

Champions 1031

Chapter 1031: This Is Fate

Mourinho was not willing to settle for a tied game. When the game still had 15 minutes left before going into injury stoppage time, he brought on attacking players and continued to strengthen the offensive, hoping to blast open the Forest goal and end the record that embarrassed him before the end of Twain's last game.

Amid his bellowing, the Manchester United players also realized that they must win the game – and that in the event of a last-minute sneak attack by the Forest team, the entire season's effort would be wasted.

The news came that Arsenal was already 2:0 ahead of their opponent in another stadium. If nothing else happened, Arsenal would definitely win.

Manchester United could not place their hopes on others and could only rely on themselves to score a goal to ensure that their fate was still in their own hands...

Seeing Manchester United step up on the offensive, Twain rose from his seat. He went to the sidelines to whistle and make hand gestures. Following this, Nottingham Forest tightened their defensive line and locked down on their defense.

It was actually a defensive counterattack.

The harder Manchester United attacked, the more chances the Forest team would have. Twain trained the team and taught them to remain patient in the face of the opponents getting the upper hand. As a rule, nothing was more important than patience.

As a result, even if Manchester United stepped up their attack, the Forest team's defense showed no signs of panic, as if they had been long prepared for their opponent's move.

In that time, Manchester United had obtained no less than five times to shoot but did not actually pose a threat to the Forest team's goal due to the joint efforts of the team. The rear defensive line led by George Wood cut across in front of the Manchester United players, leaving them in despair.

Even though Manchester United dominated the game, the Forest team's supporters were not worried that their team would concede the goal. Nevertheless, some people felt the chances of a draw between the two sides were very high...

However, John Motson did not see it that way.

"I know Tony. I've been doing commentary on the Forest games for more than a decade. This scene in front of us really makes people think of ..."

What would people be thinking of with the Forest team under siege from Manchester United?

"Nottingham Forest is like a spring. The stronger the external force they are under, the tighter their compression is, and the opponents should be wary of being stung by the rebound..."

Mourinho clearly knew it. He and Twain have been rivals for more than a decade. So how could he not read the signs?

He lifted his wrist to look at his watch. It was less than five minutes until the injury stoppage time and the score was still 0:0. Now he had to make a choice.

Should he continue to attack and try to score a goal before the end of the game to win the game and defy his destiny? Or should he stop here, stabilize the defense, hold on to the draw and win the league tournament?

Mourinho did not think about it for long. As the Manchester United manager, he quickly made the right choice. The interests of the team were more important than personal grievances. What could be more important than to take down the league title?

At this point, Mourinho walked toward the sidelines and got ready to deliver his latest instructions.

A step ahead of him, Twain had already gone to the sidelines and shouted toward the pitch, “Geo—rge—!”

Wood heard Twain’s shout in the noisy environment. Although the latter was already 50 years old, the boss’ hoarse voice had a special frequency and was always able to penetrate through the din to transmit its message to Wood’s ears.

Seeing that Wood had turned his head to look over, Twain did not waste his breath but just gave a wave of his hand while he said, “Attack, guys!!”

Seeing his hand gesture, Wood had not given any indication of following it yet, while Bale was already excited. In the second half, his side was closer to the technical area, so he could clearly hear Twain’s words. He simply imitated the boss’s gesture and waved his hand forward as he yelled, “Attack, guys!”

The Manchester United team was also attacking at this time.

The scene where Wood and Chen Jian both almost rushed toward Adrien at the same time was a rare sight. Before, it was always one player from the Forest team’s defense who would rush up to intercept the ball while the other player guarded on the side, waiting for the opportunity to exploit any gaps.

Adrien was a little flustered with the Forest team’s sudden move. After he flicked the ball to the left to avoid Chen Jian’s right leg, he knocked into Wood. In a panic, he lost the ball under his feet.

When Wood saw Adrien about to collide with him, he moved sideways to cushion the impact and turned around to separate Adrien from the ball. In this way, he intercepted the other player’s ball.

Wood, who had intercepted the ball, then tapped the ball to Chen Jian behind him with his heel. The ball just happened to bypass underneath Adrien’s feet. Adrien looked at the football but could do nothing.

After Chen Jian got the ball, he did not dribble it himself but directly sent a long pass to the front to give the ball to Mitchell. By this time, Manchester United had just completed an attack and Mourinho’s latest instructions had not been transmitted yet. The players did not know they should have retreated.

Consequently, the Manchester United players reacted slightly slower in defense.

After Mitchell stopped the football, he turned around and started to dribble the ball forward. His pace was wide, and his footwork was excellent. With a height of more than two meters, he still managed to control the ball with ease. Once he took large strides, the Manchester United defender, Evans, could barely keep up with him.

Seeing this, Mourinho changed his mind at the last minute. Instead of shouting “pay attention to the defense” on the sidelines, he shouted, “Foul!”

Before they could enter the penalty area, it was the wisest choice to foul as soon as possible to stop the Forest team’s attack. It did not matter even if they were penalized with a red card. Anyway, it was only a few minutes away from the end of the game. They would just have to grit their teeth and hang on.

Evans appeared to have heard Mourinho’s roar on the sidelines. He reached his hand to grab Mitchell and shovel him under his feet. He succeeded in disrupting Mitchell’s breakthrough but failed to keep the ball under his feet. He let it roll in the other direction.

Balotelli, who plugged in from the back, managed to receive the ball that Evans shoveled over. Manchester United’s other center back, Cathcart, did not expect Evans’ tackled ball to fall at Balotelli’s feet. Before he was ready to intercept Mitchell in front but now he had to hurry to change direction and pounce toward the Italian.

When Balotelli saw Cathcart still unable to come up at that moment, he dribbled a few steps forward. He ran near the top of the arc of the penalty area and suddenly lifted his leg for a long shot!

The Manchester United goalkeeper, Ruffier, had long anticipated Balotelli would make such a move. He rose high into the air and punched the ball out with both fists.

The Nottingham Forest fans in the stands let out a huge sigh. It was a shame that the attack did not result in a goal this time.

Many people clutched their heads in their hands, lamenting.

However, in the next second, the clutching hands reached out and pointed back to the sky.

What did they see?

In full view of everyone, Nottingham Forest’s number 13 player, wearing a gold armband, appeared in front of the football’s drop point like a divine warrior from heaven and then lifted his right leg to meet the football.

“George WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—”

Motson stood up from his seat. He raised his voice and shouted in a way that did not belong to the style of an English commentator.

He could not predict what was going to happen. However, when he saw Wood taking the stance of lifting his leg to meet the football, he was suddenly fired up and could not hold back.

He just wanted to roar.

Once the football descended, Wood did not dilly dally to adjust the ball, but directly volleyed the football with one shot!

Ruffier had just landed on the ground at this very moment and was struggling to get up to get ready to pounce on the ball again.

The football bypassed the left-back, Fábio, who rushed over to defend. The strong wind painfully brushed past the Brazilian's ear and caused his mouth to tighten.

Ruffier used all his might to get up and pounce but he did not have enough momentum. The height of his jump was limited. The football flew over him and there was no surprise on this side...

"GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL!!!"

The football hit the net hard, swinging it. Countless Forest fans in the stands raised their arms in triumph.

Those arms waved as if the wind had blown through Sherwood Forest, creating a huge noise.

"Boom—!"

"George Wood! George Wood scores a goal at the 88th minute! Nottingham Forest leads by 1:0! A 1:0 lead! Manchester United's title dream is in jeopardy... No, it's almost shattered!"

"It's a powerful strike! George Wood scored his personal 11th goal of the season!"

"Ah-ha! It is an incredible scene. Mourinho once again loses to Tony Twain. Is this fate? Will anyone still say it's not?"

The commentators gave their comments on the goal in succession.

After giving Wood a close-up shot for more than ten seconds, the television cameras cut to the sidelines and focused on the expressions of the two managers.

Mourinho angrily threw away the notebook in his hand. He would always write and scribble in it whenever he was directing the games. This notebook was useless now and he had thrown it to the sidelines in his frustration.

Next to him, Tony Twain held his arms high and rushed out of the technical area to hug the people around him. People could see that he was very excited. There was nothing more perfect than to conclude his coaching career with a victory.

"Congratulations to Tony Twain and congratulations on his victory in his last game." In the eyes of the commentators, Mourinho's side had already lost the game. If Mourinho could hear these commentators, perhaps he would not be satisfied with throwing a single notebook. He must have felt that he had received a great insult – the game was not over yet and a group of scumbags could not wait to announce his failure. How could he not be angry?

However, no matter how furious he was now, he could only endure the cheers and celebration of his opponents. Accordingly, his face looked ashen from choking back the anger.

On the other side, the Nottingham Forest people were wildly celebrating.

George Wood broke free of his teammates' hugs. He ran all the way and kept waving his hands all along, signaling to the people in front of him to quickly get out of the way.

Then he crashed headlong into Twain's arms.

He rushed so quickly and violently that when he crashed into Twain, the latter grimaced in pain.

"George, you really..."

He felt the force of Wood's arms holding him, gripping him so that he could not really speak.

However, he did not tell Wood to let up. He just grinned and bore it. To other people, it looked like he was laughing.

Twain did not know how long Wood held him. When he finally let go, Twain breathed a sigh of relief.

However, he did not complain. He just patted Wood on the back.

Wood's action inspired the other players. After Wood and Twain finished embracing, the next people who rushed up to hug the boss were Gareth Bale, followed by Joe Mattock, Aaron Mitchell, Mario Balotelli... There was even a line at the back. It looked like everyone was going to come up and hug Twain. If that went on, by the time Manchester United could kick off again, the game would already be in injury stoppage time.

The referee had to intervene.

"Gentlemen, I know how you are feeling right now, but the game has to go on." The referee also felt a little awkward. He could not speak too harshly at the Forest team's home ground. He could only tactfully advise the players to go back to their positions.

However, his influence here was far from enough.

No one reacted to his words at all.

Twain certainly saw the referee in a bind at the back of the crowd. This was his last game, and he did not want any hiccups to happen. Therefore, he stopped the players who wanted to come up and hug him as he said, "Okay, guys, it will soon be dawn by the time we wait for you to finish." Although he thought he was being funny, no one laughed.

Everyone just looked at him.

"Go back." Twain did not say more. He waved his hands, turned around to walk back to the technical area and sat down right away.

Seeing him like this, the players knew they had to get back on the pitch and continue playing.

When they had all reluctantly returned to the field, Twain stood up again and roared toward the field, "Don't let yourself slack off! If you let the opponent equalize the game at the last minute, I will make you pay!!!"

He could see that many people were in no mood to continue fighting at all, so he yelled out again to motivate them.

In fact, he worried too much.

In the final minutes, Manchester United was bent on fighting back, but their attack was undisciplined and carried out individually. Mourinho was also at his wits' end about it. He could only shrug his shoulders at the sidelines. In the end, he simply sat in the technical area and did not get up. He watched the pitch in silence.

Looking at the Manchester United players blindly shooting and running on the pitch, his heart suddenly sank with the feeling that the game was as good as lost.

Truly outrageous. He just couldn't beat Tony Twain!

He clenched his fists tightly, totally unaware that his knuckles had turned white.

Soon he heard the referee whistle once, a second time in the next second, and followed by the third whistle right after that. The game was over.

Chapter 1032: The Final Curtain

When the referee blew the whistle thrice, the Crimson Stadium boiled over. They gave a parting gift to Twain, one last victory, as they wanted.

Only Manchester United players and fans were left sad and dejected. They appeared particularly desolate in the happy atmosphere.

Twain, who had wanted to go shake Mourinho's hand after the game to complete the ceremony, knew Mourinho was not a patient man. However, as soon as he got up, he was hugged by David Kerslake next to him. The assistant manager said nothing, just squeezed him.

A group of reporters swarmed up next to them and took endless frenzied shots.

When Twain broke free of Kerslake's embrace after some effort, he turned his head to look for Mourinho and was surprised to find that the other man was still standing outside waiting for him!

Twain pushed aside the press and walked toward Mourinho with an extended hand.

"I thought you would have already left, Mr. Mourinho."

Mourinho, who lost the title, did not look good and obviously was in a bad mood. He shook Twain's hand and let go.

"I just don't want you to write in your memoir that José Mourinho is a rude and ungracious man. I should go. I want to congratulate you on winning another game. I'm very glad you retire today."

Having said that, Mourinho did not care about the reactions of onlookers, let alone the look on Twain's face. He simply turned around and left the noisy pitch.

Twain was surrounded by reporters and watched Mourinho's back as he left. He felt a mix of emotions for a moment. He was definitely not overjoyed by his victory over his old rival. On the contrary, he felt a great pity for Mourinho.

As the sky darkened, the flashes around him pulled Twain back to reality. He looked at the reporters around him, ignored them, and went straight to the pitch. In the middle of the pitch, his players were waiting for him.

In the stands, 60,000 fans were loudly chanting his name.

“The game is over. Nottingham Forest won and Manchester United lost its league title. However, none of these things matter. What’s important for us is that a very important and special person finally has to bid farewell...” John Motson, the commentator for the game, said emotionally.

He now recalled his first encounter with Twain. At the City Ground stadium, Twain was knocked to the ground by his own player after a dismal first half and then left the field. He became a big joke in the whole of English football world for that round of league tournament. Motson was responsible for the commentary in the game. At the time, he bowled over with laughter in the commentator’s box and was merciless with his ridicule.

He did not expect to be friends with Twain down the road, to be a fellow commentator alongside Twain for the England national games, or to witness the young man become one of the world’s most successful managers step by step and turn into the godfather of Nottingham Forest.

Amid the cheers of 60,000 people, Twain walked into the middle of the pitch and gathered his men.

“Boss, can you stay?” Gareth Bale asked with tears in his eyes.

Twain just smiled and shook his head.

“I don’t think your health is a problem at all, really. We’ll be able to pull a few more years together. We can leave together at that time. How about it?” Bale continued to implore, unwilling to give up.

Twain reached out his hand to touch Bale’s arm and said to him, “When I bade farewell to Demi and the others at the time, I also felt this way. But they still left. This is life. You always have to say goodbye. It’s no big deal. Besides, we’re not saying goodbye forever, are we?”

Bale bit his lip and retreated to the side without saying another word.

Balotelli looked at Twain, wanting to speak several times, but stopped. When Twain understood what was on his mind, he said to him, “Stay or leave, it will be fine either way, as long as it’s what you want. You’re a genius, Mario. But a genius is not fit for all situations. When I’m gone, you should go your own way.”

Patting Balotelli on the shoulder, Twain turned to Mitchell.

He looked up at Mitchell’s face. The kid seemed to be making a face at him like he wanted to cry and laugh simultaneously.

“Aaron. I still want to say you should step up your strength training. I hope you can be more comprehensive...” At this, he smiled and continued, “Why am I still talking about these things? Anyway, I’m not your manager next season. If you can’t break through the impenetrable line of those strong defenders, the person who worries will not be me, ha!”

Twain laughed, but Mitchell cried instead.

Twain ignored the snot and tears running down his face. He patted Mitchell on the shoulders. He turned around to look for the others.

He did not want his parting to look sad and mournful. He was already more than half a century old. Was it necessary to be like this?

Therefore, he lightheartedly talked to each player, said a few words, and moved on to the next person.

As he did so, the shouts from the stands continued. None of the 60,000 Nottingham Forest fans had left the stadium. The Manchester United fans had mostly dispersed from the stadium along with the Manchester United team.

The two large screens in the stadium's stands were replaying Twain's documentary shorts.

The live televised broadcast continued.

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Shania was waiting in the dressing room to make her appearance. It would be the final time she would appear on the runway. Now her mind was not on her job, however. She held a cell phone in her hand and was playing the television footage. It was the scene from Twain's farewell at the Crimson Stadium.

Thanks to the ever-changing technology, she could watch live television streaming here. In this way, she accompanied Uncle Tony on the last journey of his career.

The commentator's voice on the phone was very clear.

"I don't want to repeat Tony Twain's achievements at this point. I just want to admire the scene – more than 60,000 fans staying in the stands, unwilling to leave. Twain is with his players. He's speaking to them one by one... What does this make me think of? A general about to retire is inspecting his troops and officers for the last time. He shakes hands with them and thanks them for their support and work over the years..."

Shania was engrossed in looking at the screen of her cell phone. Twain was in the middle, surrounded by the players while the reporters surrounded them all. The fans were at the periphery, singing songs and shouting the names of the main character.

The hairstylist fiddled with her hair and made final preparations. There were other models in the dressing room, but Shania acted as though there was nobody else present and did not care how others viewed her.

The scene should be sad, but Shania was smiling, like the man in the middle of the screen.

"All right, my dear." The hairstylist motioned for Shania to lift her head and look in the mirror to view the whole effect.

It was hard to believe that the woman in the mirror was almost thirty years old. Her long hair was trailing over her shoulders. She looked young, beautiful, vivacious and sassy with the tips of her hair curled.

Shania made a face and then turned off the live television streaming on her cell phone.

It was time for her to make her appearance.

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Twain walked up to Wood. He was the last one.

Looking at his team captain, Twain did not know what to say. Wood was sensible and obedient. There were some things that were unnecessary to repeat, as he had said them before.

What else was there to say now?

Looking at Twain standing in front of him, Wood did not know what to say either. However, it was not like he had nothing to say. Rather, he had many things he wanted to convey and did not know how to begin at this moment.

Even at the moment of farewell, he was still so awkward with words.

It was the same when he was facing Demi, and it was like this with Twain now.

In the end, Twain said nothing. He just put his hand on Wood's shoulder and gave it a hard squeeze.

After saying goodbye to the players, he said his farewell to the coaches, starting with the team doctors and going all the way to the assistant managers. He shook hands or hugged each, one by one.

In the end, he approached Freddy Eastwood and muttered in his ear, "Dunn will come to take over my position. He is a great manager. However, he needs a great assistant. You will stay and help him, right?"

Eastwood nodded in agreement.

Twain let go of the other man when he got this promise and turned to Kerslake.

"Whether you leave together with me or stay here, it's your choice, David."

Kerslake looked at the people around him and said to Twain, "I've changed my mind, Tony. Nottingham Forest is a good place. I'm going to stay here."

Twain laughed and patted him on the shoulder as he said, "The right choice."

Having done all this, he told the two assistant managers, "I'm going to the press conference in a while, so I won't be going to the locker room. There will be many reporters blocking my way today. You don't have to wait for me to come back. You can drive straight back to the hotel once the players pack up and dismiss them on the spot. As for me, I'm going home by myself."

The two men nodded at the same time and did not object to Twain's arrangement.

Seeing that both of them agreed, Twain walked outside with confidence. After two steps out, he looked back and the players and coaches were still standing there with no intention of leaving.

Twain waved to them and said, "Go back, don't catch a cold."

Then he walked forward again, and he did not look back this time.

Along the way, the shouts of the fans were deafening. The flags and banners with his portrait on them in the stands fluttered nonstop. On the stadium broadcast, Sarah Brightman and Andre Bocelli sang at the top of their voices "...Time to say goodbye..."

Twain then walked to the entrance of the tunnel. Behind him stood the motionless players and colleagues. In front of him, there was a large group of reporters carrying cameras and filming equipment, shooting as they followed. The flashes brightly lit up the way under his feet until it was blindingly white.

When he walked to the entrance of the tunnel, many fans in the stands on both sides suddenly threw confetti. The fluttering confetti made Twain raise his head. He saw several familiar faces in the crowd.

Michael Bernard, Fat John, Skinny Bill, and even the pub owner, Kenny Burns, were there. When he saw Burns, he was suddenly interested. He stopped and asked, "In so many years, you only left the pub when the City Ground stadium was to be demolished. Why have you come today?"

Burns said to him, "An era was torn down with the City Ground stadium. Your departure means the same as well, Tony."

Twain stopped talking and waved to him and the others. He continued to walk down the tunnel amid a flurry of confetti.

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Joe Mattock sighed, "This is the last time I will see the boss appear in front of me in this capacity..."

Wood stood at the front of the team. When he heard Mattock's words, he suddenly had the idea of rushing up to Twain, but until Twain disappeared into the tunnel surrounded by the reporters, he did not put the thought into action.

He unexpectedly felt that he was timid, and not a tough guy.

He was a coward who could not show his feelings freely in front of a large crowd.

He was not as good as Mitchell, who was willing to shed tears in front of Twain, and Bale, who said to Twain, "Can you stay?"

As the team captain, he was really inadequate at this time...

Seeing Twain completely disappear from view, David Kerslake's voice rang out. He usually had a loud voice, but he sounded weak at this time.

"Let's head back, guys. Go back for a shower, change your clothes, get out of here. Your vacation has begun."

As the players began to walk off the pitch, Wood looked up and found the fans in the stands slowly leaving the stadium. However, he knew that these people would gather in the square outside the stadium. The departure of a special person would not end like this.

He pulled off the captain's armband, held it in his hand, and walked off the field with his teammates.

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Michael Bernard, who walked out of the stadium, had no intention of staying on even though a large crowd had already gathered in the square again. They still loudly chanted Twain's name, and the scene was very enthusiastic.

"Let's go back to the pub for a drink, guys," Michael said to his companions.

"Don't you want to stay and send Tony off?" Skinny Bill was puzzled.

"We've already sent him off," Michael pointed in the direction of the gate and added, "Tony, who will come out of the gate later, will no longer be Manager Tony Twain. I want to go back for a drink. All the shouting during the game has made my throat dry."

"Me too," Burns said next to him.

The two men held a high prestige among the fans. Since they had said so, there was no further objection.

"Okay, let's go back for a drink in salute to..." Fat John suddenly did not know what to say.

"In a salute to the last 16 years, and to say goodbye to the people and games of those 16 years," Michael raised his hand.

He waved goodbye to the Crimson Stadium.

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Pierce Brosnan had no time to stand aside and put on an act to proclaim that "an era is over". He had been busy since the final whistle. He was too busy to stop and reflect on it – it was Tony Twain's final game!

Like his peers, he centered Tony Twain as the focal point and followed him from the east to the west on the field as he bade farewell to the players, said goodbye to the fans, and then went together with him to the press conference hall. Now as he looked at Twain seated at a table full of microphones, cell phones, tape recorders, and interview equipment in front of him, he had time to think about the half-hour that had just passed.

The Forest team won the game against Manchester United. Tony Twain maintained his winning record against Mourinho during the course of his coaching career. These were not the important points. Thinking back on Twain's farewell to the players and coaches in the middle of the pitch, he felt that Twain's influence would not diminish with his departure. On the contrary, his influence here might even become stronger.

Cruyff remained the godfather of Barcelona even after he left. He had published a variety of articles and commentary about Barcelona in the media. He gave praise when Barcelona played beautifully and criticized when they did not play well. He even had a say in matters such as the selection of the manager, which player to sell and which player to buy. The Barcelona coaches could not ignore his advice...

However, unlike this flying Dutchman, Brosnan felt that Twain's influence would not be demonstrated through the above examples.

In fact, judging by Twain's conduct after he retired for the first time, he would not mention Nottingham Forest much again, as if the football club had never appeared in his life. He would never interfere with the Forest team's team building policy and would not comment on the Forest team's employment strategy. Whether the Forest team played well or terribly, it would be other people's business. He was peculiar like that. He would use this kind of indifference to express his feelings for the Forest team. It seemed that the more distance he maintained, the more it would let him feel the affection was pure.

However, despite this, looking at today's scene, his place in the hearts of the Forest fans remained unshakable. He believed it would be the same years later. He did not have to say anything or do anything. However, as long as someone mentioned his name, that invisible influence would begin to show.

Robin Hood died more than 900 years ago, and his influence was still present. People had repeatedly sung about him and written about him in literature, plays, and games. Tony Twain almost deserved the same treatment, didn't he?

Brosnan, who was lost in contemplation, snapped back to reality when the press officer said, "the press conference starts now." The room, which was quite noisy earlier, immediately quieted down. Everyone looked up in anticipation and looked forward to Twain delivering his farewell speech.

Mourinho had already left. While most of the reporters were still on the pitch, he had been interviewed by several Manchester media outlets and then hastily departed to leave the stage to Twain alone.

What a considerate opponent...

Twain looked at the eager reporters below and cleared his throat. Just this gesture was enough to make the people sit up straight, lean their heads forward, and prick their ears.

Twain chuckled mischievously.

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The runway show was over. Shania had just been led out by the designer to make the curtain call. Now she was standing in front of a backdrop, being interviewed by the reporters.

"Yes, it's true that I'm quitting the modeling and entertainment world. I had seriously considered it before I made this decision," Shania admitted the fact, which had long been hotly speculated, to the media for the first time.

"I'm completely retiring from the industry and I won't come back in the future."

Shania fiddled with her brown hair. With her makeup removed, she looked like a completely different person as compared to the cool beauty on the runway stage. Now she had a gentle smile on her face as she patiently and meticulously answered every question from the reporters without showing the slightest bit of impatience.

"After my retirement, I'll be with my husband and daughter before I think about the future... Maybe I will be a fashion designer."

The reporters still wanted to find out the real inside story. For them, the answers that could be found in the press were of no value. People would never find out the whole truth.

“The real reason for quitting?” Instead of expressing she was fed up with the question posed by the reporter, Shania showed a smile to make hearts flutter.

“It’s very simple. I’m pregnant.”

When Shania casually threw out the remark, no one in the room had any reaction at first. With an expression of anticipation on their faces, they waited for the real answer to come out. No one realized that the true answer had already emerged.

“Ah...” The reporter who asked the question reacted the quickest. He opened his mouth, wanting to say something but could not utter a sound.

Shania looked at the quiet reporters in the room and winked mischievously. It turned out to be quite interesting. She had succeeded in surprising them all.

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“...I have nothing to say.”

Twain said this to the eager reporters in the press hall at Nottingham’s Crimson Stadium.

“I know a lot of people like me and a lot of people hate me. I never thought of trying to change the way you think of me, even today. However you usually describe me, you shall write the same tomorrow. Anyway, I will not read any of it. I’ll be retired tomorrow.”

Twain spread his hands. He saw many of his enemies in the crowd, such as Carl Spicer and Christopher Beesley. He would no longer bicker with and hold grudges against these people. He did not need to create any more hype. He did not need to attract the firepower of the media to relieve the pressure on the players either. From today onward, he could finally completely unload the heavy burden from his shoulders and sleep through the night peacefully.

“I just want to say goodbye to all of you.”

After saying this, Twain actually stood up and left!

The reporters panicked. How could they let him go just like that? They’ve prepared so many questions. How were they going to ask him once he left? Once he was out of the door, he was no longer the Nottingham Forest manager. He would be out of the reporters’ reach.

A group of reporters got up from their seats, kicked over chairs, and tried to stop Twain from leaving.

“I still have questions, Mr. Twain!” Christopher Beesley held up his notebook and shouted. The notebook was full of words. “You can’t just leave like this. The press conference isn’t over yet!”

“I already said it was over,” Twain said to the Liverpool Echo reporter who had wished him dead with a smile.

“But we have the right to ask questions. You are a public figure...” Beesley was still making the final struggle.

“I have the right to refuse to answer.”

Twain gave a shrug.

Carl Spicer had initially wanted to shout a few words. However, after seeing Beesley's fate, his lips quivered for a while and he made no sound.

Twain did not leave directly from the side door. He walked down the steps and toward the main door from the middle passage of the press seats, intending to leave directly from there – it was closer to the stadium gate.

The reporters got up one by one. However, no one really dared to go up and stop him to ask questions.

On the contrary, everyone deliberately or unintentionally gave way to him.

Just as he was about to get to the door, Pierce Brosnan suddenly shouted out, "Goodbye, Tony!"

He raised his hand and stopped in the midair, wanting to wave goodbye to Twain before he realized that Twain had his back toward him and could not see.

Twain, who heard him, did not look back and did not stop. He just raised his right hand, waved, and opened the door to walk out.

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The lobby at the main entrance of the stadium was through a short corridor. Twain unexpectedly found a man there.

"Mr. Fasal? Aren't you supposed to be with Shania?"

The smiling man standing in front of Twain was Shania's agent, Fasal. No wonder Twain would be surprised and asked him the question. As long as Shania was traveling for work, Fasal would always keep close to her. Why was he here now in front of him? Could it be that Shania finished her work early and came back?

Thinking of it, Twain looked behind Fasal, hoping to see his wife.

"No need to look, Mr. Twain," Fasal smiled and said to him, "Shania is still in Paris. If nothing out of the ordinary happens, she should have just finished her last runway show."

"Then you..." Twain grew puzzled.

"I'm here to tell you the good news. Since Shania can't leave yet, I'll be the one to do it. I am afraid you won't believe it coming from another person."

At this point, Fasal handed Twain a piece of paper.

"The results of the hospital's checkup."

Twain was baffled as he took the paper. With one glance at it, he saw his wife's name written in the box of the person receiving the checkup.

Before he could continue to read, Fasal's voice sounded again, "Congratulations, Mr. Twain. Your wife is pregnant."

Instead of jerking his head up to look at Fasal, Twain lowered his head and stared blankly at the printed page. He could not believe the news he had heard.

“Two months ago, Shania went for a checkup. She’s pregnant. But she did not tell you yet so as not to affect your job and left the news until now to give you a retirement gift.”

Fasal noticed that Twain’s hand, which was holding the checkup sheet, was shaking. He suddenly remembered that the man in front of him had had a heart attack before. What if he could not bear the excitement of the news and had another one?

Fasal dared not think of such a thing. He hurriedly called out, “Mr. Twain, are you all right?”

Twain then looked up and glanced at Fasal. He opened his mouth and said, “I’m... good... very good...”

Having said this, he caught his breath and continued, “I’m fine, thank you for telling me such good news, Mr. Fasal.”

Fasal had thought that Twain would be so excited and say a lot more. He did not expect Twain to finish this sentence and want to go.

Instinctively, he asked, “Where are you going, Mr. Twain?”

“I’m going home,” Twain said as he walked out of the hall.

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“I think the whole police force of Nottingham is here!”

A fan, who was stopped outside by a human wall made by the policemen, complained.

These people could not be blamed for complaining. The fans originally planned to get up close and personal with their idol. However, the policemen stood guard and forcibly pushed back the fans, making way for a five-meter-wide passageway from the stadium gate all the way to the parking lot.

Learning the lesson from the John Lennon incident, they could not guarantee that there would not be a fanatical and crazy fan who would abruptly carry out a murder and make Twain stay for good just because he was unwilling to let him leave. It was no joke, so the local police force kicked into high gear for fear that another Mark David Chapman would appear among the fans.

When Twain appeared in front of the crowd, the fans in the square burst into loud cheers. They created an uproar and the policemen present were overwhelmed by the crowd and struggled.

Twain was not surprised to see the scene. He stood on the steps and waved to the excited fans. Then he lowered his head and walked down the steps through the already crooked passageway outside.

The BBC 5 station broadcasted the scene to the world.

Amid the cheers of tens of thousands of people, their king strode down the steps of the throne and walked down a red carpet outside the palace. He left the crown on the throne. The magnificent palace did not give him the slightest regret, and he turned a deaf ear to the voices of his subjects.

In the raging red crowd he, clad in black, was so calm. He folded the note in his hand, carefully put it in his pocket and patted it gently. Then he took out his sunglasses, put them on, and sauntered slowly through the excited crowd.

The 16 championship trophies, the ups and downs of the last 16 years, the days of being revered by millions of people, as well as endless arguments surrounding him, were left behind step by step.

More than a thousand years ago, the Roman conqueror returned home after victories in wars.

He would enjoy the honor and glory of a triumphant return and a moving parade.

There would be trumpeters, musicians, and exotic beasts from the lands he conquered.

There would be chariots full of treasures and confiscated weapons.

The conqueror rode the chariot to return victorious.

The prisoners of war sat in front of the chariots in chains.

His children, dressed in white robes, stood with him in the chariot or rode horses next to him.

A slave, holding a golden crown, stood behind the conqueror.

He whispered a warning in his ear:

All glories are as transient as the fleeting clouds.

Chapter 1033: Epilogue: When I'm Sixty Years Old

The yellow light from the crystal chandeliers on the ceiling could not light up the bar completely. However, in the constantly rainy late autumn, it could bring a hint of warmth to the heart.

Many people had come to the bar with the old-fashioned deco. They gathered in groups of three or four to chat about the day or perhaps other things. However, everyone glanced at the door as if waiting for someone.

Soothing music was playing in the bar. It was an old song, the Beatles' When I'm Sixty-Four.

When I get older losing my hair.

Many years from now.

Will you still be sending me a Valentine?

Birthday greetings, bottle of wine.

...

The bar was not loud, so the Beatles' soft voices were clear. Everyone kept their voices down and chatted in low tones.

Outside the door hung a sign – Closed for Business.

With a head of white hair, the somewhat hunched Kenny Burns sat behind a somewhat damaged wooden bar, holding a glass in one hand and a towel in the other.

His eyes looked straight ahead, through the old-styled glass window covered with a layer of condensation, to see outside.

A construction site had already broken ground across the street. The white fence was pushed to the ground and it became so dirty that its original appearance could not be discerned. An excavator was parked on the side of the road. The rain was a bit heavy, and work has stopped on the construction site.

It was still a row of two-story residential buildings a year ago.

It was said that a big supermarket would be built here in two years. Behind the Forest Bar, there was also a construction site where several high-rise buildings would be built for new offices. Wilford had become the new development center in Nottingham.

The bar on the corner stood alone for a long time between the two construction sites, fully surrounded by construction machinery. It was like a solitary island surrounded by mechanical monsters.

There was a roar of a car engine outside the door, followed by the sound of a car stopping. Hearing the sound, the people in the room stopped talking and turned their gazes to the entrance.

The person who pushed the door open was a woman. Everyone was a little disappointed at first, but then they all stood up.

“Madam,” They all deferentially greeted the woman who only stood at the door.

“You guys gave me a shock, suddenly standing up like this...” The speaker pushed the door open but did not come in right away. Instead, she was waiting for someone.

Seeing her like this, everyone waited as well. Each person stretched their neck out and gazed outside the door, like ducks hanging from the crossbar.

The second person who appeared at the door was Wood. Wood took over the woman’s job and held the door. The woman stepped outside.

Although they had not seen the man yet, everyone heard the familiar and somewhat hoarse voice.

“Don’t grasp onto me. Do I look like I can’t walk?”

“All right, all right, you can lead me along if you want. Just hold my arm and it will do. But don’t make it look like you’re lending a hand to support a patient...”

Before the voice faded away, its owner appeared at the door.

When the slightly hunched figure came in, everyone in the bar opened their mouths and shouted, “Boss!”

Seeing the scene in front of him, the aging man opened his mouth and laughed. He raised his hands and said, “Long time no see, guys.”

The whole bar was waiting for the man – Tony Twain was finally here.

The woman supporting him was naturally his wife, Shania.

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Twain took off the old-fashioned wide-brimmed hat he was wearing, and Wood tried to catch it, but Shania got to it first. Next, a gray scarf and black windbreaker were also handed to her. Shania went to hang up the clothes, and Twain sat down in his chair, surrounded by people. He raised the glass of soda water on the table and said, "I'm not drinking any alcohol. You all do as you'd like."

Following which, everyone came up, wanting to talk to Twain.

The first person to succeed was Kenny Burns, the owner of the bar, a man older than everyone present.

He walked slowly toward Twain, pulled out a chair and sat down. Upon seeing this, everyone discreetly drew back.

"Look at you, getting so old," Twain scoffed at Burns.

"You're no better, Tony," Burns looked at the man opposite. His hair was much whiter than before, but he was in good spirits. Twain's complexion was ruddy, and he appeared stronger than himself.

However, on second thought, he himself was 75 years old while Tony was only 60, 15 years younger than he was. Thinking back, was he not full of vigor, hale and hearty when he was 60 years old? People would always grow old. It was the law of nature.

"I almost lost my way coming here. The area has changed a lot. Ha!" Twain laughed.

When he sat in the car on the way here before, he started to laugh at the sight of the environment and Burns' bar. Neither Shania nor Wood, who was driving the car, knew why he was laughing. Of course, they would not find out. They might never know for the rest of their lives. Seeing the Forest bar surrounded by construction machinery and a completely dug out construction site, the word "holdout" naturally sprang into Twain's mind. In Twain's view, Kenny Burns was clearly the holdout here. The buildings adjacent to the bar were all demolished, only the bar remained. However, it was said that it could not escape the fate of being torn down.

"It's a re-planning of the area," Burns said as he looked out of the window at the excavator. "By the time it is over, my bar will be closed."

Twain was not surprised. He nodded and said, "And what will you do?"

"I'll go home."

Hearing him say that, Twain paused for a moment and then realized that Burns' home was not here, but in Scotland. He had lived here for decades and this made people think he had always been from Nottingham...

The City Ground stadium was torn down and the Wilford training base was also demolished. Now even the bar had to be torn down. Everything that had witnessed the past years disappeared one by one before his eyes. Twain suddenly became quiet.

Burns knew what Twain was thinking. He lightly patted the table. "Fortunately, bars and pitches can be torn down, but memories can't be taken away."

Once he said it, there was a smile on Twain's face. He thought of a song. Burns certainly had not heard the song, but the meaning was exactly the same. He nodded and said, "The memories are still there. Where are John and the others?"

He also remembered the fans.

"It's not as crazy as it used to be. After all, they're older. Now it's their children's turn to be crazy. It's just that they don't come to my place. The young people say my place looks gloomy and not suitable for young people."

Twain chuckled. Burns' bar did look old and dilapidated. Even though he kept it clean and tidy, he could not get rid of the feeling of a yellowing photograph and old film. It did not change much from when he first came here, except that there were more group photographs of himself leading the team to win championship titles during those years. However, those group photographs now looked a bit faded.

"I haven't seen them in a long time..."

Twain muttered to himself.

Today was his first visit to the bar in ten years. There was a sense that things had remained the same, but people had changed.

Since his retirement ten years ago, he had traveled with his wife all over the world. They had lived in the West Coast of the United States for a while and spent some time in Nottingham. They even lived in China and people who did not know them thought they had been in China for many years.

As the media had stated, Twain's retirement life was quite carefree. If it had not been for a problem with his health early last year, he might have been able to continue to live a life free of worries.

"They would sometimes ask about you," Burns said as he looked out of the window at the excavator. "A bunch of the old guys would get together and talk about you. I had seen John admonish his son, slap him across his head and scold him for bullsh*tting about things he hadn't experienced, ha..."

Twain was curious about what John's son had said.

"It was nothing. John just said Dunn did just as well as you."

Hearing these, Twain laughed mischievously.

"John scolded him for that. Dunn only won two championships in ten years. It's a far cry as compared to your 16 years and 16 championships. How could he do as well as you? The old guys always like to remember the past..."

"Wrong. When they start to recall the past, it means they are old," Twain corrected.

"Aren't we reminiscing about the past now?"

"That means we're old, too," Twain replied.

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Pepe and Piqué got hold of a few people from the defensive line of that time and came up to take a group picture with Twain. Twain told them he had his own bronze statue outside the Crimson Stadium, which was completed four years ago. Pepe said that with the real man in front of them, why would they go and take a picture with the statue? His words were widely endorsed by the guys. After putting it to a vote, Twain became the top candidate for group photographs.

Several people stood in front of the camera, crowding Twain in the middle, and smiled brilliantly under the flash.

With the help of his grandfather, Piqué joined the Barcelona club's board of directors and was expected to become the club's president.

Pepe, who traveled between Brazil and Portugal, had opened restaurants in both locations. He no longer worked in a football-related field. Pepe looked a little thicker than before with a round stomach and stood out in the crowd. His face was even rounder.

Gareth Bale, Rafinha, Akinfeev, as well as Pepe and Piqué, the Forest team's main defensive line in its heyday, gathered around Twain, giving a sense that they had gone back in time. The Russian had returned to his native country and became the goalkeeper coach of the FC Lokomotiv Moscow team. He was currently the goalkeeper coach of the Russian national team. Most players chose football-related jobs when they retired.

Rafinha, who was hired by Arsenal, became Arsenal's football scout in Brazil, in charge of unearthing Brazilian talent for the club.

Bale joined the Football Association of Wales. He became the most successful player in Welsh football after Giggs. It only made sense for him to enter the Football Association. Now the naughty appearance of the "little monkey" of that time could not be glimpsed in Bale. Impeccably attired, he was infinitely closer to looking like an official.

However, when Twain called him "little monkey", he still happily answered to it.

After the people from the rear defensive line left, a few people from the midfield approached. Twain was surprised and asked, "Did you all plan this? Are you all coming in waves?"

Everyone laughed and gathered around him. They took another group photograph.

When Ribéry left the Forest team at the time under the cloud of suspicion that he had run away, a clash erupted when everyone met on the pitch later. Now, when the past was mentioned, it felt more like "all was forgiven and forgotten with a smile". It was just that his smile was still ugly to look at as the scars on his face were still there. As he got older, he was less scary, however. He now ran his own agency and became an agent for a number of French players. He was considered a successful businessman. In the Nottingham Forest team, there was currently a French player he had introduced as an agent.

The two men took the first turn and then everyone came up to take photographs with Twain. There were group shots and single shots. Twain took advantage of the time during the photo-taking with them to chat briefly and catch up with everyone.

Those guys, who shook up stadiums and went on a rampage in the European football world, had all retired and became portly middle-aged men. Some of them were still in touch, while the other people

only met again because of the gathering. Most had other careers and lives. But today, in the bar which was about to be torn down, they had regained their original identity as Nottingham Forest players under the command of Tony Twain.

After the group photographs, they continued to chat together in groups of three or four, recounting the football events they missed for many years or chatting about those extraordinary old days on the field.

Twain did not participate. He sat with his wife, Shania, quietly looking at everything in front of his eyes and feeling deeply satisfied.

He suddenly remembered a long-forgotten past matter. He usually did not think of it at all.

If he remembered correctly, it was in May 2004, when he was here for a similar party. However, the leading characters at the time were Brian Clough and his men. They were celebrating the 15th anniversary of winning the Champions League. At the time, watching those people talking arrogantly together and recalling the times during the 70s, he felt very envious as an outsider. He had a fantasy in his mind that one day he, too, would be able to sit here with his former men and remember the days of being the king of Europe.

Now the fantasy came true. The setting remained the same, but with different people.

As the assistant manager for the championship team, Dunn was also invited today. He was now the manager of Nottingham Forest and had taken a special leave of absence in order to attend the gathering. At this moment, he was sitting aside, chatting with his old colleagues. Twain found him. He did not know if he would share the same vision of passing time at this point.

He got up and walked over slowly. He sat down beside the coaches.

“Guys, I’m so glad to see you’re all here.”

Everyone got up to show respect in succession when they saw Twain coming over. They were only seated after Twain sat down.

Twain glanced around and asked, “Where’s Freddy?”

“Oh, him. He said he considers himself a player and ran off to talk about the old times with his old teammates,” David Kerslake, who was older than Twain, pointed sideways, and Twain glanced over. Sure enough, Eastwood was sitting down with Ribéry and talking about something.

He grinned and turned his gaze back.

“You’re all old.”

“Aren’t you as well, Tony?” The big guy answered him.

Most of these people continued their previous work in the Forest team, which was arguably the group with the least changes. David Kerslake was still the assistant manager for the Forest team, while Eastwood became the head of the youth camp.

“How are your two daughters, Tony?” Someone in the crowd asked.

As soon as Twain heard the question, he became animated. He puffed his chest and said proudly with his head held high, "Teresa is a fine girl. As for Liv ... Fortunately, she looks more like her mother."

There was a burst of laughter in the crowd.

Teresa was already 14 years old, delicate and pretty. Whenever he looked at her, Twain felt sorry in his heart for Teresa's birth parents – how could they bear to abandon such a beautiful and lovely daughter?

Liv was Twain's youngest daughter, the baby that Shania gave birth to during the year of his retirement. She was now nearly ten years old. Unlike the gentle and quiet Teresa, Liv was lively and active, with her character like a typical Western girl, quite like her mother.

To his delight, Liv and Teresa had a good relationship. Liv did not snub or bully her gentle and quiet, shy and introverted older sister. This might have something to do with the example that he and Shania led by – after Liv was born, Teresa was worried that she would lose her parents' love, but the couple reassured her with more love.

To his annoyance, Liv preferred the sunny West Coast of the United States as compared to cold Britain. Her character was a bit like an American and she was overly lively. To make the little girl happy, the family spent more time away from the United Kingdom, so Twain gave up his job at the BBC 5 station. Now he just published his own articles in newspapers and online, but he did not rely on it for his livelihood.

There was a selfish motive deep down in Twain's heart that he had never told anyone. He wanted his two daughters to like China, so it was the place where he spent the most time in, other than the United States and Britain. He missed China intensely, especially as he got increasingly older. Perhaps his Chinese spirit deep in his bones was causing it. Perhaps it was as the saying that "in old age, an expatriate returns home"...

In any case, these two treasures, his daughters, were Twain's source of greatest pride and accomplishment. For him, the brilliant achievements of his 16-year coaching career and all his important championship trophies had long become obsolete and were not worth mentioning anymore. Perhaps the Forest fans and club players felt proud of the trophies that Tony Twain had once won. Perhaps many people still relished the memories of Twain's 16 years of legendary experience. Or maybe the media were now complaining that the current star players were all clowns playing to the gallery while missing the most annoying 'clown' of all ... but Twain did not care. He felt that the greatest honors and championship trophies of his life were to have a happy family, a loving wife, and two healthy and beautiful daughters. When he transmigrated 26 years ago, he had lost his family. However, at the time he did not care because he felt that he was young, and it was time to focus on his career. Now he felt like he had gone one big circle. What was the ultimate purpose of his career? To let his family live worry-free, to live peacefully with his loved ones...

God had let him understand it in the year he turned 50 years old, and it took him another ten years to cherish it even more.

Nothing in life was more important than his family. It would be so until his death.

Twain was excited to tell the old guys he had not seen for years how lovely and intelligent his two daughters were.

Indeed, he was showing off and flaunting his own family. However, no one thought he should not do it.

Looking at the way he was glowing with health and vigor now, the same man in high spirits of more than 20 years ago appeared in everyone's sight. No one felt sorry about it.

How amazing it was.

David Kerslake held up his glass to Twain and said, "Seeing how happy you are, I..." He looked back at his old colleagues around him and turned to look at Twain again to add, "No, we're all very happy."

Twain raised the soda water in his hand and paid tribute to the old men who had raised their glasses one by one.

"Thank you all."

There was another man who toasted Twain, with whom Twain was familiar. However, he had not spoken at all. There was a little tiredness in the corners of his eyes and some graying of the hair on both sides of his temples. The wrinkles on his forehead were noticeably more prominent. Seeing him gave Twain an illusion of the reverse flow of space-time and mirror reflection. He saw how he would have appeared in his 40s had he not transmigrated.

This was the current manager of Nottingham Forest, the Chinese man, Dunn. It was his sworn brother, whom he had exchanged souls and bodies with.

When he found Twain looking at him, Dunn returned a smile.

He moved over and sat down beside Dunn. He lowered his voice and asked a question in Dunn's ear, "Are Pa and Ma doing well?"

Dunn nodded imperceptibly. "They are very well."

With the answer, Twain raised his head again and there was a smile on his face. Then the two men looked at each other without saying a word.

Despite traveling all over the world, Twain still paid attention to matters that had to do with the Forest team. Nonetheless, he had never evaluated the Forest team in any public forum. Now facing Forest's current manager, he was still the same and did not mention anything.

It was like when he first coached the Forest team. No matter whether he did well or not, Brian Clough always did not say anything. Other than to tell him not to be too stressed or overly proud, he would not mention anything else about his achievements.

He was very immature at the time. However, Dunn was not immature now. He knew what to do and what not to do. Didn't he do a pretty good job at the Forest team in the last ten years? Although he only won two league titles, he completely solidified the foundation that Twain did not cover before.

Under Dunn's leadership, Nottingham Forest was gradually breaking away from under his influence. Burns' story was a good reflection of that. A new generation of football fans felt that Dunn was doing a good job. Wasn't it the best reward for his ten-year coaching career?

This was good. He was not required to come out and comment to show the outside world the influence he still had on Nottingham Forest. Retired people should stay retired. Otherwise, it would have been better to continue coaching. Twain disdained the cowardly behavior of wanting to be the top guy at a football club and yet worrying about failures at coaching.

Therefore, while they looked at each other without saying a word, Twain did not say “you have done well” or “you’re not good enough.” Dunn, too, would not take the initiative to talk about his coaching achievements to Twain. He had his self-respect.

Twain raised the glass in his hand to Dunn and said, “Happy 10th anniversary, Dunn.”

Dunn returned the toast and said, “I wish you good health, Tony.”

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As the sky darkened and the rain outside got heavier, the enthusiasm in the bar was exceptionally warm. Everyone was chatting animatedly and the noise in the bar was gradually getting louder, drowning out the sound of the music. Not only Twain, but some of the other people had not seen each other for years. They were also busy with their lives and careers after their retirement and usually did not have the opportunity to get together to chat like this.

The gathering on the anniversary of the five Champions League winners gave them such an opportunity. Of course, they had to get hold of the friends of yesteryear to have a good chat, ask about their lives over the years, reminiscence the years spent together in competition, chitchat about interesting people and things. Even the feuds of those years had become exceptionally warm memories in the context of this afternoon.

Under such circumstances, Twain had decided to go home.

He tapped the table in front of his wife and said to her, “Let’s go back.”

Shania was a little surprised and asked, “Don’t you want to stay a little longer? Don’t you have a lot to say to the old guys?”

“It started out that way, but after I saw them, I suddenly had nothing to say. It’s nice to just look at them. Anyway, I have seen enough and I’m a little tired.”

Shania knew that Twain was really tired, so she nodded and agreed. “Let’s say our goodbyes to them before we leave.”

The two of them stood up and suddenly caught the attention of all the people present.

“He’s still in recovery from a serious illness, so he doesn’t have as much energy as you guys,” Shania told everyone.

Twain pursed his lips and said, “Don’t listen to her. My illness was something that happened last year. I’m in good health now.”

“Madam’s right, boss. You have to listen to her,” someone in the crowd said.

“Yeah, Tony. Take care of your health so that we can get together again in ten years.” Everyone reached out and waved to Twain as they made plans for another reunion ten years from now.

“Okay, we’ll get together again in ten years.” Twain put on his coat with Shania’s help and wrapped his scarf around his neck. He finally took the hat, held it in his hand, and waved at everyone.

George Wood, who had been talking to his teammates before, squeezed in from the crowd and said, “I’ll take you guys home.”

Shania shook her head and said, “I’ll drive. It’s not easy for you to get together with everyone. Just stay to have fun a little longer.”

George Wood retired four years ago at the age of 38. As the greatest team captain in Nottingham Forest’s history, his retirement was almost comparable to the departure of Twain. The scene was so sensational and moving that a tough guy like Wood had tears in his eyes when it was time to say goodbye and even choked with emotion several times. Twain was in the stadium box and witnessed everything with his own eyes. His eyes also moistened as 60,000 people chanted “Saint George.”

George Wood’s retirement fully ended Nottingham Forest’s golden age. The last player Twain was familiar with had left the football world stage. From then on, one could only look back on history when Nottingham Forest’s most glorious period was mentioned.

In the summer after his retirement, Wood married Vivian, the nurse whom he had been in love with for more than six years, and formed a new family. Now their child was already three years old and they lived a happy life.

Now Wood looked like a typical steady family man. His immature manner was completely gone.

After Wood heard Shania’s words, he turned his eyes toward Twain.

Twain nodded and said, “Listen to her, George. Even I have to listen to her, ha-ha!”

The big man laughed again. Wood gave up and stood aside. It was only when Twain passed by him that he said in a low voice, “I’ll come to see you again in a few days.”

“Well, bring your wife along with you as well as your son,” Twain nodded gently.

As he walked to the door with Shania’s help, Twain put on his hat and once he was properly dressed, he raised his hand to wave to everyone as he said, “No need to see me off. It’s raining heavily outside. Goodbye, guys. It’s nice to see you all still healthy and active. I’m really happy, ha-ha!”

Amid the laughter, Twain turned around, and Shania held up an umbrella for him, sheltering both of them underneath. The two of them stepped into the rain. The rain striking the umbrella made a crackling sound and the water accumulated at the roadside reflected the two of them. The crowd gathered around and saw that Shania was holding an umbrella in one hand while supporting Twain. It was somewhat inconvenient to open the door with one hand. Several people rushed out of the crowd to come forward and help. Eventually Wood grabbed the umbrella from Shania while Bale supported Twain. Eastwood opened the car door for Twain and said, “Chief, please get in the car.”

Shania did not have anything to do. She stood next to Twain and smiled at him. “You see, what a grand farewell ceremony.”

Twain turned to look at Eastwood, who opened the car door for him, and smiled. Then he looked back at the door of the bar, which was already crowded with people. Everyone stood under the eaves and looked at him.

Twain waved to them and motioned for them to go back. Then he turned and got into the car.

Eastwood closed the car door for Twain while Wood sheltered Shania with the umbrella and took her around to the door on the side of the driver's seat to help her into the car.

Shania rolled down the car window and reached out to say goodbye to them. "Goodbye, thank you, everyone!"

Everyone waved and said goodbye in return.

Then the car started up and slowly wove through the parked construction machinery on both sides of the road, splashing the roadside water. As it drove away from everyone's view, only the yellow taillights loomed in the rain and finally, even they disappeared in the rain and fog.

The rain was still falling as it pitter-pattered on the ground. The players still gathered at the door, looking at the direction in which the boss disappeared.

After a while, Bale asked, "The boss left just like that?" There seemed to be some disbelief in his tone.

"Well, he's gone," Wood replied, "Let us head inside and continue."

Despite having said that, he did not move. Everyone likewise just stood at the door to continue looking at the direction in which Twain left.

Burns did not follow outside. He was in the bar and watched the scene of Twain leaving in the car through the windows covered with condensation. People squeezed outside and the bar, which was hot and noisy just now, suddenly emptied out and quieted down.

The music playing in the stereo had just finished a loop and gone back to the song in the beginning.

You'll be older too, and if you say the word,

I could stay with you.

I could be handy, mending a fuse,

When your lights have gone.

You can knit a sweater by the fireside.

Sunday mornings go for a ride,

Doing the garden, digging the weeds,

Who could ask for more?

Will you still need me, will you still feed me?

When I'm sixty-four...

[The End]