managed to get back on his feet and join TP Mazembe—a local football team in Lubumbashi. With the team, he managed to gain a bit of success in his football career.

But his success was short-lived. He soon relapsed back to taking drugs and was banned from the National League. One wrong decision led to another until even God could no longer save him from himself.

However, the starting point of all his distress was the accident he suffered when he was fifteen.

[Why would I return to a point when I was already injured?] He was distressed. He felt his mood sink as he limped back to his room to examine his left ankle.

But at that moment, a Ding sounded in his head, and a translucent blue book flipped open before him. On its first page, a few words were being inscribed in beautiful calligraphy.

"DING"

'G.O.A.T SYSTEM INITIALIZING...'