

Champions 1011

Chapter 1011: Dunn's Devil in his Dreams

Hey, old man, can you still eat?

Twain walked up to Wood, bent down and asked him, "George, are you old? Do you feel like you are too old to continue running?"

"No," Wood replied emotionlessly.

"Then, that's good," Twain nodded, "In the second half, your defensive duty load will be heavier."

Wood was a little surprised. He had thought Twain would ask him to strengthen the offense, but instead, he got more work in the defensive aspect.

"The Notts County FC manager is not a 'huge fan of 1-0', so in the next half, we will definitely counter-attack, because I would not allow you guys to lose the competition. However, facing our offense, how would Notts County react? I feel that they would not start defending from the start, but instead continue attacking, and their offense will be more aggressive. Hence, at the very least, during the first phase of the second half, you would not have much time for participating in the offense, George," Twain told Wood.

The players were more confused when they heard this. George was the core of the team, so if he concentrated on defense, who would organize a group attack?

Twain patted Wood's shoulder, then walked towards Gago, who was beside him. "You're doing well, Fernando. But you should rest more in the second half."

Gago knew Twain was being polite. Actually, he made almost zero contribution in the first half. He was getting on in years, and his physical and mental state could not catch up.

However, no one would be willing to be replaced like this.

Gago did not nod to agree, nor shook his head to disagree, but Twain already made the choice for him. "Thanks, Fernando."

Now that Gago has been switched out, who would replace him? If Wood needed to focus on defending, and Gago was not playing, who would organize an attack?

Twain turned and looked at Chen Jian, who had just been called back from outside.

"Chen Jian, you're up for the second half."

This decision surprised everyone, but Chen Jian did not reveal any sign of being shocked. He only nodded.

He already knew that he would be playing in this competition because Twain told him earlier on. Hence, he did not feel surprised. Else, he would definitely have the same reaction as his teammates – he only

joined the league team four days ago, and now he was going to play in such a competition. It seemed like Twain was really putting a lot of trust in this Chinese player.

“Your task is to organize an offense. I know that you had always done this type of thing in Spain, so it should not be too difficult for you, right?” Twain asked.

Chen Jian did not answer at once. He frowned and said, “I have only trained with the team for three days. If you let me organize an attack, would it lead to...”

“George will help you,” Twain replied.

Wood also nodded to express agreement.

Chen Jian looked at his teammates, who were looking at him. Although it has only been three days, he was always watching his team from the side. He already knew well the special traits some of the players had, so he hoped he could pull this off.

“Okay, head coach,” Chen Jian replied in English.

“The Notts County FC will start the second half with an aggressive offense, so we must all keep this tactic in our minds – this opponent is definitely not one you could easily beat. This competition is a derby, my comrades! This is the Derby City that would definitely pull ahead in terms of the difference in potential! If you guys still think that you could break through their defense with sloppy dribbling, that you’d be able to pass through with low effort passes, score with lousy shots... then raise both of your arms and surrender at once, because this is not a fight you guys should get into.”

The words Twain said were extremely annoying to some of them. This was exactly what they thought in the first half, from the first second when they stepped onto the field. They thought they could easily triumph over their opponents, and who cared if this was a derby? They were the home team!

In the end, what were the results? After allowing their opponents to score from a free-kick, they went into chaos, everyone fought for themselves and were not able to even out the score until the end of the first half. Instead, they allowed Notts County FC to gain several counterattack opportunities. The Nottingham Forest audience were so shocked that they blurted out jeers of contempt.

If they lost the game in the end, the performance in the first half would really be a disgrace.

“So we launch a defensive counter-attack in the second half, wait till the Notts County presses forward. Balotelli, you have to move a little backward in your position, connect between the front and the backcourt. Our three lines have to be packed together, not allowing our opponents to split them apart. When the two flanks are attacking, you guys must dare to press forward and not be afraid of the gaps behind you, because if you are unable to press forward, you will get beat down by your opponents.”

“The simpler the offensive method, the better, I don’t care how complex and impressive the Notts County FC’s offense is. Playing their game against them would only make us fall into their trap because they would definitely hope that the ball will stay in our half for long periods of time.”

Twain was explaining the second half’s tactics to the team in detail. Actually, the arrangement of tactics has never changed; the reminder was only because of the players’ underestimation of their opponent, which discouraged them from having tactics discipline and led to this type of situation. Now, after such a

terrible first half, and with Twain's criticism during the half-time break, the players saw they had to respect their opponents and take the game seriously.

Twain knew that Dunn's favorite tactic was offensive football. This could be easily seen from the team he created in Notts County over seven years. Counter-attacking was the best way to handle such a team.

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Chen Jian stood on the sidelines and was ready to play. Although Gago had already gone out of the field, he still needed to complete this substitution ceremony. Hence he was standing by the side of the field and waiting for the fourth official to raise up his number plate.

It would be his first official game for Nottingham Forest, but he did not feel as excited as he thought he would be. Even though it was the first time for him to be playing during a league cup match, when he listened to Twain announcing this decision in the changing room, his expression was deadpan, as if this matter did not concern him at all.

He was wondering why he was so calm. Wasn't his dream to be able to play for Nottingham Forest? Now that that dream has come true, why didn't he feel happy and excited?

Maybe this was not really his dream? Was this a self-deceptive illusion?

The commentator was reporting the names of the players who were about to go onto the field.

"Number 14, Chen Jian!"

Some fans stood up to applaud, and as the fourth official behind him raised the number plate, Chen Jian ran forward.

He felt very calm, so calm that it did not feel right. The live scene was very noisy, but his mind was not really engaged, even though he repeatedly told himself, "This is Nottingham Forest's home field! I am a Nottingham Forest player!"

It did not work; he just was not able to get excited. He was wondering whether he was on form...

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Dunn saw Chen Jian run onto the field and gave a look to Twain who was sitting beside him. He had guessed that Twain would allow Chen Jian to play in this match, so he was not surprised about this at all.

Moreover, speaking of which, he was actually a little excited to see what performance Chen Jian would put up in this competition. If next season he took over Nottingham Forest, Chen Jian would play under him.

However, he could not just let him go so easily.

Dunn walked to the side of the field and signaled the nearest Notts County player over. He wanted the player to spread the word over to his teammates on the field, warning them to keep a look on number 14.

The Chinese reporters were excited for a while upon seeing Chen Jian go onto the field, but they could not continue smiling after a while. Wherever Chen Jian was, there would always be a Notts County player, sometimes even two...

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"I really can't figure out why our head coach would want us to keep a look on that Chinese guy," Paul Johnson shook his head, talking to the teammates beside him. Currently, the ball was off the field, giving them the opportunity to talk to each other.

"Who knows?" His teammates shrugged.

"From his performance in these few minutes, it seems he is just average..."

Of course, it was average. Chen Jian was still pondering why he was able to stay so calm, so he was not able to get himself involved in the competition. His passes were all mediocre, with many that were passed back, but not many that were passed forward.

Not only did Notts County's players think that Chen Jian was average. Even the English commentator thought that Twain spent too much on purchasing this average performing Chinese midfielder. It looked disappointing, concerning the disparity in level between him and the rest of the team.

"There is something wrong with Chen's performance," Kerslake told Twain. After the training in these three days, the assistant coach has already recognized Chen Jian's potential, so he also felt something was off with Chen Jian's current performance.

Twain pinched his chin. "Who knows, this is his first time representing Nottingham Forest in a match so maybe he is overly excited..."

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Chen Jian found out that he was really calm, even when there were two opponents coming forward and blocking him. He could still think about observing the locations of his teammates beforehand. Under the circumstances, what would he do? Protect the ball, try dribbling past the two seemingly strong players, show performance in front of the fans of the home team?

Force a breakthrough, then try a long shot?

Chen Jian's foot shook. The ball passed through the gap between the two defenders, and rolled to the side defender who was running through, Gareth Bale!

"Beautiful!" The English narrator yelled.

Previously, that location had no one covering it at all, but Chen Jian was able to think on the same wavelength as Bale, and also pass the ball through the gap at the exact right time. It was truly admirable.

Chen Jian suddenly recalled that when he was representing the Spanish in their first La Liga match, when he was awarded the 'Man of the Match' by the Spanish announcer, he was also as "cold"...

He then received the ball. Balotelli turned to signal to him to pass the ball, but instead, he waved, wanting Balotelli to run forward. When he saw Balotelli run past him, he immediately sent a straight

pass, the ball passed by the Notts County's middle back, and Balotelli, upon turning and running into the space, was able to receive the ball.

Being calm and analyzing the situation on the field... wasn't this something that he has always relied upon, even in the La Liga matches?

I am not in bad form, I am in excellent form, he thought.

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Dunn found out that Chen Jian was always able to pass the ball out in the shortest period of time, causing a lot of trouble for the Notts County defenders. A player who loved to dribble by himself would be the easiest to defend against, but a player who tended to pass the ball out quickly would be a lot more of a challenge.

Chen Jian belonged to the second type of player. His dribbling was not the best, and his speed was not fast. His ball control was limited to being able to keep the ball under his foot under pressure but was not able to make fancy dribbling moves. Instead, he had a talent in passing the ball.

Now he did not know if he should be happy for having such a passer in the future or being worried about the results of the current match.

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Notts County did step up their attack in the second half. However, with Wood's defense and Chen Jian's passing, the opposing offense was completely invisible.

The Notts County players were losing their cool as the situation changed on the pitch. They were, after all, young and not as good as the players of Nottingham Forest.

Dunn saw Twain's plans, so he started to make arrangements in bringing back the defensive lines. However, this was Twain's real intention – once they brought back their defensive line, coupled with Notts County's low standards in their defensive lines, how would they be able to hold against Nottingham Forest's thunderous offense?

Seeing that Notts County has shrunk in their formation, he immediately changed tactics, asking his players to commit a full press past the midfield line, bombarding the goal whilst surrounding the penalty area.

Dunn did not predict that Twain would actually make this move, so he could not react in time. Nottingham Forest took this opportunity to even out the score with their offense, then scored another goal to pull ahead in the next three minutes. They were overtaking!

Although none of these goals were directly assisted by Chen Jian, he had played his part. His performance was pretty good.

After the score of 2:1, Twain did not pull back but instead continue strengthening his offense. He substituted in a more offensive player, Teixeira, and replaced Cohen.

Everyone knew Twain would not settle for a one-goal lead.

By the end of the game, using the chances given by Notts County while they were in full press trying to even out the score, Twain finally used his move of “defensive counterattack”, allowing Agbonlahor to get what he wanted. After being substituted late in the game, he allowed the score to end at 3:1.

The pre-match confidence-filled Notts County lost the Derby match in the end. They were very unhappy, but no one cared about them anymore.

After the game, when the two coaches shook hands, Twain wanted to comfort Dunn, but Dunn spoke first.

“It’s a shame, I only created 45 minutes’ worth of trouble for you...”

Actually, Dunn lost due to lack of experience, since he had only led teams in the lower leagues. However, Twain would not admit it now, as he needed to consider the emotions of the loser.

Therefore, he just gave a silly laugh.

“Forty-five minutes is sufficient to allow people to see your potential clearly. Take it slowly, Dunn.”

Dunn shrugged and did not say anything more. He only brushed past Twain and walked towards the paved path.

Before going onto the paved path, he turned to look at the stadium once more.

It was almost dusk after the game, and the golden afterglow of the sunset could only shine on the upper part of the roof. A large part of Nottingham Forest’s emblem was hidden in the shadows, while the entire stadium was shrouded in the gloom.

Tony Twain, his old friend, had beaten him once more.

Take over his team? This might be the hardest challenge ever since he started coaching.

But as Twain said, how could he improve without a challenge? Initially, didn’t he slowly challenge the champions to reach seemingly impossible goals?

Now, he only wanted to tell his wife: The Dunn she loved was back.

Feeling as though a great weight has been lifted off his shoulders, Dunn gave out a long breath, turned back around, and walked onto the paved paths the players took.

Chapter 1012: After the Derby

The Notts County players must have been very disappointed that they did not win the match. However, what Twain said after the match might have made them feel better.

During the post-match press conference, Twain praised Notts County’s manager, Tang, also known as Dunn, by saying that he caused him a lot of trouble and it had been very long since he felt this anxious about a game...

That was high praise for Tang. In fact, Twain meant to do that. He wanted to let the Forest fans get used to Tang and slowly accept this future manager. There were people who thought that Tang was not

capable or reputable enough. That was not a problem; he was looking for his successor, and it was not a beauty pageant. Tang was definitely capable. After all, Twain himself was “taught” by Tang—he started off by reading the notes left behind by Tang back in the day. Fame? He was not famous at all when he took charge of Forest at the beginning. Since Evan had already given up on his unrealistic dreams of being a “strong team”, why would they need to get a world-famous manager as his successor? Besides, world-class managers would not be willing to live in Twain’s shadow. These managers were all too proud to accept being compared with Twain all the time.

Furthermore, Tang came from Nottingham Forest. He was familiar with Forest and he had deep feelings for the team.

Taking everything into consideration, Tang was the most suitable successor for Twain, and he was also someone whom the Forest team could depend on for the next few decades.

It was like Moyes, who was not famous either, yet had been managing Everton for so long that he had already become a name that would never be forgotten in the history of the team. In fact, Twain had not been managing Forest for very long. All his stints added up to only 12 years, which was not even top 20 in terms of duration of management among the English football clubs.

If it were not for the fact that Twain was able to win so many trophies, his 12 years of management would not have left much of a mark in the footballing world.

The English managers would have different plans depending on the length of their management. Short-term plans, mid-term plans, and long-term plans. Twain could at most make a mid-term plan, but Forest needed a long-term plan. Nottingham Forest’s foundation was still not strong enough. A team’s foundation could not be built up just by winning five UEFA Champions League trophies. No number of trophies would be enough. Time was needed for a foundation to be built. If the club could be within the title challengers every season for a period of twenty years, then there would be some foundation for the club. After a hundred years, it would probably be a force to be reckoned with, and it would be able to be among the traditionally strong teams.

Unfortunately, Twain did not have the time to build a foundation for Forest. This was a task for the young and healthy Tang. What he did was build up a glorious history for Forest, a period of history that would become a source of mental strength for the players in the future. It could be said that Twain created mental wealth for the team, while Tang would focus on the material level. The combination of mental and material wealth would lead Forest from strength to strength. It would be unlike the Clough dynasty that faded off after a period of glory as Clough grew old. It was like a shooting star, disappearing after flashing for a moment in the sky.

Twain did not want to see Forest wallowing in the lower divisions after he grew old.

It was easy to attack a country, but harder to defend one. Offense and defense required different kinds of quality. Twain knew that he was not one to defend a dynasty; his impulsive nature was more suitable for attacking. As for defense, someone steadier and calmer would be more suited for it, and Tang would be a suitable choice.

That was why he went to Tang.

This derby match allowed many people who had no idea who Tang was to see his capabilities first-hand. Even a team like Notts County could shine under his leadership. The higher quality Nottingham Forest team would surely do even better.

Twain had not told Evan about his plans yet as he knew that Evan was only thinking about persuading him to stay for a few more years. Even if he were to talk about a successor now, Evan would not think much about it. Twain was not worried that his suggestion would not be taken into consideration. He knew how much influence he had in the club, and his influence became even greater now that he returned to rescue the club when it was in peril. He had always enjoyed massive support from the fans; therefore, as long as he supported the decision, nobody would disagree.

As for people who thought that Tang was not domineering enough? If everyone were like Twain, then the end of the world would be nigh...

It was because of this “selfish motive” that Twain almost didn’t mention his victory at all. Other than praising his team for their performance, he kept praising Tang. The Chinese media were ecstatic about it as they could boast about it in their home country to their fans. This time, they would not be labeled as “clickbait”, as Twain’s words were even more enthusiastic than their headlines!

Tang was almost embarrassed by what Twain was saying and he did his best to stay humble. Yet this humility that he showed became another reason for people to praise him.

And so, this derby that came after 14 years ended in a harmonious atmosphere among everyone.

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After the derby match, Twain did not contact Tang. They were both adults and they knew what they needed to do. Tang was still managing Notts County, but Twain was already preparing to guide his successor. Twain acted as though he had nothing to do for the time being, as if he did not continue thinking about a successor.

January was the winter transfer window. It was time for the big clubs to get some reinforcements. It was a time to strengthen areas that were neglected during the summer transfer window or to correct the mistakes made then. However, Nottingham Forest had no intention to shop for reinforcements. Twain knew that he would only stay in the club for half a season more, and Tang would take over completely before the start of the next season. If he was thinking about the long-term and for the good of the team, keeping the squad as it was during the winter transfer window was for the best.

Otherwise, the players that Twain liked might not be suitable for Tang’s tactics. Buying them would not only delay the players’ progress, but it also would not be helpful for rebuilding the team either.

Chen Jian was the only one that Twain bought as he thought that he would not disrupt Tang’s tactics.

However, not buying players did not mean he would not sell any.

With Chen Jian’s arrival, there were four players in the center of the midfield. The team did not have any plans to fight on multiple fronts so there was no need for so many people in the same position. Gago was getting old. Even though he was very happy about Twain’s return, the Nottingham derby showed him the reality. His impact on the team was getting smaller and smaller. If the boss really did not intend to stay for the next season, there would be no point in him staying too. The new manager would most

likely not place much importance on him, and in that case, he might as well return to Argentina and find a team to retire in.

Therefore, Gago talked to Twain alone, hoping to confirm that the boss was only staying for half a season.

Twain told him that he was indeed only staying for half a season, and he'd leave the team after the end of the season. He did not persuade Gago to stay either, as he knew that Gago's departure would be a good thing for the team. Tang would not need to deal with this problem when cleaning up his team.

Even though it might sound heartless, it had to be done if one analyzed the problem objectively.

Gago also thought about this problem, which was why he did not express any displeasure. Instead, he took the initiative to suggest that he would transfer to another club after the end of the season.

Another familiar face was leaving his peripherals, but Twain did not find it as difficult as before. Maybe he had seen too many departures and was getting numb to it. On the other hand, maybe it was because Gago was not really someone who had been with him for very long.

Twain did not persuade Gago to stay when he wanted to leave. However, when another person wanted to leave, Twain wanted to ask him to stay.

Jake Livermore was actually competing with Gago for the attacking midfielder position, even though he would usually be no match for the experienced Gago. He thought that Gago was already getting old so he would slowly become a key player. Little did he know that Twain would get a new player from China playing the same position as he did into the team. The new guy actually managed to play in the Nottingham derby and performed rather well too.

This made him understand that his status in the team had become even lower than before.

Livermore was a smart person. He knew the reason why his status was low was that Twain did not like him. Otherwise, he would not have gotten four players in the attacking midfielder position. A smart person would not use an egg to smash against a rock. To Livermore, he was the egg and Twain was the rock.

A smart person would leave on his own accord. This way, everyone would look good and his reputation would be intact.

Therefore, Livermore had a private chat with Twain as well. He wanted to know whether he was the last choice within the five attacking midfielders.

Of course, Twain would not say, "That's right, you're the worst player out of the bunch in my opinion." Unless he was an idiot or was trying to provoke him deliberately.

In Twain's view, however, Livermore was not useless. He was a very suitable impact substitute at least.

However...

"Boss, I cannot accept being a bench player," Livermore was very direct and frank. Twain liked his attitude. It was nice when people spoke their minds and were not secretly scheming.

“I hope that you’ll think about it carefully, Jake. We need strong substitutes too,” Twain did not give him any false information, telling him directly that his position in his mind was that of a substitute.

“I’m sorry, Boss. When Fernando and George were the big stars, I was their substitute. Now that Fernando is getting old, another player from China appeared... I’m already 29 years old, Boss, I don’t want to end my career as a substitute.”

Livermore looked at Twain with a serious expression on his face.

Even though everyone was thinking about their own personal goals, Twain did not dislike it when someone was frank about it. Wanting to advance one’s career was not something bad.

Twain’s plan for Livermore to be a substitute was simple. In his plans, Wood and Chen Jian would be the key players for the next half of the season. They might even continue to be key players for the next season. After Gago was gone, the team would only have three attacking midfielders left, and that was very unsafe. Even though he did not know what kind of tactics Tang would use, it would not do to have no substitute for this position.

Livermore was the best choice to be a substitute in Twain’s mind. He was good enough to be a starter, albeit with some deficiencies and somewhat lacking in capabilities. It would be a pity to let him go, so it was best if he could be happy being a substitute.

Too bad the players were unlike NPCs in the games. They had their own thoughts, and nobody would be willing to be a substitute. Everyone wanted to be the key player, to be the soldier. However, only eleven players could start in a football team and someone had to be the substitute. This type of player was the supporting cast. They were not as eye-catching as the star players were, but they might just be the most important type of players on the team.

However, Livermore was obviously not this type of player.

He flatly rejected Twain’s attempt to persuade him to stay.

Twain could do nothing when faced with Livermore acting this way. However, it was not difficult to find bench players. If he had no choice, he could always pick a player from the youth team. He was not the one who had to think about this problem, it was Tang’s burden to bear. Twain might as well do Livermore a favor and agree to his transfer request. He hoped that Livermore would not leave during the winter transfer window, though. Instead, he wished Livermore could finish the season. To repay Twain for agreeing to his request, Livermore agreed to Twain’s condition as well.

Just like that, Twain managed to keep a stable core for the team. Under the premise of giving up on the FA Cup and focusing on the league, they did not have to worry about major injury issues or international call-ups causing problems for their lineup.

Under these conditions, Twain was to lead the team to avoid relegation. However, deep inside, he had a greater target—to qualify for European competition.

Twain suddenly recalled the first season when he was in charge of Forest, the first half-season to be exact. He took over after New Year’s Day and the team was not doing well, just like now. The difference was that the team’s finances were in trouble then, and they did not even have a transfer budget of at

all. He could only look within the team and make use of the ready resources. Eventually, his team was only a step away from winning the title.

It was from that moment onwards that Twain felt the heart-wrenching pain of failure, and he hated failure from the bottom of his heart. It was also from that time onwards that he would do anything to win.

The situation now was similar to the situation then. The difference was, his lack of dealings in the transfer market was not because he lacked funds, but because he chose to avoid it.

His desire for victory had never changed. Twain would admit that his temper was better than before, but his competitive nature had never lost its edge. If there were people who thought that he had become a " Nice Guy" ... Twain actually hoped that people thought that way. Then he could pretend to be weak and defeat the powerful... However, would people really think so?

Chapter 1013: Losing Competitiveness

Nottingham Forest had nothing at all to do with the tumult in the transfer market. Initially, the media had still been expecting a huge storm in the transfer market due to Twain's return to Nottingham Forest. In the end, he bought Chen Jian and let go of David Sliva after much deliberation.

The team's results in January were two wins, two draws and one loss. It was not outstanding, but the results were not too bad either.

This was the current situation of Nottingham Forest. Twain's return might have stabilized the team morale but the team's results did not rise all the way to the top immediately. The team was still hovering at the area below average even though they had managed to escape relegation.

The media mostly believed that Twain's return had a huge influence because Nottingham Forest had immediately escaped relegation, but this was not the intended outcome for Twain. His internal motive was not revealed to the public but he did not care if the media knew about it, because they would have no effect on him anyway. That said, he still needed to find a suitable opportunity to reveal his own goals to the players. This was because it would be impossible to reach his goal if the players did not know what he was thinking and were not in sync with him.

Why did he need to find an ideal opportunity? Because this goal was a little too ambitious for the current Nottingham Forest, and Twain sometimes feared he was not being realistic. It was certain that the people on today's team were not the same as the ones in the past. Twain himself was not sure whether it was still possible to reach his goals.

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The happiest circumstance for Twain was that Chen Jian had integrated so quickly into the team.

Perhaps it was because Chen Jian had played with Nottingham Forest and so did not appear as a complete stranger to the team. Or maybe it was because his technique specialties were similar to Wood, so it would be natural for him to fit into the playing style of Nottingham Forest. There was no need for any special adjustment for the team to operate as normal.

At the same time, Chen Jian was able to speak fluent English since he used to live in Nottingham for three years, so he would not feel foreign in the current environment. As such, the language barrier would not be a difficulty when it came to him adapting to his new teammates.

After staying for a week at the hotel, he moved out of there because his agent Xia Yang had found a place for him to stay in the city. He bought the apartment under Chen Jian's name and the latter immediately moved in.

While he was settling into his new house, Xia Yang temporarily stayed over to cook for Chen Jian and take care of his accommodation and meals. At the same time, he also handled the necessary procedures to move Chen Jian's parents over to Nottingham. Once his parents arrived, Xia Yang would no longer need to act as a housekeeper.

"You can't find another agent like me in the world, Jian!" While cooking dinner for Chen Jian, Xia Yang stressed his importance to the young man, who was sitting at the dining table playing with his mobile phone. "Helping you to earn money, taking care of buying you a house, a car, your furniture... and I'm even making soup for you. I'm basically your babysitter. Your Uncle Xia is supposed to be a great agent who manages hundreds of Chinese football players!"

Chen Jian had been in the middle of sending a flirty text to a girl he met on his trip back to China last year. After he heard what Xia Yang said, he lifted his head and replied, "The manager was supposedly a nanny, haven't you heard this song, Uncle Xia?"

"What song?"

"Being her chauffeur, her deliveryman, and her ATM," Chen Jian hummed.

"Hey!" Xia Yang rolled his eyes. "It's the girl who's putting you up to this, no?"

Chen Jian shook his head. "Cui Cui is a very intelligent, kind and sensible girl."

"Wow," Xia Yang smiled. "This is definitely a case of being blinded by love. Everything looks great through the rosy lens of love."

Chen Jian knew that Xia Yang was playing around with him and was not really dissatisfied with Cui Cui. Hence, he did not continue to bother Uncle Xia and kept chatting about anything and everything with his girlfriend.

The fragrance wafted into the dining hall from the kitchen.

Chen Jian suddenly said without lifting his head, "Use less salt, Uncle Xia."

"I'm making my share!" Xia Yang's voice carried out from the same direction.

Chen Jian had always insisted on eating like an athlete because this assisted him in maintaining his physique and fitness. However, normal humans were unable to eat his food at all. Xia Yang once ate the same meal as Chen Jian out of curiosity and commented that it was tasteless like candle wax. Hence, whenever Xia Yang lived with Chen Jian, he would always make two separate servings for each meal—one athlete's meal for Chen Jian and one regular meal for himself.

Xia Yang would use various kinds of gourmet dishes to tempt Chen Jian who was eating at the same table, but Chen Jian was simply unswayable. He just ate his own athlete's meal. Xia Yang felt a huge sense of defeat and could only complain about Chen Jian not knowing how to enjoy life. He would not even buy a mansion after earning so much money. Other than giving his parents back home a big house to live in, he himself did not have any expectations or wants for his own accommodation. On top of that, he did not buy luxury cars or go chasing after superstars... Now, he was even losing the luxury of enjoying good food. What was the point of earning so much money?

Chen Jian ignored his complaints and continued doing his thing.

However, Xia Yang was also very proud of him, because these were the secrets to why Chen Jian was able to succeed in Europe. He was modest, hardworking, and temperate. Xia Yang had never praised Chen Jian to his face but always used him as a role model for other players he was responsible for, telling them that Chen Jian's model was the route to success.

If a professional football player wanted to succeed and extend his professional lifespan, then discipline in living and eating could not be compromised. This was also why Twain had so much confidence in Chen Jian, so much so that the man would rather bring him back to Nottingham Forest and allow him to be one of the key players in the "Twain generation". By nature, Asian players' peak periods were usually shorter, and this was related to their physical condition. After 30, their lifestyle would start on a steep downfall and if they did not pay special attention to their health, the decline would be rapid.

This would never happen to Chen Jian.

Xia Yang first placed Chen Jian's dinner on the table, then went back to carry over his clay pot of rice.

After they started eating, Xia Yang asked Chen Jian, his mouth full, "Are you going to start in the upcoming weekend match?"

Chen Jian put down the knife and fork, thought about it and shook his head. "I don't know."

"Hey, can't you tell if Twain's paying attention to you?"

"If I were to tell from the performance in training, I should be starting, but I can't guess what the head coach is thinking."

In fact, other than the first two matches where Chen Jian played as a reserve, he started in all the subsequent matches. Judging by that, Chen Jian thought he should be starting in the next match unless he suffered an injury before it.

However, it was just as Chen Jian had said: Xia Yang could not predict what Twain was thinking either.

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It was not just Xia Yang and Chen Jian; not even the media could not guess what Twain was thinking.

The upcoming weekend match would be Nottingham Forest's match against Arsenal. This would be another encounter between Arsene Wenger and Tony Twain. This match was a matter of wild speculation by many, otherwise, Xia Yang would not ask Chen Jian whether he was going to start. The match would be broadcasted live on China's television. This was going to be a huge chance to display a Chinese football superstar.

Before the game, the media had finally gotten a juicy tidbit—Twain’s initiative to provoke a war of words.

In an interview, he claimed that although Arsenal was now third in the table, his team had full confidence in beating Arsenal on away ground.

In the current situation, anyone knew that Nottingham Forest’s capabilities and results were poor. In the first half of the season, Nottingham Forest had been humiliated by Arsenal on their home court in a 1:4 loss, such was the gap in performance between the two teams.

“We all know that Twain wants revenge, but this will be a little too hard to exact...” That was what the media said. “Arsenal is not like Middlesbrough, so it would be too difficult for Nottingham Forest to be victorious.”

“This statement was expected. I think it’s possible to guess what tricks Twain is trying to pull. He is simply trying to agitate Arsenal, get them to lose their calm judgment and draw a benefit from that. But this will not work today. Wenger is very calm and calculative; he will definitely not fall for such provocation.”

“He’s probably just talking big but actually not hoping to win over his opponents. He’s probably just trying to give his players confidence.”

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“Simply saying a few words would give you all a lot of confidence? This is ridiculous! ”

In Wilford, two days before the game, Twain was giving his players one of their last tactical lessons. Tomorrow, the lesson would take place in North London’s hotel.

Twain did not only discuss tactics during his tactical lessons.

“Is there anyone who has had doubts these few days?” Twain asked the players, who were sitting down.

No one said “yes”, but in reality, they all doubted, and not only a little. Since the start of Twain’s coaching, they had never seen their head coach initiating a provocation on his opponent.

However, the older players who have trained under Twain for a very long time were not surprised.

“I’m going to make it clear in advance that I’m not bluffing or trying to give you all any bullsh*t confidence.”

Twain unconsciously used a few profanities.

“If I said I want to win over Arsenal, then I really mean that I want to win over Arsenal.”

His words caused a huge stir among the players. Arsenal was now third in the league. They were only one point behind the second place and just three points behind first-placed Manchester United. Nottingham Forest, on the other hand, was 13th, 15 points behind Arsenal. The huge gap in the rankings was actually a representation of the difference in capabilities between Nottingham Forest and Arsenal.

They had just lost to Arsenal in the first half of the season on home court, so there was seemingly little hope to win against them in an away game.

Twain saw the hesitation and lack of confidence in their eyes.

He grinned. “What? A team like Arsenal would scare you guys to death? Look at how incapable you guys are. Actually, since I took over the team, I have always had a concept, but was hesitating whether to tell you guys... it might not be possible to turn it into reality.”

His words had baited so many of them—what thoughts would make the head coach so hesitant?

“I didn’t have a press conference when I came back so no one asked me what kind of future I was going to bring to Nottingham Forest.” Twain saw that everyone was interested in what he was going to say, so he knew the time was right. “But I think that most people would feel it would be to successfully stay in the same league,” He paused. “If that is so, then we have already completed that task. Then why do we still need to work hard for the second half of the season?”

Once he said this, everyone realized what he meant. If they only wanted to maintain their league, from the current performance of the team, it should not be a problem.

“So my goal was actually not just to maintain our spot in the league. From the start, it was never just that. My goal is to return to Europe,” Twain calmly stated his real goal, but the players listening were not as composed.

There was an immediate animated discussion. Not even one of them had expected their head coach would have such huge ambitions!

In fact, returning to Europe was not a long way off. In the first half of the season, they had played in the Europa League (formerly the League Cup). They had also played in the Champions League and the Europa League in previous seasons. However, hearing this today, why did it feel that they had not appeared in Europe for a very long time?

After the discussion died down, Twain went on, “So, our lowest target this season will be the Europa League. Are there people who do not like participating in European competitions?”

“No!” There were many voices that answered this time.

“Well, it looks like we’ve found something we have in common,” Twain smiled. “As for me, I love challenges and victories. If we simply end the league on this note, it will be very uninteresting. But now I want to confirm something—” Twain paused for a while.

“How many more people have that ambition?”

As he spoke, he looked directly at everyone present.

He wanted to remember each and everyone’s reaction.

Some people were excited, some were in doubt, and some were confused.

“Do you know why I said we’re able to defeat Arsenal?” Twain observed everyone’s reaction, then continued talking.

“If you’re in doubt over something like this, then there would be no way for you to return to Europe. I want you all to find your lost confidence. This confidence is not what we had while facing Notts County F.C! I want you so fearless that you are not moved at all when facing a strong opponent!

Twain raised his fist in front of the players.

“If you can only be fearless in front of easier opponents but give up entirely against strong ones, then that isn’t confidence, that is inferiority! Inferiority in its core!”

“As soon as I said we were going to beat Arsenal, some people were so scared. How can that be? You guys want to go to Europe in the future, so you are bound to face many stronger opponents. If it scares you, why not quit football altogether?” Twain spread his arms, facing them. “This is a tragedy. The Nottingham Forest of four years ago stole away the Championship from Real Madrid in Estadio Santiago Bernabéu stadium in front of eight million fans, but today you guys only have this much courage?”

No one could answer him, because there were too many people among them who did not experience that game. However, those who had played back then were red with embarrassment and lowered their heads. How would they even dare to open their mouths and talk?

Why was Nottingham Forest falling deeper and deeper into a slump with every year that passed?

They had lost the heart to fight for the championships along with the man who had been the core of their team...

Chapter 1014: Find the Heart of the Champion

Twain never thought that as soon as he returned to the Nottingham Forest’s coaching bench, the team’s achievements would be soon improved and they would keep on winning all the way through the league champion title again even if he did almost nothing. Only a child could imagine such a scenario, but any reasonable person would regard it as nonsense.

What was happening now has proved his wisdom. Although by today’s Nottingham Forest have won a few games, there were still many problems to be solved. For example, the restoration of the team’s domination has become the most urgent problem for Twain, waiting for him to resolve it.

If a team did not have the confidence to win, there was no way to defeat the strong enemies. When some relatively small and weak teams faced a strong opponent, if they were determined to win, they could create miracles. There were many classic battles in which weaker teams defeated stronger teams, and the key factor was always the belief in victory.

When Nottingham Forest suddenly rose in England’s football world, they were depending on that relentless strength of advancing and reluctance of being defeated.

At that time, Nottingham Forest hardly knew what “fear” was. Whether it was in the face of a strong domestic opponent, or when they were facing the European famous teams, there was only one thought in their mind: “To fight and win the battle!”

But now...

“For the last four seasons, you have been complaining about losing the Champion, losing the UEFA Champions League qualification and now even losing the European League qualification. But let me tell you, none of this really matters.”

Twain looked at the players who kept their heads down.

“If you don’t find one most important thing again, you’ll never regain what you have lost. Do you want to know what it is? ”

Twain slapped his chest, where the heart was beating. “Put your hands here and feel your heartbeats. Are they accelerating as I speak of a victory over Arsenal?”

Some players really put their hands on their chests, but some players were still confused. They did not know what the coach meant.

Twain wasn’t counting on his speech to suddenly show everyone the way of victory, but he had to bury the seeds. Perhaps they would blossom and bear fruit in due course.

“The game against Arsenal is an opportunity to prove that you guys still have a fighting spirit. This time it’s not for the media out there. Fight for yourselves!”

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Arsene Wenger was 69 years old. His goal was to retire after fulfilling his contract with the club, which had three years left. That meant he would be retiring at 72. The biggest regret of his coaching life was that he had never won a title of the UEFA Champions League and the European Champions Cup.

There was a season when he was very close to the trophy, but someone shut him outside the finals.

This someone was now in front of him, smiling.

“Long time no see, Professor. ”

During the pre-match press conference, Twain and Wenger met each other. While one has just finished his part, the other was getting ready for his.

“It’s only been a few months, Tony. “Ever since Twain won the World Cup, he almost disappeared out of the vision of the public social media.

Twain shook his head. That was not what he meant.

“I mean it has been a long time since we met in this situation here.”

Twain pointed to the back of the press conference hall where reporters were waiting for Wenger to come in.

Wenger immediately understood. As opponents, they really haven’t met for a long time.

“I heard your team is going to beat my team,” said Wenger.

Twain said with a smile, “If we don’t have the spirit of victory, it is impossible for us to win.” He didn’t just nod and say yes. It was better not to be so arrogant in front of this old friend and opponent.

He actually did think so. To be honest, he had no idea whether he could win over Arsenal or not. Although tactically prepared for this upcoming battle, the current Nottingham Forest team was not the one from four years ago, and he didn't control it completely.

The reason why he said he wanted to win was the same as Twain told his players: "If you don't have the eagerness to win, how will you play on the field?"

Wenger shrugged and said nothing more. The reporters were waiting for him and it was not a good time to chat.

He reached out his hand, trying to shake Twain's, but Twain patted him directly on the shoulder. "I'm leaving one step ahead, Professor. I'll see you at the game tomorrow night."

Wenger watched Twain disappear at the end of the aisle before turning into the press conference hall.

Shortly after he sat down, the reporter's question came: "What do you think of what Tony Twain said, about his certainty of winning over Arsenal?"

Wenger smiled. It seemed he couldn't get rid of the topic anywhere.

"I certainly believe he has that ability." Wenger said "he ", not "they". He played a little trick in the choice of words, though he didn't know if anyone could see it. "But this is our home ground."

Exactly. It was Arsenal's home ground and Wenger wouldn't give up the victory easily.

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"I have done the big talk, lads."

The news of Arsenal playing against Nottingham Forest at home has become mainstream in the sporting news later in the day. Twain and Wenger had an extensively photographed pre-match press conference. Twain's words, "Yes, I repeat again. We'll beat the home team at the Emirates Stadium," were also constantly mentioned.

Twain told his players, after turning off the TV in that evening's final tactics class:

"If we don't win, you and I will all become a British national joke. That would be too humiliating."

Twain never said something like "Judging by our strength, we deserve to win over Arsenal", so none of the players could offer any objections. Anyone with a little sense knew it would be very, very difficult to win at the Emirates against Arsenal.

Nevertheless, the 'big talk' put the Forest team on the edge of the cliff.

It was like Twain said: they were all pushed towards the edge of the cliff. If they lost the game, all the bad words and comments would come to them.

No one wanted to be a joke, to be discussed in disdain.

Certainly not professional football players.

"Arsenal's style of play is as strong and complex as ever. At home, they're sure to keep playing like that. This is our chance."

Twain began to elaborate on the tactics they were going to use in tomorrow's game, but the players were able, for the most part, to predict what he would say. This was something the team has been focusing on for more than a week. For more than a week, the most important part of the training was the attack of the set-pieces play. At this point, everybody knew more or less what tactics the team would use in the game.

Between losing the game in a beautiful and spectacular attack or winning the game in a doggedly conservative defense, Twain was sure to choose the latter. However, the risk of the latter was that having held your ground for 89 minutes, you could lose the game at the last minute. That would really mean losing everything, not only the game but also the team's dignity. If it happened, the team would turn into laughing stock. In the face of this situation, many would choose an overpowering attack against their enemy. That way, even if they lost the game, they would lose with honor.

However, that was really not the best idea in this case. The Forest team was not as strong as it used to be and has already made up excuses for losing. How could such a team beat a strong opponent? They did not have the confidence for an aggressive attack.

As the saying goes, "Confront one with death and they will fight to live". How could the team summon the right kind of energy if they weren't determined to win?

"On a solid back-line basis, we need to seize every set-piece opportunity to score. Don't be afraid of less ball control, ugly scenes, and little chance of shooting. As long as we're more patient than they are, grab the set-piece opportunity to score, and the final victory will be ours!"

"We practiced set-pieces for over a week and I hope to see them in the game."

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Twain did see in the game that his team had painstakingly trained for the set-ball attacking tactics for more than a week. His team was ahead in the score for the moment.

As soon as Arsenal came up, they played with a home team's arrogance. They were bombing around Forest's penalty area. They were cooperating cleverly, running flexibly, passing directly. The Nottingham Forest team could only double its defense under the attack by Arsenal. It was a pity they were short of a punching second striker. Although the small squad was flexible enough, it was not enough to face the solid defense wall of the Nottingham Forest team.

Although the Forest were seemingly timid, they never conceded a goal. It wasn't until the 37th minute that the Forest team got a good attacking chance. Chen Jian was tackled to the ground by an Arsenal player after taking the ball in front, and Nottingham Forest, therefore, secured a free-kick on the right side of the front.

Bale left-footed a free-kick to the late penalty and Aaron Mitchell head passed the ball back with a flick-on header from the late penalty. Then George Wood followed in the middle, rushed ahead of the others, and used a beautiful diving header to send the football into the corner of the net in the ensuing chaos.

Nottingham Forest, an away team, has taken the lead with no advantage in possession or number of shots. This surprised many people.

However, more surprises were waiting for them. Nottingham Forest had another free-kick in the same position on the other side before the last minute of the first half. This time it was Bale's cross. This time around, Arsenal's fullbacks focused on the center-field defense, and in the meantime, they never stopped guarding Mitchell. However, Nottingham Forest changed their tactic.

The ball went straight to the late penalty area. Mitchell and Forest center-back Sarko were still pushing back, while the two defenders followed them back. They didn't expect that halfway there, Sarko would abruptly stop and turn out, running towards the football. He rose high with no one defending him!

He shot a rebound. The football bounced off the Arsenal goalkeeper, making him misjudge the direction of the ball. Goal right through the net!

"It's unbelievable! "The narrator cried out, hugging his head. "At the Emirates Stadium, at Arsenal's home ground, Nottingham Forest managed a two-goal lead by the end of the first half! Tony Twain's ferocious drive, defensive counter-attack and tactics of using set-pieces to score totally undermined Arsenal's technical play!"

Wenger was clearly aware that he would only lose more and more if he continued to play like this. Some specific changes had to be made against their opponents. Therefore, at the beginning of the second half, he substituted a more powerful striker in front of the goalmouth.

Nottingham Forest also relented after leading by two goals in the first half. On the other hand, Arsenal pulled one back in the second half.

Then Arsenal's morale was unexpectedly boosted. They kept attacking Forest's goalmouth to the cheers of the home fans. Twain saw the situation he quickly adjusted his team's tactic. He did not strengthen the defense, but rather the counterattack.

Surely, the change was very effective. Arsenal's attack was immediately subdued in fear of a sharp and fierce counterattack from Nottingham Forest. Rebalancing has come back on the field.

Such a score was held until the end, despite the fact that in the last five or six minutes, Arsenal was attacking most ferociously. However, the Forest team's fightback was just as active, making Arsenal powerless. In the face of the solid defense in front, as well as Forest's quick counterattack, Arsenal finally lost hope.

In this way, Nottingham Forest won a key victory.

After the game, everybody agreed that Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest was back to being the Arsenal's arch-enemy.

Wenger also admitted at a post-match press conference that Nottingham Forest's tactics had restrained theirs. This made him very helpless.

Twain, as the winner, didn't take this for granted. He said the team was just lucky enough to win against Arsenal.

It was absolutely impossible to say that there has been no change between the current Twain and the Twain of old. A decade ago, he would definitely proclaim that their victory was a matter of course.

Getting up and shaking hands with Wenger, Twain left the press conference. The team was waiting for him on the bus and, unlike at the press conference, he had another speech to make to his men.

“You have done well, lads! We got three points as an away team and the rankings went up two places. However, more than that, I’m glad to have seen in your performance the desire to win and the heart of the champions! Never give up!” Twain said to the players on the bus, with one hand resting on his chest.

“I hope this game will help you remember that the spirit of a champion who always seeks victory is more important than anything. Now I have finally begun to hope that we can return to Europe,” Twain pointed at his players and went on, “Because you all want to win. And I...”

He pointed to himself, “...would like to work with players who want to win. Nottingham Forest are winners and so am I.” He looked at everyone and grinned.

In fact, he was very arrogant, but it was precisely this confidence that made him more likely to win and turned him into his opponents’ nightmare.

If someone didn’t believe this, the game against Arsenal was an excellent demonstration.

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PS. If all goes as planned, Godfather of Champions will officially end in October. Then I will rest for a month and think about the new book. Thank you for more than two years of support, I am very grateful! Without your support, I wouldn’t be here, finishing Godfather of Champions.

On the last day of the month, everyone has extra monthly tickets. Vote for me, thank you!

Chapter 1015: Shankly’s Decision Back Then

Nottingham Forest seemed to have suddenly found their drive to move forward after the match against Arsenal. They achieved three wins and one draw in February, and they shot up to eighth place on the ranking table. They were just two places below sixth.

The team’s results have gotten better, and one man’s brain started becoming more and more active.

Evan Doughty would look at the calendar every single day to see what day it was and how many days were left until the end of the season. Twain said that he would quit after the season ended, and those words of his kept resounding in Doughty’s mind. It was a well-known fact that Twain was going to retire at the end of the season. The press knew about it and so did the fans. He even repeated those words during the FIFA Football Awards ceremony that was held at the end of December last year. Twain was dead set on retiring once the season ended.

However, Evan Doughty was not willing to let Twain leave the club a second time. He once made a mistake in the past regarding this issue and he could not make the same mistake twice.

He wondered if Twain had changed his mind after two months.

Evan Doughty would head over to the Wilford training grounds every single day to observe Twain’s behavior during the team’s training sessions. He wanted to figure out what was on that man’s mind.

This day, he saw Twain chatting happily with his colleagues and joking with his players. He even saw him put an arm around Bale and Wood and say something to them.

It looked like he was in a good mood and was enjoying his work.

Evan Doughty felt that the time was ripe.

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“Hey, Tony. I heard that your wife’s back.” The players would gather around and have idle chat during the breaks in between their training sessions, and the coaches would do the same. After all, they were humans just like the players, and they too needed rest.

The coaches were even more gossipy than the players, and they were always able to get their hands on information quickly.

This was shown in how they were already asking Shania Twain’s husband for more inside information even though the British tabloids had only reported news of Shania’s arrival in England the day before.

Twain could do nothing about his gossipy colleagues.

“Yes, she returned yesterday.”

A few of the coaches glanced at each other and laughed. “Looks like we’re definitely going to win our next few matches! Haha!”

All the other coaches began laughing with them. This was a joke that was referring to a phenomenon that happened before Twain left Forest. The team had a tendency of performing consistently well every time Shania arrived in England back then.

Twain allowed his colleagues to laugh as much as they pleased. There was nothing for him to be unhappy about. To him, harmony in the team was the key to achieving good results. Why would he possibly say something that would ruin the harmony that they had now?

Twain walked back to his office alone after the training session was over. He was going to leave his notebook on the table and pick up his car keys before leaving for home. There might be a restaurant located on the training grounds, but he had no intention of dining there. After all, his dearest wife Shania had prepared lunch and was waiting for him at home. Not only that, the dishes that were served at the restaurant were mostly fit for athletes, and were not meant to be eaten by the average person. Twain was not an athlete, and there was no reason why he should eat a tasteless meal at the restaurant.

After entering his office, Twain placed his notebook on the table. He then took his car keys from the drawer and prepared to leave. However, just as he raised his head, he saw a figure standing at the door.

“Evan!” Twain said in surprise. “You scared me. You didn’t make a sound while you were standing there. You’re just like a ghost, do you know that?”

Evan Doughty laughed in embarrassment after seeing Twain’s reaction. “I’m sorry. I saw that you were busy, so I didn’t dare to call out to you. Are you preparing to head home?” He looked at the car keys that Twain held in his hand.

Twain noticed what Doughty was looking at. He dangled his car keys and said, “Yeah. Shania’s waiting for me at home.”

“Ah...” Doughty was a little disappointed. “Looks like now’s not a good time to talk, then.”

Twain found his comment to be odd, so he asked, “Is something the matter, Evan?”

“Uh...” Doughty hesitated for a moment but was not able to get the words out. “When would you be free? I’d like to speak to you about something privately, Tony.”

Twain thought about his schedule for the next few days and said, “I’d have time this weekend, after the away game.”

Doughty nodded. “I’ll meet you this weekend then. Goodbye, Tony. I don’t want to take up too much of your time, or else your wife would complain about me.”

Doughty was well aware that Shania did not have a good impression of him.

Twain did not say anything else and only watched as the club’s owner walked out of the room. The 60-year-old man before him seemed to have lost all his arrogance and tyranny from four years ago. He was just like any other aging man now. They could try all they want, but the relationship between the two of them would never revert to how it used to be in the past. How could anyone pretend that nothing ever happened when there was a visible crack on an originally smooth surface?

Doughty rarely joked with Twain now, and Twain would not go over to Doughty’s office to have a chat with him either. They might appear to be close to each other on the surface, but one would still be able to tell that there was something different about their relationship if they paid attention to the fine details.

The difference in their relationship was not something that could be described in words. It was something one could only feel.

However, neither of them needed to be told that their relationship was not like it used to be. They both knew that very well.

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Nottingham Forest faced Manchester City in an away game that weekend. Both sides played their strongest possible team for the match, and Forest managed to edge out City with the help of a controversial goal. The press that was associated with Manchester City all believed that the goal was an offside goal, and they could not stop babbling about it during the post-match press conference. Twain responded by pushing all the responsibility onto the shoulders of the referee for the match, “...I was not in a good position then, so I don’t know what happened the moment Chen Jian passed the ball. However, since the referee has allowed the goal, I believe that the goal should stand... What is important is not the process, but the outcome. The outcome of the match is that we won, and I’m very happy about that.”

The press could do nothing about the shameless Twain. They could only watch helplessly as he ‘stole’ what should have been their victory away from them. Of course, that did not stop them from deriding Twain in the papers, but Twain did not care what they said about him. He has been a manager for 15

years, and he has spent the past 15 years attacking and deriding the press, just like they attacked and derided him. He had grown utterly used to their attitude by now.

The highlight for this weekend was not the match against City, but rather what was going to happen in the hotel that the team stayed in following the match. Or, to be more precise, what was going to happen in Twain's hotel room.

This was a scene that both Twain and Doughty would find familiar. After all, it was similar to the scene that was played out four years ago in Twain's hotel room in Madrid. The main difference was that one of the main casts from back then was missing today, and the plot for the show was different as well.

If the show they acted in four and a half years ago was about politics and trickery, the show of today would be a tearjerker.

And the man who was acting as the miserable main character was Evan Doughty.

"Evan, you said you had something to speak to me about. Are you just here to persuade me to stay with Forest?" Twain sat at the edge of his hotel bed and stared at Evan Doughty, who sat on the sofa across of him.

"What else would I possibly want to speak to you about? Tony, do you still distrust me?"

Evan Doughty had a bitter expression on his face. He had just spent a lot of effort to express his desire for Twain to stay with Forest, but all Twain did was respond with a question. How could he not agonize over it?

It was true what people said. Some scars could never heal completely...

"Of course I trust you, Evan. If I didn't, I wouldn't have accepted your invitation to return to Forest as a manager," Twain said.

Twain's attitude only made Doughty even more uncertain about what was truly on his mind. To Doughty, Twain had said those words half-heartedly and did not really mean them.

Twain noticed the expression on Doughty's face and laughed wryly. "How do you want me to prove to you that I trust you? I really meant what I said..."

"Then stay at the club, Tony."

Evan Doughty gazed at Twain but was not able to discern anything from the latter's expression.

"That's impossible, Evan. I have a family, and my health doesn't allow me to continue working as a manager any longer," Twain shook his head and refused Doughty's plea.

"But... You haven't suffered any health problems for the past few months..."

Twain raised a hand and cut Doughty off. "I know my own body best, Evan. I feel like I don't have as much energy as I used to... Besides, are you saying that I only have a health problem if I pass out by the side of the pitch and get sent to the emergency room for 48 hours? You are my friend. I'm sure you don't want me and my family to go through that once again, right?"

Twain's words rendered Evan Doughty speechless. He had been so desperate to keep Twain at the club that he had not thought about how he should act as a friend. If he truly meant well for Twain, then he would always put his health first.

Neither of them spoke for a while. Evan Doughty had his head lowered and did not know what he should say. Twain, on the other hand, had averted his gaze towards the television. News of the match that just ended earlier between Forest and Manchester City was being broadcasted, and the focus of the news was naturally on whether Mitchell was offside when he scored the goal.

Twain had mentioned during the press conference that he did not see what had happened prior to the goal, and now he finally had the chance to take a good look at it. The news replayed the scenes before Mitchell scored the goal. Mitchell was positioned in a straight line with the Manchester City's defenders before kicking the ball. The camera then froze at the moment he kicked the ball, and Twain could clearly see that Mitchell's upper body was slightly further ahead than the defense line...

Strictly speaking, Mitchell was definitely in an offside position when he scored the goal. However, whether or not an offside was ultimately given was at the referee's discretion. If the referee thought that Mitchell's upper body being slightly further in front did not have any major bearing on the match, he could choose not to rule it as being offside. However, if he had gone by the book and ruled Mitchell as being offside, Twain would be the one defending his team at the post-match press conference.

The voice-overs in the news did not share Twain's opinion. They believed that Manchester City had lost the match due to the referee's poor decision, and they condemned the referee for it. Twain then cast a glance at the logo of the channel and realized that it was a local news channel. No wonder, he thought to himself.

Twain did not have any interest in listening to the rest of the news. He looked away from the television screen and at Doughty again. To his surprise, Doughty also had his eyes on the television and appeared to be lost in thought.

Twain contemplated for a moment. He then laughed and said, "Look at me now. I've really gotten on with age. I need the referee to help me win games these days."

Doughty shook his head after hearing Twain's words. "It's the referee's mistake. What does that have to do with you? We might not have had as much possession as Manchester City for the match, but we had more shots on goal, and we deserved to win. We were just unlucky with several of our shots. There were numerous times when we could have scored but didn't..."

Twain did not interrupt Doughty. The edge of his lips went up gradually without his knowledge as he quietly listened to Doughty speak.

Evan Doughty noticed the change in expression on Twain's face, and he realized that he had said too much. He immediately stopped talking and looked at Twain.

"Ha!" Twain laughed. "I just find all of it really interesting. You were once a man who could not differentiate between a 'coach' and a 'manager', but now you are able to make good analyses like that. We are always changing... Evan, I do not wish to continue working as a manager for another decade. I'm already 50 years old this year, and I have a heart problem as well. I will definitely die before Shania, so I

want to make the most of the time I have left. I want to spend more time with my wife and Teresa... You are also a man of family. I'm sure you can understand how I feel."

Doughty nodded. He could not possibly shake his head, could he?

"But..." Doughty decided to fight back eventually because he did not want to be so easily persuaded by Twain.

"I know that you are thinking about what's best for the club, and I mean it. I've always believed in you, Evan. However, I'm really not fit to work at Nottingham Forest any longer. We are all changing, and so is Nottingham Forest," Twain said. "There is no such thing as a club that will always win in this world, and there is no such thing as a team that will always become the champions. The clubs that have managed to create a dynasty in the past all had their ups and downs, and the same happened for Nottingham Forest..."

Twain became distracted as he spoke.

The days when Herbert Chapman led Arsenal on a rampage in England were too far away. Sir Matt Busby, the man who led Manchester United to their very first Champions League title, had passed away a long time ago. Bill Shankly, who has a deep, lasting influence on Liverpool, was nothing more than a name now. Brian Clough, the man who fought against Liverpool when they were at their strongest and the man who created 'England's Red Generation' alongside Liverpool was just a bronze statue that was situated in the Nottingham city center now. The all-powerful Ferguson, who dominated the Premier League ever since its inception, has become an elderly man who basked in the sun in his backyard every single day and who did not even watch his favorite horse races anymore. Arsene Wenger, the godfather of Arsenal who was also a legend of the sport like Ferguson, was already 70 years old this year, and his retirement was imminent...

Every single one of those glorious names would become buried in the sands of time someday, and their achievements would become nothing more than a memory. Twain believed that he, along with his Nottingham Forest team from four years ago, would be destined to a similar fate in a few years' time. It was just like how the children who were born these days would never truly appreciate the greatness of Michael Jackson. Similarly, the fans of Ronaldo would never know how great Maradona was, and the fans of Maradona would never know how great Pelé was because they had never had the chance to see him play football before their very eyes. Likewise, Pelé's fans would find Alfredo Di Stéfano foreign. Everything in life would have to come to an end someday. Twain had gone through so many things in his life up until now, and there was nothing he could not put behind him.

"I cannot stay in this managerial position forever, and I should not have to stay in it forever. What Nottingham Forest needs is a long-term plan that you will slowly execute over several years. However, I'm a man who is too eager to achieve success, and I also want instant gratification. A man like me is not suitable to lead Nottingham Forest into the future."

Doughty looked like he wanted to stop Twain from self-deprecation, but Twain quickly went on to say, "Do you still fail to understand, Evan? Why did Forest's results plummet the moment I left? Why did nothing change even after hiring numerous good managers? I don't wish for Nottingham Forest to become 'Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest'. We might have won countless trophies if I stayed as the manager, but we'd never become a truly strong team. Most people cannot live a hundred years, but

many football teams in the world have been around for centuries. It's impossible for a team to be truly strong and powerful just by relying on the abilities of one person. Why is Liverpool considered a powerhouse team? They were nothing before Shankly, but what's important is that they managed to win five Champions League trophies after Shankly left."

Twain leaned forward and looked at Doughty.

"There are certain media outlets that have touted me as Nottingham Forest's Shankly. Do you know what was the best decision Shankly had made in his life?"

Twain smiled as he watched Doughty's expression change from confusion to realization and then to frustration.

"His decision to resign out of the blue and leave Liverpool forever."

Twain had heard about Shankly when he was just a regular football fan. He was also familiar with Shankly's successor, Bob Paisley. However, he could never understand why Shankly would choose to resign when he was doing a great job as Liverpool's manager. Given his success at the club, Shankly should have stayed as the manager and worked to achieve greater things with the club. For example, he could have led Liverpool to their first-ever Champions League title. Twain and many others believed that he was capable of achieving that if he had remained at the club.

Twain did not understand why he left back then, but he did now.

Twain's words stunned Evan Doughty, and his mouth dropped open. He then sat on the sofa in a daze and did not make a single sound for a long time.

Chapter 1016: Shankly's Decision Back Then

Nottingham Forest seemed to have suddenly found their drive to move forward after the match against Arsenal. They achieved three wins and one draw in February, and they shot up to eighth place on the ranking table. They were just two places below sixth.

The team's results have gotten better, and one man's brain started becoming more and more active.

Evan Doughty would look at the calendar every single day to see what day it was and how many days were left until the end of the season. Twain said that he would quit after the season ended, and those words of his kept resounding in Doughty's mind. It was a well-known fact that Twain was going to retire at the end of the season. The press knew about it and so did the fans. He even repeated those words during the FIFA Football Awards ceremony that was held at the end of December last year. Twain was dead set on retiring once the season ended.

However, Evan Doughty was not willing to let Twain leave the club a second time. He once made a mistake in the past regarding this issue and he could not make the same mistake twice.

He wondered if Twain had changed his mind after two months.

Evan Doughty would head over to the Wilford training grounds every single day to observe Twain's behavior during the team's training sessions. He wanted to figure out what was on that man's mind.

This day, he saw Twain chatting happily with his colleagues and joking with his players. He even saw him put an arm around Bale and Wood and say something to them.

It looked like he was in a good mood and was enjoying his work.

Evan Doughty felt that the time was ripe.

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“Hey, Tony. I heard that your wife’s back.” The players would gather around and have idle chat during the breaks in between their training sessions, and the coaches would do the same. After all, they were humans just like the players, and they too needed rest.

The coaches were even more gossipy than the players, and they were always able to get their hands on information quickly.

This was shown in how they were already asking Shania Twain’s husband for more inside information even though the British tabloids had only reported news of Shania’s arrival in England the day before.

Twain could do nothing about his gossipy colleagues.

“Yes, she returned yesterday.”

A few of the coaches glanced at each other and laughed. “Looks like we’re definitely going to win our next few matches! Haha!”

All the other coaches began laughing with them. This was a joke that was referring to a phenomenon that happened before Twain left Forest. The team had a tendency of performing consistently well every time Shania arrived in England back then.

Twain allowed his colleagues to laugh as much as they pleased. There was nothing for him to be unhappy about. To him, harmony in the team was the key to achieving good results. Why would he possibly say something that would ruin the harmony that they had now?

Twain walked back to his office alone after the training session was over. He was going to leave his notebook on the table and pick up his car keys before leaving for home. There might be a restaurant located on the training grounds, but he had no intention of dining there. After all, his dearest wife Shania had prepared lunch and was waiting for him at home. Not only that, the dishes that were served at the restaurant were mostly fit for athletes, and were not meant to be eaten by the average person. Twain was not an athlete, and there was no reason why he should eat a tasteless meal at the restaurant.

After entering his office, Twain placed his notebook on the table. He then took his car keys from the drawer and prepared to leave. However, just as he raised his head, he saw a figure standing at the door.

“Evan!” Twain said in surprise. “You scared me. You didn’t make a sound while you were standing there. You’re just like a ghost, do you know that?”

Evan Doughty laughed in embarrassment after seeing Twain’s reaction. “I’m sorry. I saw that you were busy, so I didn’t dare to call out to you. Are you preparing to head home?” He looked at the car keys that Twain held in his hand.

Twain noticed what Doughty was looking at. He dangled his car keys and said, "Yeah. Shania's waiting for me at home."

"Ah..." Doughty was a little disappointed. "Looks like now's not a good time to talk, then."

Twain found his comment to be odd, so he asked, "Is something the matter, Evan?"

"Uh..." Doughty hesitated for a moment but was not able to get the words out. "When would you be free? I'd like to speak to you about something privately, Tony."

Twain thought about his schedule for the next few days and said, "I'd have time this weekend, after the away game."

Doughty nodded. "I'll meet you this weekend then. Goodbye, Tony. I don't want to take up too much of your time, or else your wife would complain about me."

Doughty was well aware that Shania did not have a good impression of him.

Twain did not say anything else and only watched as the club's owner walked out of the room. The 60-year-old man before him seemed to have lost all his arrogance and tyranny from four years ago. He was just like any other aging man now. They could try all they want, but the relationship between the two of them would never revert to how it used to be in the past. How could anyone pretend that nothing ever happened when there was a visible crack on an originally smooth surface?

Doughty rarely joked with Twain now, and Twain would not go over to Doughty's office to have a chat with him either. They might appear to be close to each other on the surface, but one would still be able to tell that there was something different about their relationship if they paid attention to the fine details.

The difference in their relationship was not something that could be described in words. It was something one could only feel.

However, neither of them needed to be told that their relationship was not like it used to be. They both knew that very well.

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Nottingham Forest faced Manchester City in an away game that weekend. Both sides played their strongest possible team for the match, and Forest managed to edge out City with the help of a controversial goal. The press that was associated with Manchester City all believed that the goal was an offside goal, and they could not stop babbling about it during the post-match press conference. Twain responded by pushing all the responsibility onto the shoulders of the referee for the match, "...I was not in a good position then, so I don't know what happened the moment Chen Jian passed the ball. However, since the referee has allowed the goal, I believe that the goal should stand... What is important is not the process, but the outcome. The outcome of the match is that we won, and I'm very happy about that."

The press could do nothing about the shameless Twain. They could only watch helplessly as he 'stole' what should have been their victory away from them. Of course, that did not stop them from deriding Twain in the papers, but Twain did not care what they said about him. He has been a manager for 15

years, and he has spent the past 15 years attacking and deriding the press, just like they attacked and derided him. He had grown utterly used to their attitude by now.

The highlight for this weekend was not the match against City, but rather what was going to happen in the hotel that the team stayed in following the match. Or, to be more precise, what was going to happen in Twain's hotel room.

This was a scene that both Twain and Doughty would find familiar. After all, it was similar to the scene that was played out four years ago in Twain's hotel room in Madrid. The main difference was that one of the main casts from back then was missing today, and the plot for the show was different as well.

If the show they acted in four and a half years ago was about politics and trickery, the show of today would be a tearjerker.

And the man who was acting as the miserable main character was Evan Doughty.

"Evan, you said you had something to speak to me about. Are you just here to persuade me to stay with Forest?" Twain sat at the edge of his hotel bed and stared at Evan Doughty, who sat on the sofa across of him.

"What else would I possibly want to speak to you about? Tony, do you still distrust me?"

Evan Doughty had a bitter expression on his face. He had just spent a lot of effort to express his desire for Twain to stay with Forest, but all Twain did was respond with a question. How could he not agonize over it?

It was true what people said. Some scars could never heal completely...

"Of course I trust you, Evan. If I didn't, I wouldn't have accepted your invitation to return to Forest as a manager," Twain said.

Twain's attitude only made Doughty even more uncertain about what was truly on his mind. To Doughty, Twain had said those words half-heartedly and did not really mean them.

Twain noticed the expression on Doughty's face and laughed wryly. "How do you want me to prove to you that I trust you? I really meant what I said..."

"Then stay at the club, Tony."

Evan Doughty gazed at Twain but was not able to discern anything from the latter's expression.

"That's impossible, Evan. I have a family, and my health doesn't allow me to continue working as a manager any longer," Twain shook his head and refused Doughty's plea.

"But... You haven't suffered any health problems for the past few months..."

Twain raised a hand and cut Doughty off. "I know my own body best, Evan. I feel like I don't have as much energy as I used to... Besides, are you saying that I only have a health problem if I pass out by the side of the pitch and get sent to the emergency room for 48 hours? You are my friend. I'm sure you don't want me and my family to go through that once again, right?"

Twain's words rendered Evan Doughty speechless. He had been so desperate to keep Twain at the club that he had not thought about how he should act as a friend. If he truly meant well for Twain, then he would always put his health first.

Neither of them spoke for a while. Evan Doughty had his head lowered and did not know what he should say. Twain, on the other hand, had averted his gaze towards the television. News of the match that just ended earlier between Forest and Manchester City was being broadcasted, and the focus of the news was naturally on whether Mitchell was offside when he scored the goal.

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"But..." Doughty decided to fight back eventually because did not want to be so easily persuaded by Twain.

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Twain smiled as he watched Doughty's expression change from confusion to realization and then to frustration.

"His decision to resign out of the blue and leave Liverpool forever."

Twain had heard about Shankly when he was just a regular football fan. He was also familiar with Shankly's successor, Bob Paisley. However, he could never understand why Shankly would choose to resign when he was doing a great job as Liverpool's manager. Given his success at the club, Shankly should have stayed as the manager and worked to achieve greater things with the club. For example, he could have led Liverpool to their first-ever Champions League title. Twain and many others believed that he was capable of achieving that if he had remained at the club.

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Twain's words stunned Evan Doughty, and his mouth dropped open. He then sat on the sofa in a daze and did not make a single sound for a long time.

Chapter 1017: Leave? That's Really a Problem

Bill Shankly was the greatest football coach of his time. He had brought the previously unknown Liverpool to a Championship football team level. He had left many famous football sayings, the most widely known of which, of course, was, "Football has nothing to do with life and death. Football is much higher than life and death."

However, he abruptly announced his resignation at one of the finest moments of his coaching career and this decision shocked the whole of England at the time. Shankly's argument was that he was going to spend more time with his wife. Seven years later he died of a heart attack.

Twain wasn't very close to Shankly at that time and he didn't know if Shankly had made such a decision entirely because of his wife or for some other reasons. However, from a peer's point of view, it was not difficult to understand Shankly's choice. Putting aside the idea of health and the necessity of taking care of his wife, just thinking about the team's development, Shankly's retirement was a pretty good thing for Liverpool.

Because if he didn't retire, how could the obscure Paisley rise from being unknown to being a world-famous head coach? Until Shankly retired, Paisley was just an ordinary player who hadn't proven himself in the coaching position at all. Moreover, Paisley and Shankly were the exact opposite type of coaches. Shankly preferred to deliver inspiration and encouraging words to the team through the media as Twain

would always do. Paisley was more pragmatic and more low-key. Dunn and he were very close in characteristic.

It was a coincidence. However, it was as if it was determined by fate.

Twain and Dunn were just like Shankly and Paisley at the beginning.

Bill Shankly took Liverpool from Football League Second Division to England's top-flight – England Football League First Division. In terms of making champions, he was certainly no match for his successor Bob Paisley. However, he paved the ground for Paisley, who made Liverpool an undeniable force to be reckoned with in England. On the basis Shankly had made, Paisley was able to make the miracle of “19 Champions in 9 years”. However, it could not be simply attributed to the fact that Shankly had done the foundation work in advance. Shankly's reputation was so high at the time that his influence at Liverpool was like that of Busby at Manchester United. No matter who his successor would be, the pressure on his shoulder was enormous. But Paisley, a low-key successor, has always put himself in a position of “transition coach”. He was the man who led Liverpool to go beyond Shankly's great influence. He did what Shankly could not do during his coaching.

Would Dunn accomplish the same result in the future? Lead Nottingham Forest beyond the influence of Tony Twain and create the Forest Dynasty that would belong to him?

Twain was looking forward to seeing that day.

He chose Dunn as his successor, which was, of course, entirely and carefully considered. He had full confidence in Dunn, which was definitely not the result of a whim.

Shankly's story was well known in England, and Evan should be aware of it if he really knew football. However, did he know the story beyond the surface?

Twain wouldn't know.

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Once again, after refusing Evan's invitation to stay at Forest, Twain returned to Nottingham to continue their league campaign. In the Football Association Cup, after passing Dunn, Twain gave up the whole tournament altogether. The Nottingham Forest, who were almost all second-tier and youth team players, lost to Everton in the next round.

For many Forest supporters, this loss was a big shame. They believed this was the only chance for Nottingham Forest to return to Europe, and that the team had to take advantage of this opportunity to revitalize and rise again. However, the team lost the game and judging from the performance on the field, Twain didn't care about the Football Association Cup at all.

After the loss of the game, some minor dissent came out through the media. They believed Twain must still think the Football Association Cup was a non-essential game and did not know that the Football Association Cup was the last straw for Nottingham Forest in the current situation.

However, with the ranking of the team rising in the league, the voice of criticism gradually faded. They saw Twain's intentions: from the beginning, he didn't expect to rely on the Football Association Cup winners to get a European ticket for the game. The Football Association Cup was so randomly won that

it had always been called a “race of dark horses”. Twain was reluctant to bet in it. By comparison, the long-running league was better suited to Nottingham Forest today.

The purpose of giving up the Football Association Cup decisively, securing enough fitness and stamina for the Forest team, was to ensure they wouldn’t collapse in the end because of the double-line battle and end up with nothing.

The rest of the team also endorsed Twain’s strategy. Watching the rankings rise, they were trusting the head coach more.

Evan Doughty has not come to Twain since that day to talk about the subject of staying with the team.

Twain didn’t know if Evan had given up, but he has made up his mind. He didn’t care how hard everyone else tried to persuade him to stay.

However, from the home game stands of this round, Twain was surprised to hear the voices from the Nottingham Forest fans.

On Robin Hood Grandstand, one of the fans hung a banner that read, “We Hope to See You Again Next Season, Tony.”

Although there was only one banner, Twain saw it. He was very sure that it was not Evan Doughty’s initiative. The president of the club had a very low reputation among the fans and would be unable to get them to cooperate with him.

This must be a spontaneous action of the fans themselves.

It was no secret that he only planned to spend half a season with the Forest. It was written in the contract and fully covered by the media. Many people were then wondering if he could lead the Nottingham Forest team out of trouble again. So the half a season news did not surprise all the fans at the beginning. They could think that Tony Twain had no confidence in himself, so he chose to sign only a half-season contract.

Therefore, fans knew, of course, that Twain only had half a season’s contract with the team. However, they had always wanted Twain to stay. From the very first interview in the press conference to the present, as the season was getting closer and closer to the end. They channeled this emotion into practical actions and expressed it directly.

Twain then saw a banner in the stands, begging him to stay with the team.

Two days later, in Wilford, he saw the banner again. Twain saw the fan who raised that banner, and it was not John. It was another group of people, who were supposed to belong to another fan group, and Twain had no personal relationship with them.

The banner hanging alone outside the barbed-wire fence attracted much attention around. The media took photos of the banner before they left the training ground. Players training on the pitch would also look at the banner from time to time. Even colleagues in the coaching staff were getting interested in studying the distant banner at their leisure.

“I think if I were a fan, I’d do the same,” said Freddy Eastwood, looking at the banner fluttering in the wind in the distance.

His words got the approval of the majority. Twain was the isolated minority.

“You guys don’t want me to leave the team?”

“That’s an interesting question, Tony. Who wants you to go?” David Kerslake replied.

Twain looked into the eyes of his colleagues. He knew they were not lying. However, he had to go.

He didn’t want to go on with this conversation, so he lowered his head and smiled, touching his nose tip.

Everyone knew Twain had his personal reasons to go, so there was no further discussion.

Twain looked up again at the distant banner, deeply lost in thought.

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On the weekend, Nottingham Forest was playing at home. This time Twain saw more similar banners at the stands. All the banners are asking him to stay.

Even the live cameras noticed the situation, giving several shots of the banners in the stands during the live game.

Nottingham Forest had won the game. Their ranking continued to rise to 7th.

Such results have made the fans more reluctant to let Twain go.

After the game, fans have spontaneously formed a group to persuade Twain to stay. The name of the group was, ‘Tony Stay’. They quickly set up the group’s official website, calling on more fans to join online, creating a force that could not be ignored trying to retain Twain.

After that, the “Tony Stay” slogan could be seen everywhere. Twain opted for silence in the face of fan voices and media attention.

Reporters wanted him to comment on this, but Twain rejected their questions on the grounds that “now he just wanted to focus on the team and the play”.

His silence didn’t mean the media had nothing to say. When would the media give up? They could even let the dead speak, not to mention a living man.

The next day, the following headline appeared in the press: ‘Tony Twain Silenced in Face of Fans’ Call, He Is Hesitating!’

If one didn’t speak, the media would figure out a headline title themselves. The more silent one was, the easier it would be for them. They even had their way to get dead people to speak.

Really.

“It’s not going to work like this, Tony. ” A large crowd of fans gathered outside the Wilford Stadium, holding up portraits of Twain and signs pleading with him to stay. They were so numerous that they have completely disrupted the team’s normal training order. Looking at the crowd, assistant coach David Kerslake spread his hands out helplessly and called Twain.

The players looked at the enthusiastic fans and felt a little overwhelmed. They certainly knew what the boss's personal reason to leave the team was, but they could not say so. They could only secretly look at Tony Twain with concern on their faces.

Twain frowned as he looked at the growing crowd of fans. Since a few days ago, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of fans gathered outside the training ground. Moreover, they have only come for one purpose: get him to change his decision of leaving the team after the end of the season.

However, he did not expect that the spontaneously organized activities of the fans could get so many responses and gather such a large crowd.

Should I be flattered, or should I be overwhelmed?

So Twain thought to himself.

"Keep training, and I will talk to them," Twain waved his hand and told the team to go on. He walked to the side of the training ground, where the crowd was gathered.

Seeing Twain from behind, Eastwood sighed, "This is the trouble with being too popular!"

The fans who stood outside saw Twain coming towards them but did not make a loud, excited noise. Instead, they went very quiet, quietly watching Twain walk up to them, staring at them through the barbed wire.

"What shall I say, lads?" Twain shook his head with a bitter smile. "I appreciate your devotion to me, but you really interfere with our normal training. I don't want to do any closed-up training these days."

"Tony, we just want you to stay." One of them was clearly the leader of the group. Twain noticed the T-shirt he was wearing. It was emblazoned with his picture, which read "Stay" under it. There were many people wearing the same T-shirt. It was really well-organized. Even the themed T-shirts were already printed.

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When David Kerslake blew the whistle, the players on the pitch were still a little distracted. Some of them were glancing at the area where the fans gathered from time to time. Twain was still talking to them.

"Hey, George. Do you think the boss will stay?" Joe Mattock asked George Wood when they were assigned in pairs to do the passing practice.

Wood hasn't answered yet, but the teammates next to them were all listening carefully and waiting for his words. They all knew that of the entire team, Wood had the closest relationship with Twain. If anyone knew the boss, it was Wood.

Wood did not pass back when he received the ball from Mattock. Instead, he adjusted the football twice on his foot, thinking about the question for a short time. When he passed the football back, he shook his head and said, "I don't think so."

There was an immediate sigh of regret and disappointment around them.

“Why not?” Mattock passed the football over again. “I think he enjoys his work. Can’t he change his mind at the last minute?”

“I don’t know. However, this time I don’t think he’s coming back.” Wood passed the football and the answer back to Mattock.

“Is that your intuition?” Mattock continued to pass to Wood.

“Yeah, my intuition.” Wood passed back.

This time Mattock didn’t pass the ball to Wood. Instead, he rested one foot on it and sighed.

“Why wouldn’t the boss want to spend more seasons here? I don’t think there’s anything wrong with his health.”

No one answered this time, even George Wood. He was twisting his head towards the training ground sidelines, where Twain was still talking to the fans. It was a quiet discussion.

“Why don’t you try to persuade him to stay? Aren’t you the captain?”

The questioner was not Mattock this time, but Balotelli.

Tony Twain had won Balotelli’s heart in just a few months. Now he just wanted to play for Twain. If any other head coach came instead of Twain, he would find it hard to obey his orders. Now that Twain was going to leave the team, how could he remain indifferent?

Wood looked back at Balotelli. This man has always despised his captain’s authority, and Wood didn’t know what to make of him.

“Everyone has his own life,” He replied indifferently. “I have no right to interfere.”

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“All right, guys. In order not to interrupt the training of the team, I hope you will leave. Don’t do this again. As for your wishes, I will consider them seriously. Please give me a few days to think about it. When the time comes I will hold a special press conference to inform you of the final decision,” Twain told his loyal fans through the barbed wire fence.

“Our team is now in a critical period. Whether we can go back to Europe next season depends on the performance of these days. I don’t want the team disturbed by anything out of field. Look, they can’t even concentrate on training now,” Twain pointed at the training ground behind him.

The fans could also see the performance of the team’s training. It was true that the players have been a little distracted since the crowd appeared on the sidelines of the training ground with great fanfare. They even made some mistakes that definitely should not happen in training.

They knew they were interfering with the team’s training. They just wanted Twain to stay so badly that they had to take extreme action.

“Come on, guys. Just leave and go back home. Thank you for your support of the team and me. I will consider your request seriously.”

Twain fell silent and stood right over the barbed wire, looking at the fans.

The leader was the first to speak. "Okay, Tony. We don't want to affect the training and performance of the team either. Thank you for coming here to talk to us, we know you are very busy."

Then the leader waved his hand and turned away, leaving the training ground first. Others followed him and left one by one. Of course, many of them did not forget to look back at Twain. He was still on the sidelines, watching them leave the stadium.

A voice in Twain's head asked: Will you really consider their request seriously?

Twain could not answer that voice.

Chapter 1018: A Successor

Shania had also taken notice of the recent media reports. She was not blind or deaf. She was aware of the things that the fans did in the stands and at the training ground. If she were about her thoughts, she would certainly be selfish and want Twain to stay by her side and quit. However, after more than a decade with her husband, she also knew that only he could make the final decision. Therefore, she cleverly chose to remain silent.

At such times, she could only choose to trust her husband.

"I'll have to hold a press conference in a few days to announce whether I'm staying or leaving," Twain suddenly said during dinner, which surprised Shania a little. While the media was abuzz with speculation a few days ago, Twain kept mum at home.

She was keenly aware of something.

"It's time to resolve all this," Twain said.

Her guess was right.

However, Shania did not "What's your decision?" but just nodded and did not say anything.

Twain was not surprised by Shania's reaction, so he did not offer to explain what he would say at the press conference.

There was a mutual understanding between the two of them.

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The question of whether Twain would stay or leave obviously affected the team's performance. Nottingham Forest came close to losing against Fulham in an away game during the weekend. Fortunately, Balotelli broke through Fulham's goal with a beautiful free-kick at the last minute to equalize the score at 1:1 and save the team a point. However, because of the tie in the game, their ranking did not continue to rise but remained in seventh place.

For the Forest team to end up with a tie against Fulham was still lucky. In terms of both overall skills and actual situation, Nottingham Forest was at a complete disadvantage. If the Fulham striker had not been too wasteful with opportunities, they would have been defeated even if Balotelli had scored a goal.

Perhaps Fulham did not expect Nottingham Forest to play so poorly. They were overly excited.

For example, there were a few occasions when the goal was almost empty, and it was easier to score in such situations, but the Fulham striker excitedly shot too hard and pumped the ball straight into the stands behind the goal...

After the game, Twain admitted in an interview that he and his team had been “very, very, very lucky” today, which were his original words. He had used “very” thrice.

However, he did not criticize the team’s performance.

He knew that the team’s erratic performance had something to do with himself. If the crew of a ship did not know whether their most beloved captain would be able to stay after this adventure and continue to lead them to take on the world, they would grow doubtful and be swayed. It would naturally affect their combat effectiveness in battle.

Twain had thought that by staying silent, he could minimize the impact. It turned out that he was wrong. He must give his crew a decision to let them know what the future would hold.

A reporter asked, “I’d heard you promised to give a reply to the fans who want you to stay?”

Twain did not deny it. Instead, he nodded and replied, “Yes. When I get back to Nottingham, I’ll announce the matter at a press conference.”

The reporter did not expect Twain to answer so readily. He thought he heard wrong and hurriedly asked again, “Are you saying that you will announce whether you will be staying after the end of the season when you return to Nottingham?”

Twain nodded and did not say anything anymore. However, it was enough. The media and fans were excited by Twain’s answer. As for the game... Who cared?

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On the way back to Nottingham from London on the bus, Twain found that Evan Doughty was around, and he came to him on his own initiative.

“David...” He looked at Kerslake, the assistant manager who sat with Doughty.

Kerslake was a smart man. He knew Evan must have something to discuss with Twain from the looks of it and that it had something to do with Twain’s going or staying. Therefore, he got up and gave his seat to the chairman while he saw in the seat behind, next to Eastwood.

While Kerslake gave up his seat, Twain did not say a word but looked up at the two men who exchanged seats.

When Evan sat down, he did not beat about the bush, got right to the point, and asked, “Have you made up your mind, Tony?”

Twain nodded.

“I guess it’s not a good decision for me. Can I persuade you to change your mind?”

Twain shook his head and said, “If you still want my friendship, Evan, you won’t do that.”

Evan Doughty turned his eyes away and looked ahead with some disappointment.

Seeing how disappointed Evan Doughty was, Twain could not bear to stay indifferent, so he consoled him: “There is a saying in China that states, ‘If the old doesn’t go, the new will not come.’ The same holds true for the Forest team and you. If I, the old guy, don’t leave, how can you have a fresh new wind?”

Evan Doughty did not care about any Eastern proverbs. He only cared about one thing and said, “But I can’t think of any new manager that would be as good as you. I’ve been looking for more than four years, but I still haven’t found him.”

Twain smiled. It looked like it was going to be easy for Evan to accept his departure. He just had to find him a suitable successor.

“Of course, I have a good candidate for the new Nottingham Forest manager. I think very, very highly of him. He can definitely bring the Forest team back on track.”

Evan Doughty was stunned by Twain’s comments because the unruly Twain seldom used such blatant flattering words to describe a man, so he searched through world-class managers in his mind.

“Don’t tell me it is Mourinho?”

It was the only answer he could think of because the two had similar temperaments and he was the only person whom Twain could think so highly of.

He did not expect Twain to shake his head.

“No, it’s not.”

He did not explain to Evan why Mourinho was not the man. He just named his candidate.

“It’s Dunn.”

The name gave pause to Evan. He was not shocked, but... he basically could not recall who this Dunn was.

Twain saw the doubt in his eyes, but it did not mean anything. It was normal that the chairman of a football club could not remember an assistant manager who had left the team eight years ago. At the time, Evan was full of self-importance and was not concerned about the people and things around him.

“Do you still remember when I first brought him to the club and wanted you to give him a job?” Twain slowly recounted the story to Evan. Anyway, it was almost two hours’ drive from London to Nottingham, so he had time. The journey was boring, and it was rather interesting to tell stories.

That was when Evan remembered. “That Chinese young man?”

Twain nodded and said, "He started as a regular coach in the youth team and worked as the manager of the youth team, First Team coach and assistant manager of the First Team. He left the club seven-and-a-half years ago to become the manager of Notts County team and now Notts County is ranked midstream in the EFL Championship."

When he heard "Notts County", Evan frowned. When he heard again that it was currently just a midstream team in the English Football League Championship, his frown grew deeper.

Twain naturally took note of Evan's reaction.

"Tony, this man..."

"You don't think he's famous and has an impressive enough resume?"

Evan nodded. It was what he thought. He felt strongly that a manager without prestige could not control the locker room. How many of the managers who had been brought in before could manage the big-name players? Almost none of them could control the locker room, so it became factional and the team fell apart. How could they have the strength to compete? If the manager's resume was not stellar, it meant that there were no brilliant results and it would not impress the public. Neither could it convince him that the team would have a brilliant future in this person's hands. Furthermore, the lack of brilliant results also implied that he did not have enough experience to play big. Nottingham Forest was a Premier League team and its goal was in Europe. Was an English Football League Championship manager able to cope with that level of competition?

"Not all managers need to rely on their own prominence to manage the locker room. It doesn't matter if his resume does not look good because it is easier to draw a better picture on a piece of blank paper," Twain said. "Before I got my first championship trophy, my resume didn't even look as good as Dunn's."

His words were true. Twain's resume really did not look good when he first made his debut. He lost his team's chance of qualifying for the Premier League in the most crucial game. Shortly after, he was sacked and returned to the youth team. Then, when he became Forest's First Team manager again, he had only half a season of First Team coaching experience. However, he still created the most glorious 11 years in the history of Nottingham Forest Football Club.

If Evan had kicked Twain out for not being famous and having a bad resume, perhaps Nottingham Forest would never have had that kind of glory.

"And Dunn is indeed capable enough. He just needs a better stage than Notts County. Think about the Nottingham Derby in January, when his team did well and was ahead of us for 45 minutes. I'm sure he'll do great work for you if he's given time."

"A Chinese man..." Evan was still a little worried and was not willing to be persuaded by Twain just like that.

"What's wrong with that?" Twain raised his eyebrows and added, "Chen Jian is also Chinese, but he is now part of our main force." Actually, Twain was itching to say to Evan:

I am a real Chinese man and Dunn is the true Englishman. If you're unwilling to believe in a Chinese man, it means you don't believe me. Is that it? But I've won so many championship titles...

He certainly could not say such words aloud. Twain only muttered a few remarks in his heart to express scorn for Evan's prejudiced views.

Following which, Evan fell into a long silence. The bus was moving fast and smoothly on the highway, with the players and coaches each doing their own thing. Some people listened to music with headphones on and some took a nap with their eyes closed. Some people even played games with their handheld consoles and cell phones.

Twain adjusted the angle of the back of his seat slightly and leaned back, intending to catch a few winks on the bus. As he had said, he was prone to feeling sleepy. He took the opportunity to get some rest to keep a clear head.

Evan did not seem to pay any more attention to Twain and continued in silence. Twain did not care that the club chairman was next to him either and closed his eyes to sleep right away.

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Twain woke up when the bus arrived in Nottingham. He found that Evan Doughty was still sitting next to him. Doughty looked like he waited for him to wake up.

"What's on your mind, Evan?" He asked.

Hearing Twain's question, Evan seemed to rouse himself from deep thought and turned to look at Twain. He said, "I was wondering if your recommended successor would be willing to live in your shadow..."

Twain pulled a face. He had thought about this issue before. To Dunn, this arrangement of his might be a bit overbearing. Twain had always considered problems from his own point of view but did not seem to consider Dunn's. A young manager with little to show for in his resume suddenly wanted to become Tony Twain's successor. Such pressure was enough to overwhelm many ordinary people with poor mental strength.

However, having interacted with Dunn for so long and sharing the same unspeakable secret, Twain was fully convinced that Dunn was not an ordinary man.

"In the first few years, there may be such an influence," Twain muttered, "But it will get better slowly. Take it slow, Evan. The Forest team still has a long, long way to go..."

Evan sighed and knew he was not able to convince the stubborn man next to him.

"Very well. When would be a good time for me to approach him?"

"Wait until the season is about to end. If it's too soon, the groundless talk in the media could cause a needless stir." Twain was very glad that Evan had finally decided to accept Dunn. In that way, he was partially at ease already.

What about the other part?

As the bus pulled into Wilford, Evan patted Twain on the shoulder before getting out of the bus and said, "When do you think it's best to have a press conference, Tony? The club can arrange it for you."

“Erm...” Twain opened his mouth and looked at Evan Doughty’s back as he alighted the bus, thinking that he must be feeling pleased for turning the tables...

He thought of the fans, full of anticipation, the banners dancing in the stands. Twain felt that it was much harder to deal with the fans than with the boss...

It was the truth. He had to consider feelings when dealing with the fans...

Chapter 1019: An Era Is About to Come to An End

It was easier informing Evan Doughty of his decision because it would not involve too much emotion. However, it was another matter with the fans. The fans trusted him, liked him and supported him, but he still had to leave. How on earth would he tell this to the fans?

The debate about whether Twain would stay or not had been brewing and abuzz for a long time, but Twain would not give in to the pressure the media had put on him.

In the media, on the Internet, and even on the streets, the discussion about whether Twain would eventually stay on had never stopped. Even the bookmakers gave the odds on whether Twain would stay or leave so that everyone would come to place bets on it. In terms of the bets and odds, people tended to believe that Twain would stay in the end.

The team was dismissed after they arrived back at Wilford and Twain drove home. Before leaving, he informed Evan Doughty that the press conference would be held tomorrow afternoon.

Having driven out of the Wilford training base not far away, Twain noticed that there was a betting station on the side of the road, where the odds chart about whether he would stay or leave was displayed. However, at this time of the night, no one was placing bets there. The store manager was also yawning repeatedly as he got ready to close the shop.

Twain suddenly had an idea. He pulled his car over and stopped.

The store manager perked up considerably when he saw that there was a customer dropping by. He was stunned when he saw who walked over.

“Tony?” He squinted and cocked his head to the side. He carefully appraised the man who came in.

There might be many men named “Tony” in England. However, in Nottingham, there was only one “Tony” among the public figures – the Nottingham Forest head manager, Tony Twain.

Since he had been recognized, Twain did not have to hide his identity. He asked, “Do more people place bets on me leaving or staying?”

The store manager recovered from the initial shock and replied, “More people bet on you staying.”

“What do you think, boss?” Twain continued to ask.

“Erm...” The store manager did not answer immediately. He was caught in an internal conflict. His shop was the closest to the Wilford training base, so he could always overhear a lot of gossip and inside information that no one else could hear. And when it came to Tony Twain, he was also very well aware

of how matters stood. From a reasonable standpoint, he thought that the chances of Twain staying might not be very good. However, emotionally speaking, he could not accept the fact that Twain might leave.

Consequently, he hesitated and did not know how to answer Twain's question.

Twain pulled out a note from his wallet and handed it to the store manager as he said, "Ten pounds for a bet on my departure."

The remark sent a shockwave through the store manager. Apparently, he could discern the meaning behind it, so he was not in a hurry to collect the money. Instead, he looked up at Twain.

"The payout is yours if the bet wins. The loss is mine if it's lost." Twain did not ask for proof. He put the ten-pound note on the table at the betting station and turned to walk away.

After getting back in the car, Twain waved to the betting station manager who stood dumbstruck at the door before he started the car to drive away.

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The next morning, Nottingham's earliest edition of the local newspaper published a piece of news, which immediately attracted widespread attention.

"...The owner of this betting station, Mr. John Farrell, revealed that at about 11.30 p.m. last night, Tony Twain suddenly came to his store and chatted with him. Then he paid ten pounds to place a bet on his own departure..."

"You're reading the newspaper during breakfast again, Tony," Shania put her lily-white hand out in front of Twain, who sighed and folded the newspaper before handing it to her.

"Have you thought about how to face the fans and the media this afternoon?" Shania asked after she put away the newspaper.

"Not yet," Twain shook his head. "I'll think about it when the time comes."

He really did not think of any good ideas. He could only walk up, sit on the stage, and then figure out a way. How should he deal with questions from the reporters and fan representatives? It was useless to consider such a problem now and prepare a script. He had to handle it according to the situation. Anyway, he was good at giving directions on the spot and was most accustomed to dealing with sudden occurrences.

However, what was reported in the newspaper should give the fans a heads-up, so they wouldn't be too surprised and disappointed when the news was actually announced.

"It's nothing. Am I, Tony Twain, not known for refusing to play by the book?"

Twain wiped his mouth to indicate that he had finished eating.

Shania rose and cleaned up, while Twain's cell phone rang.

A look at the caller ID told him that it was Pierce Brosnan.

“Hello, Mr. 007.” When Twain was in a good mood, he would make these little jokes. Brosnan knew him well, so he was surprised. He said, “Listening to your voice tells me you’re in a good mood, Tony.”

“Of course. What can happen to make me feel bad?”

“The press conference this afternoon...”

“Ha. I’ve already made a decision. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“I read the news in the papers this morning. Is it true?”

Brosnan indeed called to confirm the matter.

“What’s true?” Twain deliberately acted confused.

“Is it true that the manager of a betting station said you went to him late at night to place your own bet on your departure, Tony?”

It was useless to deny it, so Twain openly admitted it and said, “Yes. I went to place a bet, but the store manager will earn the winnings if there’s any, and the loss will be mine if the bet’s lost.”

Brosnan laughed bitterly on the other end of the line and said, “Do you still think you will lose?”

Twain shrugged and said, “Who knows?”

Brosnan understood Twain. He did not think that Twain was going to stay just because of his deliberately mystifying remark.

“I actually did not call to ask about this. I wanted to ask if you need me to coordinate with you at the afternoon press conference.”

Twain and Brosnan did many such things before in the past. Whenever he encountered troublesome reporters, Brosnan would stand up and help Twain to change the topic. If Brosnan had not done this, he would not have gained Twain’s trust and naturally would not be able to become the author of Twain’s biography.

“There’s no script for us to rehearse in advance,” Twain tactfully declined Brosnan’s offer.

“Then I can only wish you good luck. You know the fans are very passionate, Tony.”

After hanging up, Twain shrugged at his wife, who was looking at him, and said, “I think Mr. 007 is really worried about nothing.”

Shania smiled and did not speak. In fact, she was also a little worried...

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After a morning of canoodling with Shania, Twain drove alone in the afternoon to the Crimson Stadium to participate in the press conference.

It was a special press conference, because not only the reporters attended it, but also fan representatives chosen by the club. The head of the “red shirts”, whom Twain had a direct dialogue with outside the training ground at the time, was also among them.

Twain was upstairs to meet with Evan Doughty first.

“Are you nervous, Tony?” Evan asked.

Twain said with a shrug, “What’s there to be nervous about?”

“It’s not always easy to say ‘no’ to people who love you...”

Twain grinned and chuckled silently.

In fact, he was silently muttering words that Evan Doughty would probably not understand, “Damned if I do and damned if I don’t...”

He could see from upstairs the media and reporters coming in and out below, as well as some people who, he could tell at a glance, were fan representatives. It seemed that there were quite a lot of people.

Not only that, fans who were not invited to the press conference stood in the square outside, holding signs expressing their desire for Twain to stay.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t be leaving such passionate fans,” Evan Doughty half-joked as he and Twain stood by the window together, looking at the people below.

Twain did not respond to his quip. In fact, he did not say a word again until he appeared in front of the reporters and officially began the press conference.

Sitting in front of everyone, Tony Twain had his signature playful smile on his face. Some people called it a ‘gentle smile’ which of course was nonsense. Gentleness was not something that characterized Twain. It made the people below the stage slightly relieved. Twain did not look like he was going to give bad news.

Twain sat on the stage and observed the situation below. Although the hall did not reach the point of overcrowding, all the seats were full.

Seeing Twain come out, the debates in the hall gradually subsided and eventually completely disappeared. Only then, the press coordinator announced the official start of the conference.

According to the procedure, Twain would speak first, followed by free time for the press to ask questions. Therefore, the media and fans sat below the stage and turned their eyes to Twain, waiting for him to speak.

Twain did not announce his decision first, but said, “I know what you want to ask. About the incident last night, yes, I did do it. The answer is quite obvious, isn’t it?”

As soon as that was said, everyone knew what Twain’s final answer was. The fan representatives could not hide the disappointment on their faces, but no one was making a clamor. They were still waiting for Twain to continue speaking.

Twain looked at the fans off the stage. He automatically filtered out the reporters.

These people supported him, and he was very sorry to disappoint those who loved him.

"I am sorry," His voice became low, "that I've failed to live up to the expectations of the fans. Even though I made this decision for personal reasons and my family's sake, I still want to apologize to the fans."

In fact, Twain did not have to apologize, because he never deceived the fans. When he came back at the beginning, he had already stated that he would only be here for half a season. The enthusiastic fans strongly urged him to stay on, which eventually made him stand up today to make this speech.

However, as much as Twain could set himself against the media and the will of the club's senior management, his relationship with the fans had been good. Therefore, he did not mind standing in front of the fans to placate them and say some words from his heart.

"I have some things that I would like to say to you," Twain kept looking at the fan base seated on the left-hand side and ignored the media on the other side.

"Truthfully, um....." Twain's speech was an impromptu performance. He never prepared any speeches, so now he did not know where to start. Twain scratched his head and said, "How should I put it? I have a happy family. For ten years, I have loved my wife, and my wife loves me. Generally speaking, I should be satisfied, but it was not so. My wife and I have been apart more than we have been together for these ten years. I have houses in Nottingham and Los Angeles, but most of the time my wife was alone in the house in Los Angeles and I had the home in Nottingham to myself. I don't know if you can imagine what kind of life that was. I'm tired of it. I want to be able to spend the rest of my life with my wife, whether in Nottingham or in Los Angeles. I admit it's somewhat selfish. However, I've given my best 11 years to Nottingham Forest, leaving behind great memories. I think that should give me the right to be a little selfish, shouldn't it?"

He looked at the fans below the stage. No one answered him.

"Initially, I could have retired completely. When I decided to come back at the time, it was because I did not want Nottingham Forest to slip into the abyss. I wanted to pull the team up. However, I can't keep holding on and not let go. I will grow old one day... In fact, I'm already old." Twain tilted his head to the side to show the fans below the white hair on his head. He had not dyed his hair since his 50th birthday. His appearance now was a far cry from how he looked at the World Cup. In comparison, he did appear old now.

"No team in the world can rely on one manager forever. Don't tell me you were not proud of Nottingham Forest before my time. Before me, wasn't there Brian Clough? What you love should be Nottingham Forest, not Tony Twain. I'm very honored to have been the manager of such a glorious team for 11 years, but I've never forgotten that the name on the front of the jersey is far more important than the name behind it," Twain declared.

"I think my departure is the right decision for the Forest team. It's a decision that will make the Forest team stronger in the future. I believe in this; hence, I made the decision. As for the results, I'm leaving it to time to prove it."

"If you truly love the Forest team, please support my decision. The future Nottingham Forest team doesn't need me. There's no way I can continue to lead the Forest team forward. There's a more suitable candidate than me waiting for everyone."

At this point, Twain stood up, which was an indication that he was leaving.

“Thank you, everyone, for your support over the past 11 years. I would also like to ask you to keep up your support. I apologize to you once again, but I want to live my own life and hope you can understand.”

Having said this, Twain turned around and walked out without looking back, leaving behind a room of people who had not yet recovered from the shock.

Only when his figure disappeared completely at the exit, people finally reacted. The fan representatives were silent, while the reactions from the reporters were much more intense.

“In other words, is it true that Tony Twain will retire completely at the end of the season?”

“Are you still questioning the veracity of the news?”

“That was really cold. He just left after he said his piece. He did not even leave any time for us...”

“It felt like he was reading from a script...”

“I even prepared a lot of questions... Now what? We have nothing different from any other press outlets. Nothing else to do than release a record of his speech!”

Pierce Brosnan did not participate in this pointless discussion. He was distracted.

This time, it was not a hunch of his, but a plan that had been confirmed – an era was about to come to an end for the Nottingham Forest fans.

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Nottingham Forest would play in an away game this weekend. The banners urging Twain to stay had disappeared. Twain saw another banner in the stands of the Forest fans that had come along:

“Thank you, Captain!”

Chapter 1020: Shania’s Good News

Her husband took the team to play an away game and her daughter had gone with the nanny to play outside. Shania finally had some time to herself. She curled up on the couch in the living room and was looking through the work arrangements that her agent, Mr. Fasal, had prepared for her.

It was now April and the work for the spring season had just ended while the work for the summer was still undecided. However, she had decided to reject all future jobs. Her current thinking was very simple: she was 29 years old and was already considered a ‘veteran’ at this age as a model. Her physical condition did not permit her to continue in this line of work. Moreover, the modeling industry would not give preferential treatment to an older model. The younger generation of models was very fierce, just like when she was when she first made her debut. She planned to quit the modeling world and stay at home to support her husband and be with her child. Uncle Tony always said that he was going to make it up to her. So, had she thought about making it up to Uncle Tony?

They had never spent a Christmas together in all the years since they had and gotten married. She wanted to make up for it.

Shania picked up the phone and dialed her agent's cell phone number.

"Mr. Fasal?" Despite their years of working together, Shania had always insisted on addressing her agent in this respectful manner as a sign of deference. How could she have such a status, had it not been for Fasal's hard work over the past decade or so? How else could she not have anything to do with the dark secrets and unwritten rules of the entertainment and modeling world?

"Yes, what's the matter?"

Shania heard some noise on the phone and asked, "Are you outside, Mr. Fasal?"

"Ah, yes. I was in the supermarket. I just came out, ha-ha!"

"Is it raining outside?" Shania listened carefully and heard the endless pitter-patter sounds of water.

"Your ears are very sharp. Yes, it's raining here. I'm glad I drove. Anything the matter with you? Oh, hang on a second, it's not convenient to talk here. Wait till I get into the car."

This was followed by the sound of footsteps. The sound of the rain was getting louder and louder. Finally, there was a bang, and the sounds of the rain and footsteps were gone. Then came the rustling sound of a seat belt being pulled.

Having done all this, Fasal spoke again. "All good now. What's the matter, Shania?"

"Well... it's like this, Mr. Fasal. I hope you can help me get rid of all the runway show arrangements from now on..."

Fasal thought he had misheard and gave a cry of surprise. Then he wondered if this could be a joke of Shania's. Shania was somewhat unpredictable. She would always do some unexpected things. She had rejected some work before. However, to reject all the job opportunities in one shot... what was going on?

"Did I hear right? I'm in the midst of planning your jobs for the summer..."

"You heard right, Mr. Fasal. I have looked at the memo in my hand and there are already five jobs scheduled... I hope you can decline them for me."

"Did something happen?" Fasal was more baffled.

"No, I'm fine."

Shania answered calmly, and Fasal could not discern anything. "Then how about Tony..."

"He's very well, too."

"Then why are you..."

"I've thought it over for a long time, Mr. Fasal." Shania continued to curl up on the couch, holding the phone as if she was chatting with a friend on a lazy afternoon. In fact, every word she said next was more shocking to Fasal than a thunderbolt from the distant sky.

“I’m going to quit the modeling business altogether. No, it’s not just modeling. I’m not going to make any more movies either. I’m tired of being a star, Mr. Fasal. I want to be able to live a normal life like an ordinary person – taking care of my child at home and spending time with my husband. I hope to have more time with my family.”

“We can reduce your workload appropriately. You don’t have to quit completely. Besides, isn’t Tony retiring completely after the end of the season? He can accompany you...” As an agent, it was normal for him to react like that. He definitely would not immediately nod in agreement with his star’s request for retirement.

“No, that’s not enough, Mr. Fasal. To be honest, Mr. Fasal, I don’t think I have a talent for acting. If I didn’t have a lot of friends, I wouldn’t have made it in Hollywood...”

“Don’t say that. You’re great...”

“Thank you, Mr. Fasal. In fact, you have arranged for all those good reviews of me after every movie, right? Truthfully, all those movies I’ve been involved in, I haven’t watched them again, and I don’t let Uncle Tony watch them either. I think I do a bad job on camera, but I have a bunch of very good friends who can tolerate me doing that. Now I’m tired of it, and I don’t want to go on like this. I want to start a whole new life. I haven’t figured it out yet at the moment, but I can be sure that it has nothing to do with the runway shows or acting. I don’t like to do the runway shows, but I have to make money from it. I like movies, but I don’t have the talent for acting. I think it’s a good idea to quit completely.”

Shania poured her heart out openly as if she was chatting with her agent with no intention of talking business.

After she had finished talking, Fasal was silent for a moment before asking, “I wonder why you have made such a decision now. It is not just some idea about spending more time with Tony that you have thought of recently, is it?”

“Well... I have thought about it long ago, but the reason that prompted me to make my decision was that I went to the hospital yesterday.” Shania turned her body around and leaned against the back of the couch, looking outside the window at the happy Teresa playing in the yard.

“The hospital?” Fasal was shocked and asked, “Are you not feeling well?” He thought of a possibility: Something went wrong with Shania’s health, so she had to give up her job. To tell the truth, filming and runway shows were not easy work. The workload was heavy and relentless.

Shania had nothing to hide from the agent, who had been with her for more than a decade. She came out with the truth. “I missed my period last month.”

“Huh? Oh!” Fasal yelped twice in surprise, and then he did not know what to say. However, his mind was clear because he knew what was going on...

“I gave Dr. Sandy a call and he suggested I go to the hospital for a full checkup.”

Sandy was Shania’s personal doctor, who had worked with her for years. Fasal knew this too.

“So, I went. As you know, Professor Constantine of the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University is a good friend of my husband’s. He promised to keep it a secret for me and never let the media know. The result...”

Fasal seemed more excited than Shania. He quickly asked, “What’s the result?”

Teresa and the nanny were playing in the yard. The bright sun was shining on them, and the afternoon in April was already warm. A fine sheen of perspiration appeared on the foreheads of her child and the nanny, glistening in the sun.

How beautiful the afternoon was...

In fact, after knowing the result, in addition to the excitement, Shania was somewhat worried deep down as well – will Tony and I still live comfortably and also wholeheartedly love Teresa in the future? Will Teresa feel left out?

However, after observing the scene outside, she felt her previous fears were unfounded. She loved Teresa, even if she was not her biological daughter. Tony loved Teresa, too. In that case, why would Teresa worry about being left out?

“I’m pregnant.”

Looking at Teresa playing in the yard, Shania smiled.

Fasal, who was sitting in the car, slowly opened his mouth and then simply laughed.

“That’s wonderful news for Tony. It’s even better news than winning the World Cup...”

However, Shania stopped his train of thought.

“Mr. Fasal, I want you to promise me that you will not tell Uncle Tony the news.”

“Huh? Why? You should know how much Tony wants to be...”

“Of course, I know, Mr. Fasal. It’s precisely because I know this that I can’t just tell him the news now. The league tournament is coming to an end and his team is at the most critical juncture. I don’t want to distract him. I’ll tell him at the right time, and you must keep it a secret for me until then.”

What else could Fasal say? Shania was being sensible and right. He nodded in agreement and said, “But I’d still like to congratulate you and Tony. His greatest wish has finally been fulfilled... I thought you guys wouldn’t try to have another child now that you have Teresa.”

“We really didn’t try. But who would have imagined, I’m pregnant... I don’t know what to say. But I’m very happy, maybe it’s God’s will...”

If Shania had understood Chinese culture, she would definitely say “a scrutinized flower never blooms, but an untended willow tree grows.”

As it turned out, after they had Teresa, Tony’s desire to have children was no longer urgent, and it could be said that he did not have the need at all anymore. Shania stopped thinking about the matter. However, the couple’s regular sex life was always going to happen... Shania was only 29 years old. Taking good care of herself made her look like she was in her early twenties.

As a result, just relaxing and enjoying each other without consciously trying to get pregnant unexpectedly gave the husband and wife such a big surprise...

Fasal promised not to announce the news. He also understood why Shania wanted to retire. There was really no way to work as a model while pregnant or with a baby. However, he still planned to persuade Shania to return to the entertainment industry some time after having the baby. She did not have to be a model, but she could do some related jobs.

Shania did not say yes. She just told Fasal that she would think about it after at least a year of maternity leave.

Fasal had no other way. He could only drop the subject at this point. He knew that Shania was also a very stubborn person.

“As for the matter of declining the jobs... it’s not a problem. We just need to pay some compensation...”

Shania asked for the specific amount of compensation. Fortunately, it was all within acceptable limits. However, Fasal felt that Shania had better not give up the May 10 event. It was a new product launch for Dior, and Shania was invited to present Dior’s new women’s fashion collection to the media as the spokesperson.

Dior was the first endorsement brand signed by Shania when she first entered the modeling world. It was important for her modeling career. And Shania was well aware of this point, so the relationship between the two parties was very good from the beginning to the present.

Fasal’s reason was that no matter what Shania did in the future, it was always good to have one more friend. The relationship with Dior was so remarkable that it would be a pity to give it up. Furthermore, if it was her last runway show as a model, choosing the new product launch of a brand like Dior as her farewell show, it could also be considered as an expression of Shania’s gratitude to Dior. He believed that Dior would also make good use of this to publicize the event.

After listening to Fasal’s analysis, Shania also thought it seemed reckless to reject the job.

“Well... Mr. Fasal, you’re right. I’ll listen to you.”

Fasal was an excellent agent and Shania put a lot of faith in him.

When the matter was settled, it was time to let him get busy while all Shania needed to do was rest at home. It was just as she had looked forward to, to support her husband and be with her child.

After hanging up, Shania thought about looking at the calendar. When she spoke to Fasal on the phone, she always thought the date May 10 sounded familiar.

As soon as she opened the calendar, she saw a circle drawn around this date. She understood at once how that familiar feeling came about.

It was the last round of the Premier League tournament...

Seeing this date, Shania suddenly had an impulse to call Fasal back and ask him to decline the job with Dior. However, in the end, she held back.

She really could not decline the event, but she had to make it up to her husband.

She had to keep the matter a secret until that day came.

She wanted to give her husband a surprise with the best gift in the world and welcome him home.