

SCALONETA

IN REVIEW OF A JOURNEY

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***Scaloneta*: In Review of a Journey**

A Documentary Novel

To Meixiang and Shizhou, my parents

献给孙世洲，金美香，我的父亲母亲

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1. Introduction

It was 2pm on December 19th, 2022. Professor Camilo Rubbini showed up punctually for his Economics class at Barnard College in New York City.

-- Good afternoon! Everyone!

He smiled and continued with a louder voice than usual:

-- You know, yesterday, Argentina won the World Cup! This is a great honor for my country!

Students started to applaud while a girl in the back of the classroom raised her hand and said above the din:

--I’m so glad for you and your country, professor! So, for any answer to a final exam question that we might not know, can we get partial credit if we write “Vamos Argentina”?

I heard this anecdote from Carlos, Camilo’s friend.

Carlos:

Now that I think about it, this was not the first time that my friend Camilo had to teach right after a World Cup final. Back in 2014, he was teaching summer courses in Guangzhou (China) and had to go to class just a few hours after the final ... That



time, of course, his story was quite different.

...

In November 2022, the early summer season of South America, Professor Fan and I of Peking University were doing research as visiting scholars in Buenos Aires, where we also attended an academic conference on Hispanic literature. A few weeks later, when Argentina won the FIFA World Cup, the entire city was flooded with joyful hustle and bustle, there was a festive atmosphere in every single corner. As young students at Peking University about 30 years ago, the two of us used to join our schoolmates and fanatically watch football World Cups. By now the middle-aged us were engaged in teaching and research for a long time, and we didn't expect the passion and madness of football in this country would deeply infect us again.

At that conference, we met our old friend Carlos, a senior professor from Buenos Aires. Because of similar research fields and constant exchanges of ideas, we decided to work jointly on a research project in Latin American narratives. The day before the end of the semester, the three of us gathered in a cafe to talk about our summer plans. Carlos, who was immersed in the joy of Argentina's winning the Cup, told us that he'd soon return to his hometown for vacations, and would visit a town along the way, where his relatives lived, "an interesting place". Professor Fan and I inquired about it, and immediately on a whim, we put



down our teacups and decided to take a surprise trip with him, taking advantage of the nice holidays...

That day, when the sky was already dark, the vehicle driven by Carlos took us down from Highway 33, following a car that also got off the highway, turned right at the first traffic light, and it didn't take long before we stopped outside a courtyard at the corner of the street. Carlos didn't get out of the car, but turned to us and said, "It's kind of late, maybe we should come back tomorrow?" But when we saw a young couple getting out of the car in front, we decided to get off too. As we walked closer, I saw there were quite a few people already waiting in the yard. A boy's voice was heard asking, "Is he at home?"

-- The house is rather quaint, it must be post-colonial in style, right?

Professor Lao Fan looked attentively at the courtyard with thick walls and tiles, and the sturdy wooden double doors in front of him. At the time, we were only feeling excited, neither of us could have imagined that a longer journey of exploration would begin.

...

-- That house was my parents' home; I was born and raised there. It was built on the street close to the national highway in our town and was very easy to find. Last Christmas holiday, I came back to visit my family; many people from near and far came to



ask me for an autograph or to take a photo. After you guys left, more and more people came by, and my brother put tables and chairs outside. After I'd finished breakfast, I'd go out to sign and pose for pictures, and then go into the house for lunch, and take a nap, and then my brother would come in again to urge: There's another line outside, go ahead. At the most, there were about 300 people in line. That's all I had for the last few days of the year 2022, and it was quite a pleasant experience.



People from near and far came by...



A year after the World Cup, as he faced several visitors including us, Coach Lionel Scaloni, who looked back on the journey to Qatar, was also to recall that distant afternoon when he first met Diego Maradona.

At that time, at an intersection of Highway 33 in his hometown of Pujato, the 15-year-old Lionel, with the same style long hair as his idol star and wearing the jersey of Newell's Club, was eagerly waiting with his brother for the long-distance bus to Rosario, 50 kilometers away, their football club's home city.

Pujato, located in the middle of the Pampas, is a farming and pastoral town with a population of over 3,000. The Scaloni family, whose ancestors are from Italy, have been running a beef cattle farm and growing crops there for three generations. Like countless small Argentinian towns, Pujato has its own football club, called Matienzo, with corresponding teams ranging from five or six years old to thirties and forties. Lionel has been training there with his older brother since he was 5 years old. When he was in the children's team, his father had also served as their coach. The elder Scaloni is a super football fan, who had been an amateur player for many years, and was also one of the leaders of the Club. He had always dreamed of letting his sons become outstanding players on the green field.

When Lionel was 6 years old, he was sent by his father to the children's section of Rosario Central Club to train under full-day care, but after a year the family encountered some