

## Champions 411

### Chapter 411: The Number You Have Dialed Is Not in Service Part 2

"If I didn't watch videos all day at home, you'd be in a lot more trouble now." Dunn finally spoke, but his words surprised Twain.

"Why?"

"Because the media would not be speculating about you and Gloria, but about whether you and I..." Dunn paused before he looked at Twain and said, "are a couple."

Twain suddenly jumped away from Dunn. "I'm good... I'm okay."

Dunn ignored Twain's exaggerated display. He turned on the television again, but Twain did not stop him this time.

Twain sat on the couch and picked up the phone again. He looked at it and put it down.

With his back towards him, Dunn suddenly said, "I'm not optimistic about the team's game in Milan."

"Because I'm upset and distracted?"

"Ah, you know."

Twain did not speak. He just looked at his cell phone, lost in thought. It was just groundless gossip. His conscience was clear. What was he upset and distracted about?

I shouldn't be upset about this meaningless matter, because it's nothing at all. Even though I have a favorable impression of Gloria, it's just because I have favorable impressions of all beautiful women...

However, Twain thought about his recent conduct. It was as if he had leaped high after being stabbed in the rear. He was really somewhat upset and distracted.

But his emotional outburst had only happened this evening.

It was because Shania had turned off her phone.

"Hey, Dunn." Twain leaned on the couch and looked up at the ceiling. He said to Dunn next to him, "What did you think after you saw those photos in the newspapers?"

"I was a little surprised."

"Surprised at what happened between Gloria and me... Is that it?"

"No, I was surprised that you didn't go out to dinner with the whole crew, but alone with Gloria."

Twain had told Dunn that he was having dinner with the crew that day. Dunn's understanding was in line with Twain's desire. But now it was somewhat ironic to hear Dunn say that.

Twain smiled bitterly, "I just wanted to avoid some unnecessary trouble. I never thought... but trouble still found me in the end."

“What’s the trouble? Isn’t it nice to be lovers with Gloria?” Dunn asked in return.

Twain froze for a moment, and then shook his head, “No, that’s not it. I admit Gloria is beautiful. But, how do I say it... I don’t have any special feelings for her. Other than the fact that I think she is very beautiful and a nice person, I don’t have other ideas. You know? it’s just like when you see a beautiful girl on the street, you’ll give her a few more looks, perhaps you may want to sleep with her, like a one-night stand. But the word ‘couple’ never comes to mind.”

Dunn was silent for a moment. “I don’t know much about that.”

“Dunn, between a man and a woman... There are some other things in addition to the mutual physical attraction. That kind of thing is very mysterious; I can’t tell you exactly what it is in words. Anyways, there is no such thing between Gloria and me. It’s that simple.”

Twain picked up his cell phone and dialed Shania’s number again. Without exception, it was still “the number you have dialed is not in service.”

This time he did not fling his cell phone but gently put it down.

Dunn suddenly spoke up again. “What about you and Sophia and Shania?”

Twain glanced back at Dunn and found that he had not turned his head to look at him. Instead, he continued to stare at the game videos on the television screen.

He was somewhat discomfited by this question because he did not know what to say.

Just at that moment, his cell phone rang. He heaved a sigh of relief on the inside. He just grabbed his phone without even checking the caller before he answered.

“Hello? Miss Gloria!” Twain sounded pleasantly surprised. When he heard the name, Dunn finally shifted his gaze from the television screen to look at Twain.

Gloria sounded full of apologies on the other end. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Twain. I was busy at work this whole time, so I did not turn on my public cell phone. I only just found out about everything.”

Twain opened his mouth but did not know what to say to her. In the end, he suddenly laughed. “I’m afraid I have nothing more to say about it other than to laugh.”

Gloria also laughed. “But it feels nice to have a “romance” in the media with you. Actually, you’re a very good lover.”

Twain could almost see Gloria standing on the opposite side, playfully winking at him.

He gave a hollow laugh. This woman does not shy away from controversies. She appears as if she was still very happy to play along.

“But please be assured, Mr. Twain, I will make a public statement to clarify our relationship. I also have friends in the British media who will help to speak on our behalf. It’s not going to affect your life. But, Mr. Twain, since you don’t have a girlfriend, I’m sure that it has not caused you any trouble, has it?”

Twain thought that even though he did not have a girlfriend, it had actually caused trouble. He thought of Shania, who had turned off her phone. He did not know the reason behind Shania's switched-off phone. Perhaps it was due to work, but he still worried about it.

"I don't know what kind of impact it's had on my life, but it has caused problems for my team. We just lost to Liverpool in the league tournament. Do you know that?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. But it's not because of me, is it? I heard you only sent half of your main force."

As he listened to the two people, Dunn realized that the conversation had no further developments, so he re-focused on the game videos.

Next, Gloria told Twain that she had called to apologize for the trouble the matter had caused him, and also to discuss the shoot in Milan. After all, they still need to cooperate for one more game.

At first, during this sensitive time, Twain should reduce the chances of him appearing and interacting with Gloria in public. But now Twain decided to do the opposite. At a time like this, he should meet with Gloria all the more. Hence, the shoot would be carried out according to the original plan, and not be affected by the incident.

Gloria's statement might mark the end of the media hype about their relationship. Twain believed that Gloria was capable of that. But his headache was far from over.

After he ended his call with Gloria, Twain dialed Shania's phone number once again. He still received that message. "The number you have dialed is..."

Twain did not wait for the message to finish before he hung up the phone.

It seemed that the Milan trip was not going to be easy.

#### **Chapter 412: The Night Before A Tough Fight Part 1**

With a streak of unease, Tang En led the team to their arrival in Milan, Italy.

What prevented his mood from becoming worse was that practically nobody in Milan cared about nonsensical topics like Gloria's relationship with him. The questions raised by the reporters were largely related to the match. After all, this was Italy. The Italian media was not in the least concerned with the personal life of an Englishman.

On his end, Tang En did not care what their lack of concern stemmed from. What was most important was that he no longer had to entertain extremely annoying questions. He could finally settle his heart down to prepare for the match.

But his heart still could not settle.

Shania continued to be uncontactable; her phone was off when he tried calling, and she was offline on MSN.

Tang En knew that this was not the time to be distracted. Inter Milan could not be easily dispatched. Even if he was unable to contact Shania, he could only suppress his worries and prepare for the Champions League.

Everything proceeded as per the procedure: getting used to the grounds of Saint Siro Stadium and carrying out their usual, daily training.

Back in England, Gloria's interview was published on various media outlets. In the interview, Gloria personally denied having any relationship with Tang En that went "beyond normal friends and a working relationship". She did not forget to berate England's tabloids for being "silly." Regarding their meal together, Gloria said, "If any man inviting a woman to eat together is her lover, then, in this world, I think there are few husbands who don't have mistresses." About the act of affection, Gloria's explanation was, "Mr. Tony and I are friends. Between friends, I believe that it's very normal to occasionally have some actions intimating affection. If you always maintain five meters distance from your friends, be extremely formal whenever you speak to them, and act polite and cordial as if you're wearing a mask, then please don't use your alien standards to judge others."

Gloria's retaliation was very effective. In addition, The Sun did not have any further evidence, other than that single act of affection, to prove that Tang En and Gloria were in an intimate relationship. They had done nothing like going to a hotel on their own. If they had done anything scandalous, the photographer following them the entire time needed to show photo evidence of it. As it was, there was nothing except a few pictures of them having a meal together. What did it show? It showed that The Sun had nothing else up their sleeves. If they could not bring out any fresh photographs of scenes proving Tang En and Gloria had other acts of intimacy, or those of their sexual relations, then the topic that The Sun had stirred up was about to return to still waters.

Nottingham Forest's trip to Milan for their match was perhaps an opportunity; one that would allow the media to regain their initiative. Everyone knew that Gloria's film crew would certainly go to Milan and film the match live. In that case, the two leading characters of the story were sure to meet again. At that time, they only had to send someone to keep an eye on them to see if they were hiding something.

Italy's professional sports media was all focused on the quarter-finals of the Champions League. England, who had no professional football media coverage, instead hastily sent out to Milan huge amounts of professional coverage for gossip and entertainment.

While the Italians were keen to know the match results of Nottingham Forest against Inter Milan, the English were more concerned about Tony and the true relationship between him and Europe's beautiful anchor, Clarice Gloria.

Just a day after Tang En's team arrived in Milan, they were conducting training in Saint Siro Stadium to get used to the grounds when Gloria brought her film crew to the location to commence filming. Under the gaze of numerous English media representatives who were present, they set up their equipment to proceed with the shooting.

As Gloria smiled at those who cast curious gazes towards her, Tang En led the team in their training. While it could not be observed from his appearance, he could not help but wonder, in the depths of his heart, what Shania was doing.

What a mess...

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The next day was match day. Although Tang En did not set any prohibition from going out the night before the match, all the players stayed in the hotel anyway. Their entertainment was to go downstairs to the lounge and play billiards or ping-pong.

The managerial team, as well, did not stay up the whole night analyzing their opponents. As a well-known European team, Inter Milan had long ago been analyzed to bits by Tang En and the rest.

Unlike less renowned teams, information for a powerhouse such as Inter Milan was collected with ease.

As a result, when night came, the managers were left with nothing much to do.

Kerslake had originally intended on inviting Tang En downstairs to the bar to sit, drink, and chat.

Tang En lay on the bed clicking the television remote in boredom. It looked as if he had no intentions of getting up and out.

"I'm a little tired. I'll watch some television and then rest, David."

Kerslake saw how unenergetic Tang En was and sighed. He shrugged.

"Alright. Rest early then. Tomorrow, we'll be having a... tough battle." He then turned and left, closing the door behind him.

Although Tang En's mouth answered "yes," his gaze never left the television screen as his hands mechanically went on pressing "next channel" on the remote. All kinds of programs showed up on the fluorescent screen: news, movies, soap operas, talk shows, sports competitions, mature programs... and fashion shows.

Hold on.

A fashion show?

Tang En froze for two seconds, stopping the finger that had been moving toward the "next channel" button. He abruptly came to his senses and hastily pressed back to the channel. When the screen returned to the models on the runway, Tang En only had time to see the back of a person walking to the backstage.

Despite just seeing the back, Tang En did not think he had made a mistake recognizing the person.

But this program... Tang En noticed a "LIVE" symbol on the top right corner of the screen.

Subtitles appeared at the bottom immediately after, stating the event today to be a new product launch of an internationally-renowned brand, CD.

Tang En suddenly launched off the bed.

Address! What's the address?

Tang En was about to dash out the door when he realized he did not know the exact venue of where the fashion show was being held.

Riddled with anxiety, he walked in circles around his room. The models that appeared on the television screen were unfamiliar faces now. Suddenly, Tang En remembered someone who might have the means of finding out where this new product launch was being held. He dug out his cellphone and called Clarice Gloria.

“CD’s new product launch?” Gloria felt odd that Tang En was showing such sudden interest in that.

“I remember you as a person who’s at a complete loss when it comes to fashion, and has zero interest in it.”

“Uh... I’m going there to look for someone,” Tang En explained to Gloria as he kept glancing back at the television screen, hoping to see that familiar silhouette again.

“Hmm... alright. Wait for a while. I’ll call my friend and ask.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll wait.”

“I’ll have to put down the phone first, sorry.”

“No problem, no problem. I’ll wait...” The tone that occurs after hanging up a call started over the phone.

He waited for three minutes. Those three minutes were such a torture for him that he suspected that he had, in fact, been waiting for thirty minutes. Gloria’s call finally came.

“Tony, I’ve got the information...”

“Thank you so much!”

“But...”

“Ah?”

“Tony, are you as familiar with Milan as you are with Nottingham? Even if I told you the address, would you know how to get there?”

“Um...”

“So, why don’t you wait for me at the hotel entrance where you’re staying? I’ll drive you there.”

After thanking Gloria again, Tang En hung up the phone and dashed out of his room, draping a coat over himself.

He met with Kerslake as he left the elevator.

Kerslake thought it was strange for Tang En to be going out at this hour.

“Where are you heading, Tony?”

“I’m out to look for someone...” Tang En had originally intended to head out like that, but bumping into Kerslake made him pause. He hesitated, and then looked back at the utterly confused Kerslake, saying,

“When time is up, get the players to rest. There’s no need to wait for me. I don’t know what time I’ll be able to get back.”

Kerslake nodded woodenly, still having no idea about what was happening.

As he watched Tang En’s retreating back, he suddenly remembered to remind him.

“Don’t forget there’s a...”

Before he could finish, Tang En had already run out of the doors.

“...A tough battle tomorrow...”

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The English tabloid writers lying in ambush near the hotel’s vicinity immediately perked up when they saw Tang En run out of the hotel at eight thirty in the night and standing at the hotel doors looking around anxiously.

Taking a sudden trip in the night, and in such a secretive manner, not wanting anyone to see... What could this mean?

And Clarice Gloria was also in Milan!

The lens of the camera focused on Tang En beneath the street lamp. All eyes were anxiously staring towards where he was looking; from there, surely the answer for this story would emerge.

They did not have to wait long. Tang En only looked down once at his watch before a yellow FIAT drove over leisurely and stopped next to him. The car horn sounded twice.

As they pled gratefulness for the advancement of modern technology, the reporters looked through their camera lenses and found the leading actress of the gossip, Clarice Gloria, sitting in the driver’s seat of the car!

At that moment, like wolves in the night, their eyes lit up with a glow.

### **Chapter 413: The Night Before A Tough Battle Part 2**

A long, difficult wait came with rewards! In comparison to the scene before them, what were the insect bites from hiding in the grass worth? As they watched Tang En open the car door and tuck himself into the vehicle, the reporters were already beginning to make calls for the cabs they had reserved.

They did not know where Tang En and Clarice Gloria were heading to, but everyone hoped they were going to have dinner, visit a bar to indulge in drinks before going to a hotel to have inebriated sex... Then, they could take photographs of it and publish them in the newspaper, on television, and on the internet... They were eager to see what expression Tang En would have then. At that point, it would probably be useless no matter how he cursed or swore.

The paparazzi were in great anticipation, all of them eagerly tailing behind the yellow FIAT in the cabs they had called.

At the same time, in the car, Tang En's heart started to settle down somewhat. Perhaps, he should not display too much of his true emotions in front of Gloria.

"In truth, Tony, I am quite curious. Who could make you so anxious to meet them at this hour?"

"Uh..." Tang En was at a loss about how he should answer her.

Gloria was an intelligent woman. There are two kinds of intelligent women; one liked to use their intelligence in an overbearing manner, causing others to be afraid of them; the other knew when they should be intelligent, and when they should pretend otherwise.

"I'm thinking it must be a person affected by the 'scandal' about us," Gloria said with a laugh.

Tang En coughed twice, indicating a quiet assent.

"I'm truly sorry," Gloria apologized again.

"Actually... it's not what you're thinking..." Tang En began saying. "But what it really is, I can't explain clearly enough."

It suddenly became quiet in the car. Gloria pointed at the car's stereo system.

"Would you like to listen to music?"

Tang En shook his head. "No, thank you."

He turned to look out the windows and suddenly noticed a few vehicles within the side mirrors. He laughed.

"Ms. Gloria."

"Yes?"

"I think there might be some even more explosive news published tomorrow."

Gloria took a glimpse in the rear-view mirror and nonchalantly said, "Let them be."

"You're always the one apologizing. I think I should apologize to you too. I'm sure this matter has brought you some trouble?" Tang En said sincerely.

Gloria laughed and unexpectedly shook her head. "I'll hope for it to bring me some trouble, but unfortunately there's nothing."

"Uh, you... are you still single?"

"Are you accosting me?" Gloria asked, turning to wink at Tang En.

The two laughed.

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The car reached its destination. After Tang En got out of the car, Gloria asked, "Do you need me to wait for you?"

Tang En looked at all the people that were hidden in the darkness and shook his head.



“No need. Thank you, Ms. Gloria...”

“Call me Clarice.” Gloria winked at him. “Give my regards when you see her. If you meet with any trouble, I can explain it to her personally.”

Tang En noticed that Gloria had used “her.” He smiled.

“I will. I’ll tell her what a good person you are.”

“Goodbye, Tony. Good luck.”

“Goodbye, Clarice...”

Tang En waved his hands and saw Clarice drive off in her car. He looked towards the slab of darkness again.

Sorry to disappoint you all!

The paparazzi were indeed tremendously disappointed. They had thought that they would be able to witness a passionate night between the two. Although they did come to a hotel, they did not get off the car together and go in to get a room. Instead, they bid their goodbyes at the door and went separate paths, doing their own things!

What was this!?

However, Tang En could care less about what the paparazzi felt. He walked through the main building and directly got into the connecting low-storied building behind it. This was the venue where CD’s new product launch was being held. The parking lot outside was filled with all sorts of luxurious cars. Evidently, those who could attend the launch were not mere common folk.

So, it was more than normal for Tang En to be stopped at the doors by security.

“Ah, I need an entry ticket?”

Tang En was faced with expressionless guards.

He peered around, showing his lack of class, attempting to find a ticket booth.

“Where do they sell tickets?”

“Please show me your invitation card.”

How could he have an invitation card? It was a sudden decision for him to come to look for someone. He patted his pockets.

“I don’t have one.”

“I’m very sorry, Sir. I can’t let you in.”

“I’m just looking for someone...” Tang En tried to walk in but was stopped.

“Only people with invitation cards are allowed in.”

Tang En looked at the pitch-black doors and stretched his head out to peer around but saw nothing. He looked again at the two icy guards and knew there was little chance of barging in. He glared indignantly at the two guards and looked at the doors once more before turning swiftly to leave.

Was he giving up?

Of course not.

He skirted around the building, looking for the back doors.

He ended up finding them. Like the front, there were some cars parked outside. However, they were not as luxurious as the ones parked in the front. While he was rounding the building, Tang En understood one thing: trying to look for Shania from the front was a silly idea. That was certainly not where the models entered and left from. There must be a back door, one that led directly backstage.

Now that he had found it, it was a pity that the doors were tightly locked from the inside.

He pushed it, but it did not budge. Pulling it was also an exercise in futility. He even tried knocking the door, but there was no response.

Tang En was at the end of his rope; the front door had refused to let him in, and he could not enter from the back. However, he did not intend to give up.

The new product launch would come to an end eventually. I'll wait here. I'll wait until you come out!

Unfortunately, he happened to be in a windy spot. The night winds in Milan made him feel rather chilly. Tang En could only turn up his jacket collar and squat at a spot facing away from the wind.

Just as Tang En began to get a little dizzy from stooping there, a ray of light shone over him.

"Who is it?"

The glaring light from the torch shone directly into Tang En's eyes, blinding him entirely. He could only squint heavily and use both hands to block it out. The way he looked now made him seem anything but good.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?!"

As the other party spoke, they kept the torchlight shining directly into his eyes. He had no choice but to completely shut them to prevent himself from temporarily losing his sight.

"I said..."

Tang En abruptly remembered that he hardly understood or spoke any Italian. He shouldn't have tried avoiding gossip by letting Gloria leave. She could speak Italian fluently! "I'm not the bad guy you think I am! I'm not a thief either! Or a pervert!"

He could only shout in English and hope the other man had at least gotten through eighth grade for English. But his hopes were dashed. The man only continued loudly berating him again and again in Italian. Both Tang En and the other man failed to understand each other.

The man decided it was just as well to dash forward and grab Tang En's hand, but Tang En would not allow just anyone to put their hands on him. The two started to tussle. One wanted to catch the other, while the other refused to be caught. Amid all the pushing and pulling, Tang En's jacket pocket tore. The other man even called for reinforcements.

Five tall, burly men surrounded Tang En with unfriendly faces, treating him like a thief.

Standing in the middle of them, Tang En did not panic. He opened his mouth to ask, "I say. Do any of you understand English? Chinese would work too!"

A slew of gibberish in Italian came back at him.

"F\*\*k. The English penetration rate in Italy is not high enough!" Tang En cursed. He truly wanted to explain his identity to this group of people. "I am Nottingham Forest's main manager. I'm a person with status! Hey, surely there's a football fan amongst you? Football, football!" Tang En lifted his feet, intending to mimic the action of kicking a ball. Instead, the nervous guards perceived it as an attempt to attack them; all five of them sprung up and swarmed over him, pinning Tang En onto the ground.

"Dammit, Englishman! Even if we don't understand English, don't think we can't understand you cursing at us. We can hear F\*\*K as clear as day!" The Italian security said furiously, "Get a hold of yourself!"

Despite being pinned on the ground, he was still struggling, unwilling to succumb. He knew that this group of people was going to remove him. But, if he were taken away, wouldn't it be a waste of a trip? He could not let that happen no matter what!

When the group of them were making a fuss to no end, there was a sudden creak, and a ray of light made its way into the battle, as did the laughter and chatter of some girls. However, all those sounds disappeared swiftly. The people outside looked up towards the back door while those within looked back in surprise at the several men tussling on the ground outside.

Tang En was no exception. Even though he had his head pressed down by a guard, he still tried to glance sideways at the back door. From the voices, he could tell that the models had come out. In that case, that girl should be with them too.

But the backlight obscured everything; he could not see.

The light from within the doors was blocked by the crowd, casting streaks of shadows across the ground. Even so, there was still some light passing through, lighting up the ground.

Shania, who was among the crowd, had been chatting jovially with her companions but was now stunned. She saw a familiar face. Despite it being somewhat dirty after the scrape with the ground, at the wrong angle, and with weak lighting, she could still recognize it.

"Uncle... Tony?"

Without letting down their guard, the guards who had been putting their all into holding Tang En down suddenly felt the body beneath their hands relax. Like a balloon that had deflated, the "thief" who had been continually struggling stopped fighting against them.

Tang En's heart finally settled.

## Chapter 414: Thank You

“Uncle Tony?”

After she saw who was lying on the ground, Shania was stunned.

When he heard Shania call him that way, Twain’s agitation finally eased. He no longer struggled. He just laid on the ground with a crooked smile on his face.

“Judy, you know him!?” Her surrounding female companions were very surprised. How could this unkempt looking man know Shania?

Shania nodded. “He was the one who sent me the Totoro toy.” Next, she said to the security guards, “Please let him go, he’s here for me.”

Twain really had not expected that the young girl could actually speak Italian. Shania seemed to have a talent for languages.

“Mr. Twain!” A man’s voice rang out behind the security guards. This time, it was Shania’s agent, Terry Fasal, a boorish-looking but mindful and meticulous middle-aged man. He recognized Twain because of Shania. “What are you doing here?” He was a little shocked to see Twain pressed on the ground by a group of security guards.

“Well... It’s a long story,” Twain said with a grimace. “But can you ask them to pull me up first?”

“Uh, what are you doing? Mr. Twain is my invited guest.”

He was also another person who spoke fluent Italian.

The security guards, who were initially hesitant, did not hesitate this time. They immediately pulled Twain up. Someone even patted the dust off him and repeatedly said “I’m sorry” in Italian. The difference in their attitudes was really vast. Twain once again realized the importance of mastering a foreign language.

Twain, who had stood up again, had scratches and dust on his face. He looked at Shania with a silly smile.

When Shania saw his face, she could not lose her temper even if she wanted to. Instead, Fasal said, “Let’s find a place to sit and talk.”

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In Shania’s apartment, Fasal left after a brief exchange of a few simple words. Now only Twain and Shania were left. Twain held a glass of water in his hands and looked at Shania opposite him with a silly grin still plastered on his face.

Shania was at her wit’s end when Twain was this way. She got up and went to the bathroom to take a towel. She passed it to Twain. “Wipe your face.”

Twain obediently took the towel and wiped his face. Then he continued to smile. "Shania, it feels great to hear you call me 'Uncle Tony' again."

Shania pouted.

"Why didn't you answer my calls?"

Shania pretended to be surprised. "Did you call me?" Then she took out her cell phone from her bag and glanced at it. "Oh, it's turned off."

Twain knew that Shania was lying, but he did not point it out.

"Have you been busy at work recently?" He asked.

Shania nodded and then shook her head again. "It's okay."

"We haven't seen each other for half a year, have we?"

"It hasn't been that long. We just had a video chat two weeks ago."

"Oh, but how can a video chat be better than talking face to face? No matter how high the resolution is on camera, can it be as clear as me, a real person sitting in front of you? Even if the network is advanced, can it beat being able to speak like this without any delay?"

Shania put her hands up in surrender. "All right, all right. We'll take it that you're right. It has been a long time since we last saw each other."

Twain chuckled. "I haven't seen you in six months. I feel like you've grown up a lot."

"Are you going to treat me like an adult?"

"In my eyes, you'll always be that little girl."

Shania pouted in silence.

Children always wanted others to see them as adults. When Tang En was a child, he had also thought this way, so he could understand Shania. But..."Is it nice to grow up? Do you want to grow up, Shania?"

"I don't know." Shania shook her head. "But when I grow up, I can do what I want to do. I don't have to worry about my father and mother always nagging at me. 'Judy, you have to do this.' Jordana, you have to do that.' It's so annoying."

It was just like a child who thought that if he were to grow up, he could watch cartoons every night and not be urged to go to bed. If he did not have to sit for tests, he would not have to worry about poor grades and being reprimanded by his parents at home. He would not be afraid of his teachers. He could do what he wanted to do without anyone's control; he would decide for himself.

It was a simple idea.

Twain smiled as he looked down at the unhappy Shania. He got up to change his seat and sat next to Shania. He raised his hand over Shania's head, hesitated mid-air, and finally gently placed his hand on Shania's shoulder.

“But adults have worries too.”

Shania rested her head on Twain’s shoulder and asked a question that panicked Twain. “You mean like worrying about gossip in the media?”

After she blurted that out, Shania could feel Twain sit up with a stiffened back. She lowered her head and secretly smirked.

Twain coughed twice. “That’s all fabricated by the paparazzi. There’s nothing between Miss Gloria and me. We’re just good friends. She drove me here to see you. She’s actually a very nice person. You’d certainly like her if you met her.”

Shania snorted.

Twain felt that it was not a good idea to continue with that topic. He looked at his watch and saw that it was almost eleven o’clock. “Ah, it’s really late. I should go back. There’s still a game tomorrow.”

Shania lifted her head from Twain’s shoulder. He pulled his hand back to take a ticket from his pocket and handed it to Shania, “I’m sure you didn’t buy a ticket, so I’m giving you one.”

“Tomorrow? But I have a job tomorrow.” Even though she said that, Shania still took the ticket to the game.

“If you’re too busy with work, it’s okay. You don’t have to go.”

Twain stood up and Shania saw him to the door.

Just as Twain was about to turn and leave, Shania called him. “Uncle Tony.”

“Yes?” Twain turned to look at Shania, leaning against the door.

“Thank you for coming to see me...” Shania lifted her head.

Twain smiled. “Go back and rest. You still have work tomorrow.”

“Ok.” Shania nodded. Twain watched her walk back into the apartment. When he heard her close the door, he walked to the elevator.

It was a high-rise apartment with elevator. They did not have to worry about the paparazzi loitering in the corridor or on the doorstep. The security guards would not let them in. However, no one could control them if they stood outside the building.

Twain walked out of the lobby and deliberately stood at the door for a while. He looked left and right. He knew that there must be people hiding on both sides. But he could not cut off contact and communication with people whom he was familiar with just because he was afraid of being followed and photographed by the paparazzi. If they want to take his picture, let them. He had nothing to hide.

At that point, Twain straightened his collar and stepped out.

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Once she saw Twain get on the taxi downstairs through the window, Shania pulled the curtains closed. Then she gave a call to her agent, Terry Fasal. "Mr. Fasal, about the job tomorrow....can you postpone it?"

"Because you're going to see the game?"

"Yes."

"Okay, I got it."

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Fasal."

"Not a problem. I'm glad to see that things between you two are alright again." Fasal laughed and hung up the phone.

With the phone in her hand, Shania also laughed as she recalled the scene where Twain was pinned to the ground by the group of security guards.

Because he could not get through to my phone and happened to catch this week's live broadcast program on the television, he decided to come in person, and was then mistaken as a thief and gangster by the security guards, and even pinned to the ground as he struggled. Uncle Tony is too adorable!

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It was 11:30 P.M. when Twain returned to his hotel. The players had already gone to bed to rest. But Kerslake, who was worried about Twain, waited for him at the door of his room. He was a little surprised when he saw Twain appear in front of him. Not because Twain had come back, but because of his torn jacket.

"Were you out... in a bar?" Kerslake thought about it and did not say "fight." Twain had a short fuse, but he was not a troublemaker.

"No.," said Twain with a grin.

"What about your clothes?" Kerslake pointed to the torn sleeve.

"Oh." Twain looked down. "It was purely an accident. But David, what are you doing here? Have the players gone to rest?"

"I waited for you." Kerslake shrugged. "They all went to bed."

"Good. You should go rest too, David. Don't forget that we have a tough competition tomorrow."

Kerslake looked at the smiling Twain. He sighed in his heart and darkly thought, So, you do realize that there's a tough fight tomorrow, huh?

"Okay, you rest early as well."

Even though he said that, Kerslake did not move. He looked at Twain open the room door, enter, and close the door before he turned to leave.

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Twain slept soundly for a long time. He did not even dream. He was full of energy when he woke up, no longer agitated. Now no matter how much the media speculated, he would not lose sleep over it. He could really put all his energy into the game with Inter Milan. He just did not know if it was too late.

As the game was held in the evening, all the meal times had been pushed forward. After lunch, the team had a rest. Their dinner was around four o'clock in the afternoon. It was followed by a short break, then the team would wait for the bus to go to the stadium for their pre-game preparations.

There were only two main activities for the day, which were rest and competition.

During dinner time, Twain appeared in front of all the players in high spirits. His voice was also full of energy.

"Good morning, boys!"

There was laughter all around.

"Chief, it's already afternoon!"

Twain laughed too. "It's great to see you all in such good spirits. Is everyone ready?"

"We're all ok."

"Very good. Let's eat." Twain waved his hand and turned to walk out of the restaurant. There were still people waiting for him outside.

Clarice Gloria had already begun work. But since she did not see what had happened for the rest of yesterday, so she was not very assured. She especially came to the hotel to see Twain. Twain had to thank her in person.

Although there was a lot of media inside and outside of the hotel lobby, Twain and Gloria did not intend to hide their meeting. They openly found a place to sit down in the hotel lobby to have a chat and ignored the camera flashes from the reporters.

"I really want to thank you for yesterday," Twain said.

"It looks like your troubles have been resolved, Mr. Twain. You look much better." Gloria winked. "I look forward to tonight's game."

Twain smiled.

"Clarice?"

"Yes?"

"Have you interviewed a lot of people in the football circle?"

"Yes; I have a partnership with the UEFA. If they want to make some special features, they ask me for help most of the time."

"Do you think a manager like me, who ran out to solve a personal problem before an important game, is incompetent?"



“Well, this is the real you, which I think is good. It’s much better than those who wear a mask in front of the cameras and say something that they would usually scoff at,” said Gloria as she shook her head.

“Thank you.”

Gloria stood up. “I should head back. You’re going to the stadium soon, right? We’ll meet there.” She graciously extended her hand.

“Ok, see you later.” Twain also put his hand out. The two of them shook hands naturally under the glare of the media.

Scandal? Twain now had no such word in his mind. Let other people think what they want. It’s ok as long as the people I care about don’t believe them. I’m not obligated to answer to the media and rubbernecks.

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As a stadium which was similarly used by the sworn enemies in the same city, it was famous because both teams were Titans. Therefore, it had two names: San Siro and Meazza.

AC Milan fans called their team’s home ground San Siro, whereas Inter Milan fans called it Meazza. The AC Milan fans would never call the stadium “Meazza,” and Inter Milan fans would never allow anyone to call the stadium “San Siro” in front of them.

The rivalry between the two team fans had created the special story of the stadium.

There was a common saying in England about football: there would be no modern football without the derby.

That phrase was accurate whether it was applied to Britain or other countries. In Italy, Milan was the fashion capital but also the capital of football, because of the derby. Few cities had two world-class football powerhouses at the same time, each with a long and glorious history, sharing the same stadium.

Looking at the familiar stadium that appeared in front of him, Nottingham Forest’s captain, Demetrio Albertini, felt his heart surge with an inexplicable feeling.

He had not expected to return to the stadium after being on loan to Atlético Madrid in the 02-03 season. His opponents today were not AC Milan, but his old rival, Inter Milan.

He should thank Tony Twain. It was this man who had given him the opportunity to return to San Siro. But why did he have to be a visitor?

Sitting in the front row, Twain turned back to glance at Albertini, who was lost in thought as he stared out of the window and the stadium came closer.

Kerslake also noticed Albertini’s feelings about the stadium. He was somewhat worried. “Tony-Demetrio...”

“Don’t worry, David. I believe in Demetrio. He’s a professional player,” said Twain as he turned back to the front.

Twain was right. When Albertini changed to the Nottingham Forest jersey in the locker room and put the captain armband on his left arm, the expression in his eyes changed. He looked resolute and calm.

He was the captain of the team. The entire team and his coaches were watching him. How could he be distracted by feelings unrelated to this game? If the captain was shaken, the others could not be expected to play well.

The players had already finished their warm-up and were back in the locker room.

Twain stood at the door and said seriously to the roomful of players, "I don't want to talk too much nonsense. I only have one requirement for every game. You all know it. Today's game is no exception. Try your very best to win!"

When Twain finished speaking, Albertini was the first to stand up, which took a lot of people by surprise.

"Let's go, guys!"

He took the lead to open the door of the locker room.

He took the path to that familiar green field. He had walked that path for fourteen years. Whether it was for AC Milan's home games or "away games" with Inter Milan, he regarded himself as the owner of the stadium. This time, he really walked this path as a visitor.

But, so what?

I'm Demetrio Albertini. This is my way.

And Nottingham Forest number 4 marched out.

#### **Chapter 415: Giuseppe Meazza.San Siro Part 1**

The broadcast of Giuseppe Meazza Stadium was reporting the player names of the away team. Most of Forest's players were unfamiliar to Inter Milan's fans, so they remained unmoved when hearing their names. This was just a required procedure that occurred before the commencement of the match. However, upon hearing a person's name reappear in this place, loud jeers started up immediately.

"Demetrio Albertini!"

The jeers were not targeted at Albertini himself, but rather at the 14-year period with AC Milan that he represented. As their arch-rivals in the same city, it was enmity that would not fade even with the passing of time.

Faced with such a scene, Albertini remained impassive. He had long ago become used to it. In fact, he was not yet used to not hearing the same jeers in England whenever they played against a rival from the same city. Now that he got to hear this again, it felt somewhat dear to him.

The captain of Inter Milan was still the Argentinian, Javier Zanetti. The same captains from the two teams back then clasped their hands together once again.

"Welcome to Giuseppe Meazza," Zanetti said.

“It’s San Siro,” Albertini answered.

The feeling of a derby returned to Albertini’s body.

Ever since Albertini had pulled his thigh muscles at the beginning of the season, his condition was no longer the same as before. Pulled muscles were injuries caused by fatigue. It was considered a chronic issue that was difficult to treat completely. There was the chance of a relapse whenever he became overly fatigued. Adding to that was Albertini’s increasing age; his bodily functions were beginning to deteriorate, making it easier for him to pull his muscles.

As a result, Albertini had suffered a small injury a few rounds before the current match. The duration of his field appearance became unstable. However, in fighting this Champions League match, Tang En still insisted on putting Arteta on the substitutes’ bench, allowing Albertini to be a starter instead. If there were no accidents, he also planned on letting Demi play the full 90 minutes.

Why?

Simply because their opponent for the match was Inter Milan. Albertini, more than anyone else, would have immense motivation in playing against that team, and would more easily perform at his highest level.

But... Tang En felt somewhat regretful at times. If only their match opponents were AC Milan... Would Albertini be even more spirited?

In the coin toss, Zanetti won and attained the right to kick off.

Players from both teams positioned themselves accordingly; the match was about to start.

Tang En had sat down on the managers’ seat but leaned out again to look back at the spectators’ stand.

He wanted to see if Shania had come.

Even though the girl had already told him she needed to work today, and he had also said it was okay not to come if she was busy, he still hoped, deep in his heart, that she would turn down work to come and watch the game instead... Perhaps it was a little selfish, but it was natural.

The ticket he had given to Shania was not a luxury box ticket. This was not Nottingham, and he was not the manager of Inter Milan. Long before the season started, even a few seasons before, Giuseppe Meazza’s VIP luxury box tickets had already been swept clean. Shania could only watch from the spectators’ stand like any other normal football fan, if she wanted to come.

Tang En only casually glanced over the stands; it was much too difficult searching for someone among the 80 thousand-strong crowd.

Not managing to find her did not mean she was not here. Tang En comforted himself that way, and then refocused his gaze on the football field.

The match had begun.

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Inter Milan, second only to Juventus F.C. in their fame among Italians, had numerous fans. The Champions League quarter-final match filled Giuseppe Meazza Stadium almost to its maximum capacity; “almost” only because they had to leave a segment of empty seats as a buffer for safety considerations.

For this match, the Italians greatly emphasized the safety standards; after all, the two nations most renowned for their football hooligans in Europe were the UK and Italy. Having England’s football team come to Italy for a match would have large numbers of English fans inevitably following. When they drank too much, anything could happen.

On Italy’s side, the good news for them was that Nottingham Forest was a small team; there were only two thousand fans that came to Italy.

Italian fans on the spectators’ stands were loudly singing Inter Milan’s team songs to cheer them on. They completely ignored the presence of the two thousand fans from England.

Right from the start of the match, Inter Milan made use of their home ground advantage to launch a continuous streak of ferocious attacks on Nottingham Forest.

When Roberto Mancini first took over Inter Milan, the style of football he initiated was attacking football. His appearance made numerous Inter Milan fans jump for joy. However, with the season’s progression up until now, the position of that accomplished and cultured manager had become unstable; the results of the team were lacking. Mancini also knew that in an elimination competition such as the Champions League, defense was a better guarantee than offense.

But in this match, he still chose to let his team go on the offense, pressing forward; an oppressive style of offense... This was their home field. If he held back from attacking here, he would not have the opportunity to in the next round.

Mancini planned to make use of their offense and momentum, being on the home ground, to score more goals and attain three points. Later, when they got to the away field, he would implement the Italians’ tradition of Defensive Counterattacking, and eliminate Nottingham Forest. In other words, he planned to use his own attacks to curb Nottingham Forest’s.

What a pity. Tang En’s calculations were the same as Mancini’s; he intended to use defensive counterattacking in the away field to score away goals and minimize goal losses, thereafter capitalizing on scoring goals to crush their opponents in the home field when all factors—place, time, and people—were advantageous for them.

So, as a result of that, Nottingham Forest appeared to be in a rather sad state. They were being suppressed by their opponents, and it looked as if their goal was in imminent danger of being broken through by Inter Milan.

But in truth, Tang En knew that Forest’s goal gates were safe up to this point.

He could tell because George Wood continued performing steadily as per the norm.

At times, Tang En felt somewhat tired of that scene. He hoped that Wood would, in a series of matches, perform irregularly and have his condition fall to rock bottom... That would make Tang En feel that the child before his eyes was a normal person. Now, if not for the physical examination conclusively telling Tang En that George Wood was indeed human, he would have truly suspected that Wood was a

humanoid robot who had traveled through time and space from the future. If a normal Chinese football fan like him could transmigrate to the UK to become a professional football manager, why couldn't a 22nd century "humanoid weapon" transmigrate to be a professional footballer? Maybe his true aim was to assassinate a devilish foe who would come to threaten world peace in the future. And maybe, in the process of transmigrating, his enemies suddenly launched an attack on the time machine and caused it to malfunction, losing what information he had had and leaving him without knowledge of the mission that brought him to the 21st century. Perhaps not even aware of his true identity, he could only make a living through working as a mover to take care of the kind-hearted mother who took him in. This was until he met Tang En, who had also transmigrated... Wait, Tony, hold up. This is a YA football novel built on the basis of reality!

Unhappy jeers sounded from Inter Milan's fans on the spectators' stands. The match had been going for three minutes, and they had finally found a jeering target in place of Albertini; it was someone whom they could not help but dislike at a glance: George Wood.

Earlier, when Stanković had tried cutting inward from the wings with the ball, he was knocked down unceremoniously from the side by George Wood. Even though the referee had blown quickly on the whistle, signaling a foul, it still failed to stop the deafening jeers sounding from Giuseppe Meazza's stands.

In the eyes of the fans, Wood's actions of raising his head and turning to leave after his foul were truly arrogant and annoying. After committing a foul, most players would, in an act of friendliness or to escape being given a card as punishment by the referee, help up their opponents who had fallen. Patting their heads, they would say a word or two of apology, or something resembling it. But Wood never did that. It was not just against Inter Milan, so the fans from England were already inured against that oddity; when playing within the domestic leagues in England, Wood was as unlikeable as he was here.

Wood only pursued victory. Just like Tang En, it was easy for him to become engrossed and view his opponents in matches as enemies engaged in a life-and-death battle. Since they were his enemies, it was unnecessary to show any shred of pity or goodwill. That would just make him feel as if he lacked the will to fight, as if he had betrayed his teammates who were pursuing victory alongside him.

Oh, yes. George Wood's world of football was that simple; other than his teammates, everyone else was his enemies. So, in these few years of his professional career, he had only once exchanged jerseys with his opponents. That was also only because he had scored a goal at the very last minute and was in a good mood after helping his team to equalize the score. To add to that, the other party was the one who had initiated the jersey exchange. The instance in question was the one where Roy Keane had exchanged jerseys with George Wood. Other than that time, Wood had no other history of exchanging jerseys.

An exchange of jerseys? If I were the victor, why would I care about the thoughts of the loser? And if I were to lose, why the hell would I still want to do such a thing with a smug winner, making myself lose face?

So, George Wood's fans were Nottingham Forest fans. Beyond that, the supporters of any other team, without exceptions, hated him to the bone.

Now, Inter Milan's fans were also rapidly beginning to dislike him.

What a boy he was to leave such a deep impression.

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Paying the price of committing a single foul, Wood ended Inter Milan's three minutes of crazed attacks from the opening of the match. After Adriano headed the ball high, Inter Milan's offense began slowly receding.

Nottingham Forest started to go a little on the offense, although the troops they invested into it were few.

Mancini could tell. Tony Twain was intending to go on the defense in the away field, taking a minimal loss as a win. In that case, the best result for them would likely be a draw. This made him even more resolute about attacking in their home field.

However, the Italian general had only gotten the first part right. Indeed, Tang En intended to defend in the away field, but his aim was not to "take a minimal loss as a win."

#### **Chapter 416: Giuseppe Meazza. San Siro Part 2**

Just like before, George Wood was in charge of defending, being a "bodyguard on the field." Along with Wood's rapid growth, Albertini could afford to put less energy into defending. He was already 34 years old; he was not, like in the past, capable of both retreating to defend and advancing to attack. He had aged, and his physical fitness was not like before. However, the experience he had accumulated as well as his stability and calmness made him extremely suitable to take on the role of a midfield playmaker.

Tang En was fond of Albertini's middle and long passes. Before Arteta, Forest's offense was mainly activated by his mastered pass and its hidden genius, tearing apart the defensive lines of their opponents.

However, in this match, Inter Milan were being extra cautious against Albertini; as former opponents, they naturally understood Albertini's strengths. Furthermore, Inter Milan's current manager was Mancini.

Albertini's "old friend."

Back then, when Mancini was making his mark as a young manager in his time with Lazio, Albertini had once played a season of football under his charge. However, their relationship was not good. In truth, their cooperation started off very well in the beginning but rapidly deteriorated. The deterioration in their relationship was not due to issues about positionings on the field or problems of that nature. Rather, it was because Albertini felt Mancini lacked respect towards him.

Albertini was a straightforward person. He had had intense fallouts with numerous managers, but not with Tang En. Why? In their interactions during this half season, he felt that Tang En was a sincere person. Albertini was the same way, so he liked people who treated him sincerely. Tang En happened to fit nicely into his aesthetic sense.

Returning to the match, despite Albertini's feelings about Mancini's lack of respect towards him, Mancini was clearly, at least on the field, paying attention to the former vice-captain of AC Milan; it could be observed from just the first 10 minutes of the match.

Esteban Cambiasso was responsible for marking Albertini, but this was only on the surface. In truth, Mancini had requested for any nearest Inter Milan player to press Albertini at the first instance he gained possession of the ball, preventing him opportunities to establish control over the match pace. As a main manager who had once coached Albertini, Mancini knew all too well that no matter the strength of Inter Milan, they would only be led by the noses should they allow Albertini to take hold of the pacing of the match.

But, as a manager who played a refined-style, Mancini was not as shameless as Tony Twain. Unlike Tony, he did not have a player under him like George Wood, a midfield meat shredder. As a result, the pressure he tried putting on Albertini was still not nearly enough.

Ten minutes passed. After Albertini received the ball, Cambiasso tried to move forward to defend, but George Wood ran over in an untimely manner. He swept in between Cambiasso and Albertini, forcing the Argentine to slow down and give way to him. Getting slowed down in that manner immediately allowed Albertini to lift his foot for a shot, sending the football out.

It was a 35-meter long pass aimed at Franck Ribéry.

The infuriated Cambiasso glared at Wood, who had suddenly appeared in front of him, and turned to run back for defense. After the pass, Albertini also moved forward to follow-up with the attack. Meanwhile, George Wood, who had been providing protection to Albertini at the back, stopped in the backfield, awaiting the next offensive maneuver by the opponents.

As Albertini moved forward, he suddenly stopped and looked back to wink at Wood, thanking him for his soundless protection.

Wood maintained an impassive face and gave no response. We're in the middle of a match, shouldn't we be a little more serious?

Albertini was already used to the boy's expressions, so he simply turned to continue moving forward without feeling odd.

Ribéry's ball was kicked out of the sidelines by Zanetti, who returned in time to defend, buying some time for the rest of Inter Milan's players to come back for the defense.

As Inter Milan's captain loudly called for his teammates to return, Nottingham Forest's captain waved his hands for his team to press forward.

"George!" Albertini waved at Wood, "Come forward!"

Turning left and right, Wood watched as the fullbacks ran past him, and hesitated.

"Come forward!" Albertini waved his hands again and shouted.

Although what Tang En appreciated in Wood was his ability to defend, Albertini hoped, being his teacher on the field, for Wood to become more rounded, like he was in his younger days.

Defense is not the only thing you are capable of, George.

Despite his brief hesitation, Wood still ran up. In truth, he was at a loss for what he should do after moving forward. When he was in the backfield, he felt like a fish in water; he had a clear mind and was sure about what his mission was, what he had to do. But, once he got past the halfway line and was faced with the opponent's defensive formation and their goal, his brain would become somewhat inadequate. He was lacking experience in that aspect and had no idea how he should manage it. Perhaps what he needed to accumulate more experience in this area was to take greater initiative in moving forward during training and in matches.

But, Albertini did not plan on giving Wood a chance to slowly adapt to it. This was the pace of professional football; if he could not catch up, he would be eliminated!

Albertini received the ball from his teammate, Leighton Baines. He had just turned when he saw Cambiasso rushing towards him.

"Don't let him shoot or pass!" Zanetti called out from behind.

The people in the stadium must still be familiar with the shooting of that youth who wore jersey number four for AC Milan. A long shot! Banana kick!

Right before Cambiasso, Albertini raised his foot.

In this stadium, would they again see that familiar downward arc?

Cambiasso leapt up selflessly, stretching out his body to block the shot.

But Albertini passed the ball horizontally to George Wood, who had run up instead!

George Wood was momentarily stunned. In the meantime, Inter Milan's defensive players were already rushing forward. They were rather close to the penalty area, so the one coming forward to defend was center back, Materazzi!

Wood's brain went completely blank. He was utterly unprepared. He was a defensive player; seeing the opponent's rear defender come up, he knew exactly what it meant.

If the defensive midfielder who was originally responsible for defense rushed forward only to have his ball intercepted, it would turn out to be a fatal counterattack; what was to be Forest's opportunity would, in an instant, morph into Inter Milan's chance.

Manager Tony did not say anything in the match regarding Wood moving forward to take part in the offense. He only told him to oversee the defense, and especially to stay in the backfield when it was a set piece. Now that Albertini had arbitrarily gone against Tang En's instructions, getting Wood to move forward for the attack, whose responsibility would it be if it caused a problem?

Wood did not want Albertini to take up that responsibility for him. In that case, he could not allow the football to be taken away from under his foot. As he watched Materazzi dash forward ferociously, Wood subconsciously nudged the ball gently to the outside.



Materazzi watched as the ball rolled past his feet; he was helpless to stop it. He figured he might as well go with the momentum and knock number 13 down. After all, they needed to halt their attack no matter what they needed to resort to.

Keeping in mind the idea of “the ball passing, but not the player,” Materazzi joined both hands in front of his chest and slammed into George Wood.

What was the result of that? Before Materazzi fell on his back, he did not see Wood sprawling onto the ground with his four limbs up. Instead, Wood’s body only wavered slightly before steadying again.

He looked at Wood incredulously as he fell, even neglecting to put up his hands to protect his head. Who was Materazzi? After being purposely slammed into by Wood, how many were able to come off as if nothing had happened? Materazzi could not believe such a thing could happen, but there was someone like that before his eyes right now!

Materazzi had fallen. The obstacle before Wood was gone too. Looking at the football that was still spinning under his foot, Wood thought about nothing as he stepped forward and pulled back his leg.

After watching Wood knock against Materazzi, Tang En’s eyes shone as he leaned forward, seemingly expecting something. But, following that, he saw Wood use all his might to shoot at the goal, only to kick the ball towards the spectators’ stand behind it instead. Tang En sat back abruptly in his seat.

“Ah. That damn ‘terminator!”

Earlier, the hearts of Inter Milan’s fans had been about to leap out of their throats. Fortunately, Wood’s ridiculous high shot on the goal in a situation without defenders prevented their hearts from really jumping out. But, they became even more resolved in their loathing towards Wood; they believed that Wood must have knocked down Materazzi in front of their goal.

However, that was quite ridiculous. Anyone with discerning eyes could tell which of the two took the initiative in their exchange.

Wood was still fretting over his terrible shooting when Albertini came up with a smile and patted his shoulder.

“Beautiful job, George!”

“But, the ball...”

“No, I’m not talking about your shot. I’m talking about your performance before it...” Albertini looked at Materazzi, who was being helped up from the ground by his teammates, and could not help eventually bursting into laughter.

“If you were playing in AC Milan, this performance alone would have been enough for you to gain everyone’s welcome in San Siro.” He winked at Wood.

“But, I just want to stay in Forest...”

Albertini patted his shoulders, silently asking him not to say any more. “You did beautifully. Go back and defend now.”

Wood obediently ran back. Albertini did not follow to return to defend. He only looked at Wood's back in a stupor.

...I only want to stay in Forest...

...I only want to stay in Milan...

The promises made in their youths, how could they make them count?

Lowering his head, he ran back.

"Demetrio Albertini has a grasp of Nottingham Forest's match pace. His faked shot-turned-pass threw Inter Milan's defensive line into major chaos. Even George Wood, who wouldn't usually come forward easily, gained an opportunity to shoot at the goal because of him. What a pity; if he himself had taken the shot, even Júlio César would have been helpless against it. The 34-year-old him shows no sign of aging at all; his performance is as brilliant as before. It makes one reminisce, looking at him appearing in this stadium..." said Italy's commentator from ESPN with a sigh.

#### **Chapter 417: A Pivot and A Long Ball Part 1**

"After how well Albertini has performed so far, Adriano Galliani and Carlo Ancelotti must be kicking themselves! Demetrio is fully in command of Nottingham Forest's rhythm. He's like the conductor of a marching band. The Forest team's offense and defense all revolve around him for execution."

"I disagree with you, Malachi. Galliani and Ancelotti won't come to watch Inter Milan's game. I'm afraid they won't even watch the television broadcast."

"That's a pity. At present, Albertini can totally play on AC Milan as the main force."

The two Italian commentators praised Albertini for organizing the offense at that moment.

After Inter Milan's bombardment in the first few minutes, Albertini pulled back the pace of the game to the benefit of Nottingham Forest.

The best move that Twain had made was letting Albertini be in the starting lineup because Albertini was familiar with Inter Milan. He knew how to deal with them. If it were Arteta, the Spanish kid would have been overwhelmed by the Italian-style defense.

The Italian-born Albertini, who had played in Italy for sixteen years, did not have that problem. He played the game skillfully and with ease, and performed gracefully and calmly.

Watching from his seat, Twain wanted to exclaim that this might have been Albertini's best performance this season.

Cambiasso finally managed to intercept Albertini's ball, but it was immediately intercepted by George Wood in return.

Now, when Albertini had the ball, there was no hissing sound in Meazza. However, Wood drew all the Inter Milan fans' firepower. When he used his body to squeeze past Cambiasso and intercept the football, the shrill jeers started again.

Roberto Mancini finally stood up from his seat in the technical area.

Fifteen minutes had passed. Inter Milan's attacks appeared to have increased and surged. However, the really threatening attacks were only a handful. On the contrary, Nottingham Forest made several counterattacks which were impressive and created a lot of trouble for Inter Milan's defensive line. It looked like the Englishman Tony Twain was as good at defensive counterattacks as an Italian.

If they wanted to deal with defensive counterattacks, they could not leave too many empty gaps in their own backfield for the opponents to take advantage of. But if they wanted to ensure that their rear defensive line formation was stable enough to defend, it would affect the offensive strength in the front. Without sufficient force, they could not break through the opponent's "defense" component of the "defensive counterattack."

It was quite a dilemma.

Mancini could see that Nottingham Forest's counterattack depended on the two flanks. Whether it was Ribéry on the left flank or Ashley Young on the right, they were both very fast and skillful. Many times, even without the support of their teammates, they could still dribble the ball and attack alone. And when assisted by Albertini's accurate long balls, they could easily rip apart Inter Milan's line of defense. By comparison, the Forest team's two strikers, Viduka and Anelka, seemed to be less threatening.

So how should he solve this now?

Step up the defense in the flanks?

No, that's not what should be done in this game.

Mancini whistled on the sidelines and extended two fingers. Then he pointed towards the Nottingham Forest's goal. What he meant was to let the team step up the offense on both flanks and to suppress Nottingham Forest's attack with Inter Milan's offense.

Mancini did not believe that Inter Milan's offense could not compete with Nottingham Forest's. Moreover, this was their home ground. With more than eighty thousand fans cheering for them, there was no reason not to beat Nottingham Forest!

In this game, Mancini had deployed Dejan Stanković and Luís Figo on the left and right flanks. Adriano and Obafemi Martins were the strikers.

During the summer, Twain was interested in Martins. But now that he had Anelka, who was a more well-rounded than Martins, he no longer missed the Nigerian kid.

As a true powerhouse club, Inter Milan's players seemed to be more popular than Nottingham Forest's. Almost every player was an established star player or even a superstar. In contrast to Nottingham Forest, save for Albertini, Anelka, Edwin van der Sar, and Viduka, the others were recognized by the public in the wake the Forest team's ascent over the past two years. It seemed that their strength could not be compared. However, in reality?

Inter Milan was ranked third in Serie A, while Nottingham Forest ranked second in the Premier League.

Twain did not want to fill his team with superstars, like Real Madrid, where a manager's dignity was buried by the brilliance of the superstars. He was the kind of manager who needed to control every

single player and aspect of the team. He could not tolerate having any players be placed above him. Consequently, he was very satisfied with the current team structure because he had personally hand-picked every single one except Anelka. And he was also satisfied with the French striker's performance since his arrival, so he was no longer hung up on it.

Only a team like this could become whole and be united in the fight. Working together as one for a common goal would give them strength. Therefore, even though the Nottingham Forest players were not very well-known, they could rank second in the league tournament and reach the quarter-finals in the Champions League.

If there were people who still could not understand that, then they were the ones who would lose out. Take, for example, Benfica; the poor Primeira Liga champion team that underestimated Twain's Forest team did not even make it past the group stage.

Another example was Inter Milan, which had suffered continuous internal strife this season. The clash between the "King" of Meazza, Adriano, and the Argentine midfielder, Juan Sebastián Verón, was already widely publicized. In this game, Juan was still in the starting lineup. But due to the conflict between him and Adriano, even if Mancini favored him, he would decisively abandon Juan and choose to stand on "King" Adriano's side at the crucial moment for the sake of his managerial position.

Twain could only sigh on that point. The powerhouses needed superstars so they would buy a superstar at all costs. Therefore, when all brilliant names appeared on the game's starting lineup at the same time, they felt that they looked good too. And because the locker room was full of star players, no one gave in to anyone and the dark side of struggles between cliques and factions was, intentionally or otherwise, ignored by the club's decision-makers. Until the day when poor performance resulted in an eruption and exposed all the contradictions, the "purge" would be held off. However, the team's fighting strength and honor would have inevitably been affected. In the end, who would be the ones hurt by this? It would be those fans who showed unconditional support without complaints.

Both Evan and Allan wanted Nottingham Forest to become a powerhouse club like Real Madrid, Inter Milan, or AC Milan. But sometimes Twain thought that it was nice as it was. There were no big-name stars, but a group of valiant and strong players, united in their struggle.

It was just that Twain was also well aware that if the team could continue to win more and more championships, they would not be too far away from the expectations of Evan and Allan. At that time, there would be more and more big-name stars on the team. As the manager of the team, in addition to racking his brains to deal with the opponents, perhaps he would also have to worry about dealing with his own people.

That was truly a worrying future.

Sitting in the technical area, Tang En shook his head, tossed aside that future, and went on to watch the game. Speaking of Adriano, he recalled what had happened later in his memory. He's a king now but after two seasons... Trash.

Do I want to poach him at that time? Tang En frowned as he pondered the question. But soon he gave up on the idea. The discipline of Brazilian players was a headache for him. Even though they were all brilliant, they could also become a time bomb for the team's locker room. Moreover, he knew what

Adriano's future would be like. Perhaps his arrival would make Allan beam in delight. But it would cause a headache for Twain, so it was better to forget about it.

Getting back to the present moment, Twain saw Edwin van der Sar dauntlessly push Adriano's header out of the goal beam. The Brazilian striker seemed to use his own performance to remonstrate Tang En's evaluation of him.

"Inter Milan has stepped up its offense on the flanks," said Kerslake next to him. It was Figo who crossed the ball for Adriano's header.

"We do not need to adjust our defense. The current situation is still good. As for our offense..." Twain touched his chin and said, "Let's use Anelka on this point."

Kerslake nodded in understanding. He stood up and walked towards the sidelines. He conveyed the tactical adjustment on behalf of Twain. It was to shift the offense direction from the two flanks to the middle.

It was almost impossible for the team to truly achieve the principle of, "Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing." That would be too demanding. However, through their usual repeated training, a similar situation could be achieved. And that was to prepare a number of programs to be run as repeated drills during the usual training. When the time came for the need, they could be adjusted at any time.

In most cases, everyone knew that the Nottingham Forest team was strong in the flanks. Many goals came from coordination in the flanks. The middle seemed more like a relay station to provide ammunition for the flanks. This admittedly had to do with the Forest team not having a genuine attacking midfielder. But this was not to say that the Forest team could not attack from the middle.

#### **Chapter 418: A Pivot and A Long Ball Part 2**

Anelka's arrival added new avenues of offense for Twain in the middle. When the opponents put their defensive attention on how to prevent the Forest team's assaults from the flanks, Anelka's speed and skills could sometimes be used with Albertini's exquisite direct pass to rip apart the opponent's defenses. And what was different from the flanks was, once the Forest team ripped apart the opponent's line of defense in the middle, Anelka would directly face the goal and goalkeeper! At that time, with Anelka's ability, his one-on-one face off with the goalkeeper often yielded a goal.

The only drawback was that that move could not be used much. After all, the middle was a zone that required any team to be heavily guarded by default. In the absence of powerful strength, heavily attacking the middle would only let their own offense sink into a quagmire. Now Inter Milan had put all their attention on the flanks. Whether it was offense or defense, they gave priority to the flanks. In that way, there would inevitably be gaps in the middle. As long as the Forest team could seize the opportunity, they might be able to score a goal.

Attacks in the middle required not quantity, but quality and success rate.

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Finally, there was a dead ball. When he saw Kerslake standing on the sidelines, Albertini knew the coaching team must have had a new plan, so he ran over to receive Kerslake's instructions.

Kerslake briefed him simply and Albertini ran back.

Anelka glanced over and the captain nodded to him. A smile showed on his face. After the others covered for him for twenty minutes, it was finally his turn to take center stage.

Inter Milan's flank attacks had gradually pushed the Forest team back. Now they indiscriminately bombarded the Forest team and their fans in the stands constantly cheered. No one noticed that Nottingham Forest had quietly completed the adjustment of their main direction of offense.

As the center forward, Mark Viduka still attracted Inter Milan's two center backs' defensive attention in the forefront. Anelka drifted behind him. He looked a little anxious because he could not get the ball. He constantly ran back to raise his hands for the ball.

The two players' positions and performances looked no different from before.

Outside the penalty area, Juan suddenly made a long shot and the football flew towards the Forest team's goal. Edwin van der Sar focused his attention and pushed the football out of the goal beam.

"...Inter Milan's offense surges. It seems like if they continue to play like this, it will be a matter of time before Nottingham Forest concedes a goal!"

The fans agreed with the commentators' view. They heartily sang in the stands as if Inter Milan had already taken the lead.

"This is Inter Milan's corner kick. Perhaps it's their chance to break the deadlock! Let's see... Materazzi and Samuel have rushed up, Mark Viduka also returns to the penalty area to participate in defense. In the first twenty-six minutes of the first half, Inter Milan is awarded a corner kick and the front of the Nottingham Forest goal is a mess."

Materazzi rushed in and George Wood was responsible for defending against him. The two men collided and immediately ignited a spark. With the two sides entangled with each other, Materazzi wanted to shake off George Wood's marking and George Wood pulled at Materazzi's jersey without letting go. Seeing that the two players were about to come to fists, the referee blew the whistle in time and paused the game.

"The two of you, break it up now!" The referee ran forward and warned the two players. He swung his hands to both sides. "Separate immediately!"

Materazzi raised his hands to indicate that he had no intention of continuing the entanglement. He certainly did not want to continue tugging with Wood. Wood just dropped his hands to show that he was not pulling at the other man either.

When the referee exited the penalty area, his hand went up again.

Materazzi ignored him. He decided to himself that the best way to retaliate would be to head the ball in over the boy's head. He certainly would not forget to connive with a covert petty maneuver when it was time for him to head the ball.

The referee whistled again. This time, the whistle was to signal that Inter Milan would kick off.

Stanković's corner kick, aimed for Materazzi's header, flew over.

The two players almost jumped at the same time, but no one clipped into a favorable position in the previous entanglement, so this time it was doomed to be purely a contest based on jumps and physiques to fight for the header.

Materazzi was six feet, four inches tall and weighed ninety-two kilograms.

George Wood was just over six feet tall and weighed eighty-four kilograms.

Everyone thought that Materazzi would win just based on height!

Unfortunately, the contest to fight for a header in the game was not merely jumping; it included a lot more things, including petty maneuvers.

After Materazzi jumped, he wedged his elbow between himself and Wood. He wanted to covertly push Wood so that he would lose balance in midair.

Clearly, Materazzi had not learned his lesson from the previous fall. His petty maneuver did not disturb Wood at all. Instead, he could not fully strive for the header.

When Materazzi reacted, he could only see a shadow appear over his head.

"George Wood's header lifted the siege!"

The football was headed out from the penalty area by George Wood, and Albertini appeared right in the middle of the spot where the ball landed.

Zanetti hung around near the midfield, in charge of defense. When he saw Albertini use his chest to stop the ball, it was too late to shout for his other teammates to fall back, so he turned back to run over.

"Fall back to defend!" Mancini shouted on the sidelines.

Some of the Inter Milan players still had not figured it out. Even the opposing center forward had retreated to defend the corner kick. And now you want us to fall back to defend? Who are we defending against?

He firmly stopped the ball with his chest and the football fell to the ground at a moderate speed. As the ball completely stopped with his chest, Albertini turned around simultaneously and rotated his right leg.

Yes, the Forest team's center forward had withdrawn to defend against the corner kick. However, the Forest team did not just have one striker!

Watching the football spin in front of his eyes, Albertini felt that his body was full of vitality. He felt better than ever. He was confident in passing the ball to where he wanted it.

"This is Albertini's trademark!...But who did he pass the ball to? Anelka!"

The mystery was revealed.

It was indeed a corner kick to break the deadlock, but it was dedicated to Nottingham Forest!

“Anelka! There are no defenders around him. It’s not offside! Not offside! His timing to run forward is marvelous! He’s got the ball... He nicely stops the ball... Zanetti can’t catch up, but he’s still chasing... César sallies! And he shoots... Ah, a feint! He swings past poor César... And it’s a goooooo!!”

Everyone on the Nottingham Forest’s substitutes’ bench and in the technical area leaped up.

#### **Chapter 419: You Are Inter Milan’s Players! Part 1**

“Anelka! GOOOAL! Unbelievably, Nottingham Forest takes the first goal in the away field and leads against home team Inter Milan!”

In a corner of Giuseppe Meazza Stadium, Nottingham Forest’s fans were jumping and cheering for joy. Their voices were practically the only sounds resounding through Giuseppe Meazza’s spectator’s stands at the moment. As fans of the away team, they numbered only two thousand. Being greatly outnumbered by Inter Milan’s fans, they had originally been suppressed by them. But finally, they stood proud and elated.

The two thousand fans of Nottingham Forest loudly sang their team song. Meanwhile, Forest’s players dashed towards that part of the stands and gathered at the bottom, cheering with their arms high alongside the group of spectators above.

At the same time, within bars doused in red in Nottingham, countless Nottingham Forest fans were cheering with them.

“In the 27th minute, Nottingham Forest takes a lead of 1:0. The scorer is Nicolas Anelka!” The live broadcast of Giuseppe Meazza reported the scorer’s name as per the usual process, and this time everyone heard the jeers of the home team fans.

Tony Twain and his assistant pumped their fists in celebration with the others.

The match was proceeding in an unexpectedly successful way now that they had gained an away goal in such an important match.

With an away goal in the bag, everyone’s heart settled. Following that, so long as they did not lose to the opponents by a large margin, it would be considered a victory for them.

Naturally, Tang En would not be content with that. While getting an away goal was good, he would not say no to getting more of them.

“Demi!” Tang En stopped Albertini, who had run back to the sidelines to drink some water, and showed him a thumbs-up.

“Great job!”

“That can’t be the only thing you want to say, Boss,” Albertini said with a laugh as he drank a mouthful of water.

“Of course. Tell them to keep playing that way. Defend and counterattack!”

“Alright.”



Returning to the manager's seat, Tang En muttered to Kerslake like he was talking to himself, "We're leading, so we can play defensive counterattacking with even more peace of mind now..."

"I think it's rather interesting that we're playing defensive counterattacking in front of Italians," Kerslake said, smiling.

"It'll be even more interesting if we win."

The two looked at each other and smiled.

As the two managers of the away team chatted jovially, Mancini was biting his lip with an ashen face, staring into the field.

Was there anything that made him more unhappy than losing goals in the Champions League elimination match, on their home ground?

Yes, and that was to lose the match.

Although they had yet to lose the game, losing a goal was more than a small blow to Mancini's plans. However, it was not yet time to make any adjustments. The strategy to go on the offense on their home ground was sound. Now, they could only continue attacking; he was not about to quietly watch his team fall behind.

As a result, when the match restarted, Inter Milan's attacks became even more ferocious. Anelka, however, seemed to completely vanish after scoring the goal. Forest had no attack whatsoever to speak of; once again, they were forced into the 30-meter region by Inter Milan.

Up until now, Verón's performance had been nothing special. In fact, Tang En felt that his condition was not too good; George Wood did not even need to specifically mark him. With heavy troops deployed in the mid and backfield for Forest Team, the area around and within the penalty box became as crowded as a wet market. When Inter Milan's players broke through into the area, they immediately found themselves surrounded by people, making it beyond tough for them to accurately send the ball to another teammate.

Even Cambiasso came forward to participate in the offense. He tried to pass the ball over to Martins, who was in front, but it was intercepted by Albertini midway through; due to the crowd of players, it was a feat achievable with the mere extension of his leg. With everyone compacted in the area, it was very easy to kick the ball into the opponent's possession.

But Albertini's interception only circumvented that single attack from Inter Milan; the ball did not fall entirely within Forest's control. In fact, it was the reverse. Due to Inter Milan's team pressing forward heavily, the backfield of Forest formed tremendous depths. With the offensive line layered upon layers, Forest's interception of the ball swiftly led to it again landing beneath the foot of another Inter Milan player. They would then move forward, be intercepted again, and the cycle would repeat itself in that way. Entering Forest's penalty area was as difficult as climbing into heaven. George Wood and Albertini erected a tall wall before Pepe and Piqué. Other than long shots, frontal assaults had, on countless occasions, hit a dead end. And about passing center from the wings... Pepe and Piqué were both more than six feet tall and had excellent skills in heading; theirs was a defense that was entirely three-dimensional.

It looked like the defense of the English was even more authentic than that of the Italians.

But Tang En had learned tremendously about defending from the Italians. Now was an opportune moment to put it to use against an Italian football team; the effects seemed rather good. Inter Milan was unprepared against such a thorough defense from Forest. Other than using long shots, they did not have any better methods.

Verón took a long shot, as did Cambiasso, Figo, Adriano, and Martins. Even Materazzi ran up to take one. By the time the whistle sounded, signaling halftime, everyone had already lost count of the exact number of long shots executed by Inter Milan. The only thing they saw was Inter Milan's helplessness against Forest.

In general, long shots are the easiest way to pry open an opponent's defense when they are buckling down in their defense. But it is also the most uncouth, most technically deficient way of doing so. It felt like trying to hit the jackpot. From another perspective, the frequent use of long shots by a team clearly showed their agitation.

It was evident from the expressions of both teams when they were leaving the field; Inter Milan's members lowered heads and walked swiftly, while Nottingham Forest's players languidly walked to the players' corridors.

That went for the two managers as well: Mancini had a stern and displeased expression, while Tang En and Kerslake walked back with smiles.

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"Everyone did really well." Tang En praised everybody immediately upon walking into the room. "We've made Inter Milan suffer. We don't look good on the field, but look at it: we got an away goal. I think it's worth it! If we keep playing like this in the second half and wait for Inter Milan's players to get anxious, victory will be ours!"

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"Look at what everyone's been doing." That was the first statement from Mancini after he entered the home team's locker room. His icy tone showed how angry he was. "Who taught you to take long shots whenever you got the ball on the field? I don't remember telling you during training that the way to break an opponent's tight defense is long shots!"

Inter Milan's players all sat in silence.

"In the second half, seal off Albertini completely. I don't care what method you use, but you can't let him get the ball or pass comfortably. He's a dangerous person. I think a few of you here are familiar with that appraisal."

Javier Zanetti lightly nodded. Indeed, he was no stranger to it. When Albertini turned to pass the ball, he immediately set off after him, but it was a pity; if he were just a few years younger, he might have been able to intercept that ball. Without his realizing, he had truly gotten old.

"Cambiasso, you have to mark him more tightly!" Mancini pounded his fists. "I don't want to praise our opponents in front of you, but you should observe number 13 closely! Watch how he defends."

He had originally wanted to say, “Watch how he defends Verón,” but thought saying so would be unfair to Verón, deciding to change his phrasing at the last minute.

“Foul! Play a little rougher! This is our home field, what are you afraid of?”

Cambiasso felt he could not raise his head after the rebuke from Mancini. He knew in his heart that his defense against Albertini in the first half had been unsuccessful. Most of the time, Inter Milan was suppressing the opponents, so there was no need to pay attention to defending against him. But, when it came down to really needing Cambiasso to mark down the opponent, he had let him execute a high-quality long pass, directly aiding Anelka in scoring.

“Do you need me to teach you how to defend?”

Cambiasso shook his head. “No, sir.”

“Albertini is the core of their team. There’s no need to care about anyone else, Ribéry or Anelka. You only need to mark Albertini, that’s enough! When they get the ball in their backfield, they look for Albertini and let him take the responsibility of sending out the ball. Watch him and intercept their pass routes. Employ high-pressing defense against anyone else who gains possession of the ball. Even if we can’t intercept it, we have to force them into mistakes!”

“In terms of going on the offense...” Mancini waved his hands and made a motion to pull back. “If they aren’t coming out, pull them out. I don’t want to see any more dumb methods like using frequent long shots to break their defense! Use your brains. You’re Inter Milan’s players. You are professional footballers, not any amateur team! Is this your first day playing football?!”

In the end, Mancini failed to control his temper.

“This is the Champions League. It isn’t some friendly match. If we lose this match, do you know what that means?” Mancini pointed upwards at the spectators’ stand.

“Remember what you need to do. Did you see the face of Forest’s manager when he went off the field? He believes he’s already won. He thinks his team can beat Inter Milan here! Don’t let him get away with this.”

## **Chapter 420: You Are Inter Milan’s Players! Part 2**

The duration of halftime went by torturously slow for Inter Milan’s players; for them, it was a period of having to withstand the manager’s rebukes and the enormous pressure brought about by their fans’ expectations. But who had asked for them to be a powerhouse? In contrast, Nottingham Forest’s players felt the time pass quickly. With traces of relaxed and joyful smiles yet to fade from their face, the second half had already started.

Tang En leaned back on his seat and crossed his legs. So long as his team continued defending like this, Inter Milan would certainly press forward heavily in an attempt to equalize the score as soon as possible. Only in that way would they have enough time left to try to overturn the scores. When that happened, numerous gaps would appear in Inter Milan’s backfield. Then, Albertini could make another long pass and Anelka would get another flash of inspiration, ending the match!

Everything was under control. Tang En believed that strongly in his heart.

“The second half of the match has just begun, and there’s no difference at all from the first half. Inter Milan is launching a tidal wave of attacks on Forest’s penalty area while Nottingham Forest has gotten more resolute, determined to defend after having taken the lead. Although it does not look good appearance-wise, this is the quarter-finals of the Champions League. Victory is the number one priority!”

The commentator got it exactly right. Whether it was Forest, who looked like they were being beaten to a sorry state, or Inter Milan, who was going full-out with offensive-styled football in their anxiety to equalize the score, both teams knew in their hearts that defending or attacking were only the means. In such a competition, their aim was certainly not to please their audience or neutral fans. Their aim was victory.

After five minutes, Inter Milan’s attacks began to recede. Forest gained an opportunity.

At that point, Albertini was the first to feel the difference; when he held possession of the ball, the defensive pressure he faced significantly increased.

Cambiasso tightly latched onto Albertini like he had been drugged, using both his hands and feet to make Albertini extremely uncomfortable. His opponent’s style had changed so suddenly, Albertini knew Mancini must have made some adjustments during halftime. Just as Mancini understood him, he also understood Mancini.

Fortifying their defense against him was indeed a good method to curb Forest’s offense; he was the brains of the team, the command tower.

Under the overwhelming pressure from Cambiasso, Albertini felt he had no choice but to pass the ball to Ribéry in the wings. Ribéry then faced overbearingly aggressive defense from Zanetti and ending up passing the ball back to Leighton Baines, having no confidence to break through. This time, Figo leapt forward to defend.

Even though Inter Milan was still suppressing Nottingham Forest, the situation was, in fact, already greatly different from that of the first half.

Seeing Baines forced into a corner and being unable to kick the ball out after a long while, Albertini ran over to receive the ball. In the end, Cambiasso followed along with him.

Albertini looked again at George Wood, who was being utterly unhelpful, standing at the side. He really wished Wood could become a well-rounded talent comprising abilities in both offense and defense. In a situation like now when he was being tightly marked, there would at least be one other person who could step up to organize the attacks. If they wanted to change the set situation of having one player attack and one player defend, they would need to change out a defensive midfielder and send in Arteta. But, who should they change out? Changing out any of them would not be good. If they took out Albertini, Arteta would still be quickly marked down when he came in; Inter Milan would just have a different target to mark, that was all. What if they changed out George Wood? Then, what would they do for defense?

Albertini, a hardcore fan of the CM series, unknowingly began to consider that question from a managerial perspective.

Despite knowing Wood's low contribution to their offense, Albertini still decisively passed the ball to Wood after receiving the pass from Baines. There's no time to let you practice going on the attack on training grounds, George!

Ever since pulling his thigh muscle and not playing for more than two months, Albertini acutely felt the changes taking place in his body. He was old, truly getting old. No matter how unwilling he was in his heart, his body was perhaps unable to hold on for much longer.

If I retire, who in Nottingham Forest's midfield would be able to take control of the pace?

AC Milan's loyal subject had, unconsciously, started thinking for the future of Nottingham Forest.

George Wood received the ball and looked at Albertini as well as his shadow, Cambiasso...

He spun around, looking at his surroundings, but seemed unable to find a suitable spot to pass the ball to. Every one of his teammates had Inter Milan players lurking nearby, waiting opportunistically. They were just waiting for him to pass the ball over so that they could surge forward to press and steal the ball, counterattacking from there.

Inter Milan had already shifted their defense from their half of the field into Nottingham Forest's half.

The ball stayed under Wood's foot for half a minute, but he could not find a suitable target to pass to. An Inter Milan player finally rushed over. Stanković wanted to intercept Wood's ball, and Wood had no choice but to use his body to block the other party. Then, the ball was again passed back to Albertini.

After making that round, the ball still returned to its starting point. Nottingham Forest's offense continued spinning in circles at the same spot.

This time, under Cambiasso's man-to-man marking, Albertini finally made a mistake passing. While originally intending to launch the ball over to Ashley Young on the other side, he was intercepted mid-way by Stanković. After the interception, Inter Milan immediately switched to offense from defense.

Stanković looked up. Martins was running diagonally into position, directly entering the penalty area; this was an opportunity!

"Inter Milan intercepts the ball and counterattacks... a direct pass to Martins! A beautiful pass!"

The pass was indeed beautiful. With a kick, Stanković made a direct pass. The football passed through the space between Pepe and Chimbonda, appearing perfectly on the diagonal route Martins was running. The swift Nigerian horse did not need to kill the ball, simply moving forward with it. Accelerating, he passed Piqué who was following behind. His speed was doubtlessly fast enough! Once he was given a sliver of space, he immediately grasped the opportunity!

But!

After Martins used his speed to forcefully pass Piqué, he found the shooting angle to be extremely narrow. Finally, Martin's decision to make a brutish shot at the goal deposited the ball straight into Edwin van der Sar's arms.

Inter Milan's threatening attack in the second half ended in that manner. Mancini was rather dissatisfied with Martins' selfishness in the final moments, but he at least saw a hope of equalizing the score. Meanwhile, Tony Twain had already uncrossed his legs, sitting up again on the comfortable seats of Giuseppe Meazza Stadium.

He smelt a whiff of a coming thunderstorm.