

Champions 671

Chapter 671: Double “Wood” Is “Woods”, And Triple “Wood” Can Be Counted As “Forest”

Piqué’s departure gave Twain a clear look at the current situation—he thought the team was weak in the areas of the left and right backs, but now he suddenly discovered that his center back area was already a bit stretched. The team’s original main partnership was Pepe and Piqué, with Kompany and Ayala for the second set. Now, Piqué was gone, and Ayala was old. The real players who could play were Pepe and Piqué, while Morgan could only get a chance to play in the tournaments such as EFL Cup and English FA Cup. He could not be expected to play in the important tournaments.

In that case, he had to put aside the search for a full back and prioritize to solve the center back issue. The full back could be a little weak, but the center back could not be weak.

It was already August, less than half a month before the start of the new season. It was less than ten days from the FA Community Shield.

This summer, the team’s signing of new players had been slow. This was due to a number of reasons. First of all, because of their successes these two seasons, Twain believed that the structure of the team was very sound and did not want to adjust too much. So, he had decided not to buy a large number of new players. Secondly, most of the players whom Twain was interested were “already taken” and they were reluctant to leave their new clubs. Thirdly, the Nottingham Forest Football Club could not afford to take out too much to support Twain’s moves in the transfer market. Not only that, they also needed Twain to cough up with the money he earned from the sale of the players to “make up for the household expenses.”

For a UEFA Champions League winner to live like this, Nottingham Forest could be alone in that.

As for the full back position, Twain had drooled with desire for a player four years ago. He thought it would be a good time to make his move this summer, only to have another door shut in his face.

It was Manchester City’s Micah Richards. The tall player could play both center back and right back, which was very much in line with Twain’s desire for the players to be versatile.

When he had approached Stuart Pearce with an offer to buy him a few years ago, he was flatly turned down. Helplessly, he had to buy Sun Jihai. Now that Pearce had left Manchester City, the Manchester City club was in another different crisis. Twain thought this was a good time to buy Richards. With Nottingham Forest’s reputation as a Double Winner, would it not be easy to beckon Richards?

He was wrong.

The Manchester City club did have some difficulties at the moment. The Thai government had issued a notice to freeze Mr. Thaksin’s assets. It would be difficult for Thaksin, who had lost most of his fortune, to try to keep the Manchester City club running. With so much trouble around, who could care about a small football club? There were many rumors that a certain consortium was interested in Manchester

City and wanted to buy it. But Mr. Thaksin himself denied it. He admitted that things were not going well, but the Manchester City club was still in his name and everything was under control.

Twain did not believe this Thai man's words. The Manchester City club must be in trouble. He might be able to pry the players, such as Richards who usually could not be moved, at this time.

He jubilantly made an offer, but the Manchester City club directly rejected it without even hearing it—“Richards is not for sale.”

He raised the offer again only to hear that same answer—“Micah . . . Richards is not for sale.”

He tried again for the third time and this time it was slightly different. “We don't want to sell Richards to a direct competitor.”

That infuriated Twain. How dare Manchester City label my team as “a direct competitor?” That's an overestimation of themselves?! My team is a Double Winner which had won the UEFA Champions League title for two years in a row. Where does your Manchester City team rank? I'm the only tough one here who reject other people's offers. How dare that Mark Hughes act so arrogantly in front of me! (He had long since forgotten the fact that Hughes was older and more experienced than him...)

He did not make a fourth offer, as it would have made Nottingham Forest lowly in front of the pompous Manchester City. Twain did not want to bow to anyone. Sell to whomever you want to sell to! Even if it rots in your own mouth, it's none of my business!

In this way, a seed of hatred against Manchester City was planted Twain's heart. The friendly relationship between the two clubs during Pearce's time remained in name but was lost in reality due to Richards.

As a result, the saying among the media that Twain was a narrow-minded person, was right...

With the deal and relationship gone, Twain could only continue to look for other candidates.

He wanted to buy Carvalho but Scolari would not let him go. His reason was the same as Manchester City—“We don't sell our important players to our direct competitors.” Twain was not angry that Chelsea said that, because Chelsea was indeed Nottingham Forest's rival.

The Argentine, Garay was signed by Real Madrid; A. S. Roma would not let Juan go; Ronaldo was unwilling to leave Werder Bremen...

In the end, Twain could only cast his search back to England.

This time, Twain was not going to buy a young center back anymore. What mattered in the rear defensive line was experience, which was often proportional to age. Therefore, Twain plan to have a slightly younger center back.

He set his sights on Jonathan Woodgate who was still at Middlesbrough.

He played only nine games in the two years for Real Madrid due to frequent injuries and was called an “English patient” by the Spanish media. He even became an example of an injury-prone player in the football world. But he had done well at Middlesbrough in recent years, with his injuries seemingly long gone. Under the instruction of Southgate, the former well-known England defender, he had improved

considerably and become the captain of Middlesbrough. With at least two chances to play against each other each season, Twain naturally paid attention to this former Real Madrid player. After he observed him for a few seasons, Twain discovered that Woodgate was the man the team needed. He decided to make a move.

Originally, Ramos was due to take this former England center back to White Hart Lane in January, but Tottenham Hotspur and Middlesbrough had not agreed on a transfer fee. Both parties officially announced the collapse of this transfer deal before the winter transfer window closed. Hence, Woodgate stayed at Middlesbrough.

The “English patient” who emerged from Real Madrid’s shadow regained his confidence at Middlesbrough and now was the time to look forward to a new future. The failure to join Tottenham Hotspur, which was eligible for the Champions League, frustrated Woodgate a little. However, it did not matter. He would soon know what the meaning of the Chinese idiom “to lose at sunrise but gain at sunset.”

Nottingham Forest made an eight million pounds offer to Middlesbrough in the hope of taking Woodgate away. Anyway, the money not spent also had to be returned to the club. Twain did not care about one or two million less at this point—Tottenham Hotspur’s offer to Middlesbrough was 6.5 million, which they finally increased to seven million and refused to increase further.

Eight million was the price that Middlesbrough wanted. And Southgate was already clear on one thing and that was—Woodgate’s heart was no longer at the Riverside Stadium. He was so happy when Tottenham Hotspur wanted to buy him. How could the twenty-eight-year-old center back not be tempted now that it was the higher-level Nottingham Forest?

Soon the Middlesbrough manager saw Woodgate’s statement in an interview with the local media in Nottingham in the newspapers: “I think it’s time to go to a bigger stage to pursue my dreams...”

Even though he hated to let him go, Southgate knew the limits of the club, and Middlesbrough would never be able to keep the players whom the big clubs were interested in.

In the end, Woodgate joined Nottingham Forest for eight million pounds and signed a three-year contract. The details were not disclosed to public, but it was said to be definitely higher than when he was at Middlesbrough.

His signing was dubbed by the English media as “Nottingham Forest has become a veritable forest, with a pile of wood in the team.” It referred to George Wood, Freddy Eastwood and the just joined Jonathan Woodgate. Moreover, it was a coincidence that these three “woods” formed the team’s central axis in terms of their positions—striker, midfielder and center back.

The Chinese media used their style to explain this interesting coincidence: “The two Woods make up the (Sher)wood and the three Woods now make up the Forest. They have the Woods and Forest. Nottingham Forest finally proves itself to be “The Forest.”

The Chinese media used their style to explain this interesting coincidence: “The double Woods make up ‘林’ and the three Woods now make up ‘森’. They have the ‘森’ and ‘林’. Nottingham Forest finally proves itself to be the ‘森林.’”

Twain was in a good mood after he solved the center back problem. At the press conference for the signing and to welcome Woodgate, he joked with the reporters, "If a player has 'Wood' in his name, congratulations to that guy. He'll have a good chance of joining us at Nottingham Forest!"

Woodgate also said, "I am very happy to join Nottingham Forest. I don't mind people making fun of my name. This means I have a connection with Nottingham Forest. Coming here, I want to help the team win more championships. Injuries? That's a thing of the past..."

These words were still ringing in everyone's ears when Woodgate left training with an injury the next day...

It was a good thing that it was only a minor injury in a check-up after the game and would not affect the new season. It was just that a lot of injuries made Woodgate a little sensitive.

Twain could breathe sigh of relief, "Luckily it was nothing. Otherwise I'm going to be the laughingstock of the whole of England."

"This was supposed to be a gamble. Woodgate was never a strong center back." Dunn said, "Since you decide to buy him, you have to be able to withstand the psychological pressure he will bring you since his injury."

"We rotate anyway." Twain shrugged.

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Four days after Woodgate arrived at Nottingham Forest, the team had their first game of the new season—the FA Community Shield held at the new Wembley Stadium against the English FA Cup winner, Portsmouth.

Although this was the first time that Twain and his team had played in the FA Community Shield, they displayed the strength of the Double Winner of Premier League and Champions League. Portsmouth simply could not withstand.

And the rotation for the new season had been put in place since the start of this game.

The newly joined Tiago replaced George Wood and appeared in the team's starting lineup. Woodgate and Şahin sat in the stands and were not in the squad list.

Şahin was still undergoing psychological treatment, while Woodgate was injured the following day he joined the team.

Petrov replaced Ribéry's position in the starting lineup. Van der Vaart was still the attacking midfielder while young Lennon was on the right. The strikers were Bendtner and Arshavin. Starting this season, Twain would continue to increase Bendtner's chances for appearances, gradually making him the team's leading striker.

The center back was a partnership between Ayala and Kompany, with Pepe on the bench after losing his regular partner. The left back was Bale and the right back was Sun Jihai. The goalkeeper was changed to Akinfeev.

Since the start of this season, the EFL Cup had made a major change. For many years, the EFL Cup's substitutes' bench was limited to five players, leaving many players without the chance to make it to the squad list. To some extent, this rule was not suitable for the development of English football, because the absence of two positions was equivalent to the lack of two opportunities to train players. Ferguson's suggestion to the Football Association last season to add the substitutes' positions to the international standard of seven players was echoed by seven clubs immediately. And Tony Twain was the first manager to come forward to show his approval and support. Even Ferguson's nemesis, Arsène Wenger, was on the same side as Ferguson this time.

Therefore, the English Football Association readily accepted the suggestion and increased the number of bench places from five to seven at the start of the new season.

Now on the substitutes' bench for Nottingham Forest were van der Sar, Pepe, Baines, George Wood, Ribéry, van Nistelrooy and Beckham. This was the absolute mainstay of the team last season.

More than half a season ago, when Twain challenged Portsmouth with a lineup that was similar to the current starting lineup, the Portsmouth people thought they had been insulted and that Nottingham Forest was too arrogant. Now, they would never thought so again because they had learned a very deep lesson...

Consequently, in this game, Portsmouth's new manager, Tony Adams adopted the stance to cling fast to defense in an attempt to pull Nottingham Forest into a bitter fight.

This summer, Tony Twain had instructed the team to practice how to deal with the enemy's intense defensive attack, especially the attacks from the middle. He was not surprised by Portsmouth's approach. Today's Nottingham Forest was attacked on all sides. Any team which played against them would not be foolish enough to rush up to attack. That would only cause their own demise faster.

Steady counterattack was the way. Just like how Nottingham Forest won...

However, they picked the wrong opponent.

Twain asked the team to strengthen the long shot and coordination in the middle to continue to attack in the middle. They might not be able to score immediately, but it could give the opponent a huge psychological pressure, while messing up their play at the same time. His arrangement paid off in the 21st minute when Nottingham Forest's high pressing tactic left Portsmouth dizzy. The French defender, Distin did an own goal and Nottingham Forest took the lead with 1-0.

For Nottingham Forest, the game was easier to play after the lead. The other side must press out to play so that the Forest could retreat to hit the opponent's counterattack. That was the biggest headache for their opponent...

Trailing behind, Portsmouth was at its wit's end as it faced Nottingham Forest which retreated to defend as it waited to strike their counterattack—they certainly could not put too much forces into the attack because they had to be wary of Forest's counterattacks. But if they did not increase their attack, it would be a bit difficult to break through the Forest team's iron wall with Portsmouth's current strength... This became a paradox. If they did not attack, they could not score and equalize the score. If they could not equalize the score, they would lose the game; But if they attacked, they could continue to lose the ball which would still cause them to lose. If they dared not invest more players in the attack for

fear of continuing to concede the goal, then they would still lose when they put in the forces for the offense ...

Unlike the paradoxical Portsmouth, it was much easier for Nottingham Forest to pull the game into their familiar orbit after they got ahead. Portsmouth did not come out of this paradox until the end of the first half. Therefore, Nottingham Forest ended the first half with a 1-0 lead.

During the halftime interval, Manager Adams asked the team to show courage in the locker room and not to worry about this or that. They should equalize the score first. Furthermore, Tiago had just joined the Forest team not for long, so the team's cooperation still had problems. Ayala was getting old and his reaction was not as good as before. His physical quality had also declined... As long as the Portsmouth players were willing to rush, they could certainly find a breakthrough from these two people!

With their fighting spirit and confidence restored, Portsmouth returned to the field with a spirited attempt to equalize the score. This time they found that the people standing in front of them had changed. Tiago, who still did not have a rapport with the team, was replaced by the captain, George Wood. The older Ayala who could not keep up with the pace, was replaced by the strong Pepe...

When George Wood stared at the Portsmouth players with a cold expression in his eyes, it sent shivers down the Pompey's backs.

In the final stage of the game, Portsmouth launched a suicide attack. It was heroic and sad at the same time. Nottingham Forest, which had waited for the entire game, finally got their best chance to fight back. George Wood did a long pass from the backfield, and Bendtner leaned his body against the only center back to stop the ball and broke into the penalty area to volley a shot. After it was pounced on by the goalkeeper, Arshavin followed up with a shot. 2:0! Nottingham Forest locked in the victory to win their first title of the new season.

"It looks like Nottingham Forest continued the good form from last season. Nottingham Forest controlled the pace of the game the entire time. Poor Portsmouth, the gap in their strength and experience caused them to lose the game..."

The television commentator summed up the game in this way.

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This championship title had another meaning in addition to another new trophy that Twain had won. He had let the new players get the first taste of Nottingham Forest's style and tradition—defensive counterattacks and the championship trophies.

This would help them integrate quickly into the team and play their parts earlier.

In fact, the FA Community Shield Cup was not a big deal. In the early years, it was considered a terrible "curse" —whichever team that won this season's FA Community Shield Cup, would surely lose the Premier League title. Now that the spell was broken, no one took this championship too seriously.

It was like how Tony Twain acted in this game—he rotated half of the main force and half of the substitutes which hinted strongly that he was training the players, as if it was still a summer friendly match. Only Portsmouth, lacking in honors, would take it seriously and really treat this game as a final to

play. Unfortunately, they were somewhat inferior in strength and could only nurse their grievance as they returned.

For the Nottingham Forest fans who had experience the victories of major titles in two years, the FA Community Shield was only a minor victory. But it gave them a good reason to get together for a celebration.

No matter how lowly the title was, they still lifted their glasses and roared:

“To the endless championship titles! To the insufferable Tony! To our dearest Nottingham Forest... Cheers!!”

Chapter 672: New Capital, New Season

After they won the FA Community Shield and with only five days to go until the start of the new season, something shocking happened in the English football world.

When this shocking incident first occurred, it was only a minor shock, and not many people took it seriously. But its impact gradually spread over time, and everyone suddenly woke up overnight—this could perhaps be a shock that would change the Premier League structure!

On August 11th, United Arab Emirates’ Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment announced that it had formally acquired Thaksin’s Manchester City Football Club under his name. Thaksin Shinawatra, the former club chairman would become the honorary president and did not have any real power. Like Abramovich’s acquisition of Chelsea, Bates continued to act as the chairman of the club for some time before his departure.

This piece of news came so suddenly that many people had not yet reacted.

While everyone knew that the Manchester City boss, Thaksin Shinawatra had a difficult time in the recent months and that his fortune had plummeted as a result of the investigations in Thailand, no one thought he would really just sell the club he held for a year!

Just over a year ago, when he took ownership of the Manchester City Football Club, the Manchester City fans did not express much dissatisfaction because they were eager for championship titles—Chelsea’s success had made many other English teams’ fans aware that a huge influx of foreign assets was the new impetus for a team’s redevelopment. Thaksin had injected more than half a billion pounds into his new team. Manchester City was even at the top of the league table at one point in the first part of the season. Therefore, the local media exclaimed: Manchester City is about to usher in “Thaksin’s Era!”

While these words still rang in one’s ears, the Manchester City boss had changed.

The Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment was headquartered in Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates, which was a city made up of more than a dozen islands. It was now the richest place in the United Arab Emirates and the world, with a per capita wealth of up to seventeen million US dollars. Their investments abroad reached almost one trillion US dollars!

The secret to their success laid with the fact that a quarter of the world's oil was at their feet, and the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment dealt in oil explorations and investments. On top of that, Abu Dhabi's behind the scenes supporter was the United Arab Emirates' royal family.

The British tabloids immediately dug up the news behind the club's change of hands. They claimed that after their investigations, the Abu Dhabi consortium, led by the oil trader, Al-Fahim, had ten times as much wealth as Abramovich. This news shocked the whole of England.

Abramovich was scary enough when he first came to England. Over the past two years Abramovich's investments gradually leaned toward rational, but everyone still remembered the storm he set off when he first arrived in 2003 and the impact could still be felt till now... Now that there was the richer Abu Dhabi consortium, all the clubs had to be careful that the core players of their teams being poached.

The statement did not indicate how much money was involved in the deal, with the number coming out of the tabloids listing it at two hundred million pounds. Thaksin made a small profit, and it could be seen from this that the reason he fled Manchester City was simply he was disappointed that Manchester City did not win the title, or because he now had no money and needed to sell the club to cash in.

Some media said that August 11th, 2008 would be the most memorable day for this 130-year-old club since its birth. It was enough to be compared to the birth of the team. The subtext was that the Manchester City Football Club could take advantage of this opportunity to be reborn. Chelsea's yesterday was their present and Chelsea's today would be their tomorrow. The todays of Manchester United, Real Madrid, Barcelona, AC Milan, Inter Milan and other powerhouse clubs would be their tomorrow. However, in fact, their nearest goal that should be the goal most likely to achieve would be to become the next Nottingham Forest ...

As the team's manager, Mark Hughes indicated his welcome of the arrival of the new boss on behalf of his team.

"... I know that money is not everything, but this is still something we can look forward to—we now have enough money to be used in the transfer market to find the players we need... You know, what that's like. I mean, I feel good now that we have the prerequisites to be a successful team. Maybe I should set a target for my team to enter next season's Champions League?"

Look, Mark Hughes, who had never been so rich, was so happy that he talked without rhyme or reason...

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Twain only learned the news when he read the newspaper at breakfast. Although it was not new news that foreign investment had been flowing into the English Premier League since a few years ago, perhaps the combined assets of those foreign bosses together could not be compared to the Abu Dhabi consortium...

He held the fork in his mouth as he stared in a daze at the picture of Al-Fahim in the newspaper.

He wondered what kind of impact the arrival of the new boss would have on Nottingham Forest.

He first thought of Ribéry. He was never at ease with the player with a rotten agent. With the transfer deal to Real Madrid fallen through, would this agent, who was unwilling to be left out of the action, pull

another stunt again and flirt with the wealthy Manchester City club? And encouraged Ribéry to move to Manchester City?

Thinking about it, Twain rejected this hypothesis. Even if Manchester City were able to offer a salary of five million pounds a week, Ribéry would not have gone to a team which could not even win an honor. He wanted to go to Real Madrid because on the one hand, Real Madrid could meet his salary requirements while on the other hand, Real Madrid itself was a world-renowned powerhouse club, where it was very likely for him to obtain the honors and received the world's attention. But what would he accomplish if he went to Manchester City? No matter how rich this team was, could it become the champion of the Premier League and UEFA Champions League overnight?

Twain gave a derisive snort.

He did not make this judgment because he had a bad impression of Manchester City from the incident with Richards a while ago. It was because he really despised the strength of the Manchester City team. Mark Hughes was not a successful manager. Twain did not think he could lead Manchester City to achieve any accomplishments.

You think you can be arrogant just because you have money? Can you buy all the world's heroes with money?

Dream on, Mark Hughes.

You may be able to afford the money, but it doesn't mean my players will want to go!

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In the days that followed, while nervously preparing for the new season and watching the oil daddy-backed Manchester City club made waves in the transfer market, and constantly hit the wall, all these became Twain's life.

The whole world knew that Manchester United was in pursuit of Berbatov, and the world knew that Berbatov had long "given his heart" to Ferguson. And now the world was waiting for the Tottenham Hotspur boss Levy to nod his assent after he raised the price high enough.

If it was not for Twain's satisfaction with his forward deployment, perhaps he would have gotten involved in Berbatov's transfer.

Now his secret idea had been realized by Manchester City. The new owner announced the bid for Berbatov on the first day of his arrival.

As a pair of mortal enemies in the same city, Manchester City was happy to do whatever it took to make Manchester United uncomfortable. They might not really need Berbatov, but they definitely wanted to oppose Manchester United.

This infuriated Ferguson. He was just about to succeed when Manchester City's bid raised Berbatov's worth to twenty-nine million pounds. Levy, the sly and greedy fox, thought about it and rejected Manchester United's offer. He pretended to hesitate whether to accept Manchester City's offer.

Meanwhile, just as AC Milan and Barcelona were chasing after Adebayor, Manchester City made its move.

Despite knowing that Wenger would not agree to Adebayor's departure, Manchester City still offered a high price of twenty-eight million pounds. Wenger took this opportunity to reject offers from AC Milan and Barcelona, while he offered Adebayor a new contract for a weekly fee of eighty thousand pounds which waited for his signature to take effect.

Mourinho finally ended his reclusive life at home and returned to his post. This time he landed at the Serie A powerhouse club, Inter Milan. Having just arrived at Inter Milan, there was news that he wanted to take Lampard and Drogba. On the other hand, Real Madrid also wanted to bring in a good center forward and was also keen on Drogba. This time it was Manchester City again who disrupted things and turned a transfer deal into a mess.

It was only the first day that Manchester City had given the whole of European football a glimpse of their style... which was annoying.

Twain did not know what Manchester City's purpose was in doing so. Was it fun to antagonize everyone? Could it be they were putting on a performance art? Or was Abu Dhabi really an idiot who knew nothing about football and thought that anyone could be bought with money?

The results of these three transfer deals showed them.

When Berbatov saw that the despicable Levy wanted to go back on his word, he immediately came forward for an interview and publicly stated that "he must have Manchester United and no other team." Manchester City wanted to buy him? Let them wait for the next life!

Manchester City's offer scared away AC Milan and Barcelona. Adebayor was annoyed, and he would never condescend to go to a small place like Manchester City, even if he had to stay at Arsenal! Consequently, he signed a new contract with Wenger.

As for Drogba? He did not even glance at Manchester City. Inter Milan and Real Madrid had an ambiguous attitude and eventually he stayed at Chelsea.

This bitter fact proved Twain's previous assumption that having money did not guarantee that a desired player could be bought. The world of football was not a world that money was invincible. A second-tier team like Manchester City had a long way to go to become a god.

Out of a mentality that hated the rich, Twain took delight in Manchester City's encounter. He liked to see the rich people deflated because he was not rich...

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Unable to purchase the players he was keen on in the transfer market for a while, Twain intended to take his energy back and focus on the league tournament which was about to start. Anyway, it was still half a month away from the close of the summer transfer window. He would play while he searched.

Nottingham Forest took on West Ham United in the first round of the new season. The opening game was Arsenal's home game against West Bromwich Albion.

West Ham United was not a powerful opponent, but Twain attached importance to it because this was the first game of the new season after all.

The Chinese people paid particular attention to “The first step is always the hardest.” If the opening game was not good, Twain would think that it would bring negative impact to the whole season. From a superstitious point of view, a bad beginning was really a little unlucky ...

Accordingly, the entire main force was deployed to play.

Van der Sar, Pepe, Kompany, Gareth Bale, Rafinha, George Wood, Van der Vaart, Ribéry, Beckham, van Nistelrooy and Eastwood played.

Such a lineup was at the championship level. Twain believed that this should fine for the away game.

As a result, the word “unlucky” came to his mind at the beginning of the game.

Van der Vaart was brutally shoveled to the ground by the West Ham United midfielder, Lee Bowyer after he took the ball in the midfield. When Bowyer shoveled van der Vaart down, he also made a “scissor legs” move and knocked van der Vaart’s left foot away. At the time, van der Vaart even made a gesture to request for a replacement as he laid on the ground. Only ten minutes had passed since the start of the game...

“Damn it!” Twain jumped out of his seat and swore. It was not only van der Vaart’s injury that angered him, but more so because Bowyer, the culprit, only received a verbal warning from the referee and did not even get a yellow card. He simply patted his buttocks and got up from the ground, pretending to come forward to comfort van der Vaart, but was pushed away by George Wood.

Bowyer covered his face and fell, sparking a clash between the players on both sides.

In the end, the referee gave George Wood a yellow card and also gave a yellow card to Behrami, who was active in the conflict, punishing both players before the two teams were separated.

“This asshole...” Twain certainly was not cursing George Wood. In actual fact, he was supportive of George Wood’s action. He was scolding Bowyer. After all these years, this scumbag still showed no sign of improvement. It did not look like this game at the JJB Stadium would be easy.

Van der Vaart was carried off on a stretcher and the team doctor, Fleming told Twain that he was absolutely not be able to play again in this game and had to be replaced. Şahin, who was still undergoing psychotherapy, did not come to London with the team. Twain had to bring on Petrov and let Ribéry go to the middle.

Van der Vaart’s injury disrupted the tactics and rhythm of Nottingham Forest. For some time, West Ham United dominated with its home advantage and bombarded Nottingham Forest’s penalty area.

Fortunately, George Wood was as consistent as ever and organized the defenders to put up two defensive areas in front of the goal. The West Ham United team had no better way to break through the Forest’s goal for a while.

But a good defense could still collapse in the face of an endless attack. At the end of the first half, the Welsh bad boy Bellamy forced his way through Rafinha using his speed and plugged into the penalty area from the side. He lifted his leg for a shot at a very narrow angle!

The football was pounced on by van der Sar for a bit before it hit the inside of the goalpost and bounced into the net...

“The defending champions entered a bitter fight in the away game! The West Ham United team informs the defending champion that the new season is definitely not going to be easy!”

Twain replaced Beckham with Lennon in the second half. With his excellent speed and breakthrough ability, Lennon did cause West Ham United a lot of trouble. His attack on the right flank was more penetrating than Beckham’s.

With this substitution adjustment, Nottingham Forest swept away the first-half slump. The score was equalized seventeen minutes into the second half. The goalscorer was van Nistelrooy. Lennon’s breakthrough resulted in a weak defense in the middle of the penalty area. The keen senses of the King of the Six-Yard Box helped him locate West Ham United’s fatal spot at the most crucial time.

Following which towards the end of the game, Nottingham Forest, which had not given up on the offense, scored another goal, which was scored by Ribéry. With a breakthrough from the middle and a long shot from top of the arc, the football shot into the West Ham United team’s goal like a shell. The commentator shouted “world-class ball” continuously.

Twain also excitedly jumped from his seat. The last-minute reversal killed West Ham United!

Despite winning the game, Twain did not mean to let go of anyone in the post-match press conference. He lashed out at Lee Bowyer for his lack of sportsmanship and then “questioned” the referee’s decision on the foul. His doubts were certainly more bluntly put than what was generally said.

“I can’t figure out why Bowyer did not even get a yellow card with this foul. It was only a verbal warning for such a bad foul. Could it be that someone did not want us to win? I’m sorry, but we still won in the end.”

Chapter 673: Wealth of An Entire Nation

“Gabriel Agbonlahor! Agbonlahor! This is his third goal in this game! Agbonlahor scored a hat trick in less than eight minutes! Oh, ho ho—poor Manchester City!” “The cheers at Villa Park stadium were thunderous cheers as if there had been an earthquake here. The vigor stunned the visiting Manchester City fans, who sat dazedly in their seats as they watched that kid darted along the sidelines.

His name was Gabriel Agbonlahor and had been Aston Villa’s rising new star for the last two seasons. Now he was the absolute leading player in this game.

The Manchester City manager, Mark Hughes stood on the sidelines with his arms across his chest as he looked on helplessly at the celebratory crowd around him.

Just eight minutes earlier, his own team had just turned the score to 1:1 thanks to Elano’s penalty shot. He was still plotting how to take three points from this away game to give the new boss a perfect gift for their first meeting when over here, Aston Villa’s number 11 had already scored three goals in a row and completed a hat trick...

After the game, the away Manchester City team lost 1:4 and became the laughingstock of the media. Having just become a billionaire, they were crushed on the field which made people gleeful. It looked like there were a lot of people who hated the rich in England...

Once they returned to Manchester from Birmingham, the first thing that Mark Hughes did was to go to the club's owner and tell him that the summer would be over soon if he still did not make a move— Manchester City were slow to make a move in the transfer market due to Thaksin's problems earlier. Except to buy back Shaun Wright-Phillips, there was no other move to be commended about.

Before he could leave to look for his boss, an Arab man in a white headscarf found him.

"Good morning, Mr. Mark Hughes." That man was very polite.

Hughes did not know him, but he was not surprised. Since the club changed its owner overnight, the number of unfamiliar faces had increased.

"I'm Mr. Fahim's assistant, Osamu."

"Ah, Mr. Osamu, good morning. What can I do for you?"

In fact, it could probably be estimated that Osamu looking for him was equivalent to Fahim looking for him.

"Mr. Fahim thinks the team should make some big changes. He wants Mr. Hughes to come up with a list and give it to him."

In the face of such a good thing, Hughes shook his head and said, "Mr. Osamu, I have no doubt that Mr. Fahim wants the team to be stronger. But now that the new season has already begun, implementing big changes in the lineup will only bring about worse results. Of course, we need to adjust the current squad, but not now."

"In that case, can you tell me which areas the team needs players the most at the moment?"

This time Hughes immediately blurted out, "Strikers."

Indeed, Manchester City's forward line was terrible.

The game against Aston Villa looked like something was wrong with the rear defensive line, but in fact the root cause was in the forward line. When the striker could not pose a threat to the enemy's goal, the other side's offensive would be unbridled.

After Thaksin took ownership of the team last season, he brought in a lot of new people to the team, but the quality was really underwhelming ...

The first thing that Mark Hughes did since he took over this summer, was to clean up the players he did not need in the team. He drove away five strikers in one go on the forward line.

Corradi was sold to Reggina Calcio, Bianchi was sold to Turin, Samaras sold to Celtic, while the contracts of Dickov and Mpenza were terminated by the club.

The only strikers left in the team that could be used were Vassell, Benjamin Mwaruwari, Bojinov and Sturridge. Sturridge was the team's future star, but he was still a little young.

Looking at this lineup, there was hardly a goalscorer among them. Moreover, looking at the top five teams in the Premier League, every single one of them had a leading goalscorer. Manchester United had Rooney, Ronaldo and Tevez, Liverpool had Torres, Arsenal had Adebayor and Eduardo da Silva, Chelsea had Drogba, and Nottingham Forest had van Nistelrooy.

The Manchester City new boss's bold and visionary words held a prominent position in the media. As a team that had always wanted to win all the championship titles and reach the Champions League, it was wretched not to have a striker who was of a good enough level...

The position suggested by Mark Hughes also received Osamu's approval. He nodded and said, "It won't be long before you, Mr. Mark Hughes, can have a lot of world-class strikers."

Mark Hughes was alarmed instead. He feared the club would waste time on the players who would not come at all. He hurriedly said, "I hope it's as soon as possible. We don't have much time, Mr. Osamu. The summer transfer window only had half a month left. If we can't find anyone, we have to wait until January..."

"Please rest assured on this, Mr. Hughes. We have a big plan, but it will take time. Don't worry. The striker position will be fulfilled at the first instance."

With that, Osamu turned and left. He was now a busy man. Although the Manchester City club had a general manager, this personal assistant was better to employ in front of Fahim...

Mark Hughes shook his head as he looked at this Arab man's back. It had only been a week from the initial excitement over a huge influx of capital pouring into the club to the current calmness. Because he had seen first-hand how the star players simply rejected Manchester City.

Manchester City was not Chelsea in those years. For most of the players, it lacked appeal. Some things could not be achieved simply by having money.

Abramovich's money was only one reason Chelsea was so attractive during that time. The most important reason was that, with the foreshadowing of Hoddle, Gullit, Vialli and Ranieri, Chelsea was already an emerging power outside the Premier League's traditional top three at the time. In addition to being in the top four in the league for a long time, they were basically considered certain to be a powerhouse for winning the FA Cup and the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup. Under such circumstances, they could immediately take on a new lease of life with the capital injection.

Manchester City was different. Although they represented Manchester longer than Manchester United which was an outsider, their results were really a tragic sight. Their best results were four FA Cups and one UEFA Cup Winners' Cup which happened a long time ago, which held no appeal to the players today. More people just thought of them as a traditional Premier League mid-stream team.

How many world-class players would condescend to join this team that might not even be able to play in next season's UEFA Europa League just for the money?

According to Hughes' train of thought, Manchester City's rebuilding required at least three to four years, through small victories and trophies to re-establish their foundation and change Manchester City's image as a low-level team in everyone's mind. Then it would be the road to becoming a powerhouse...

However, his new boss was impatient and obviously could not wait that long. Furthermore, he had a lot of inestimable pounds. He admitted himself that he was buying time with money. He wanted Manchester City to become the world's number one team that all the world-class star players scrambled to join overnight. He was serious about the team becoming the new Manchester United and new Real Madrid.

Mark Hughes now felt that sitting in the Manchester City manager's position was not an enviable job. With such an ambitious club owner who knew nothing about football and a second-rate team... the harsh reality made him feel like he was sitting on the edge of a volcanic crater. If he did not produce the results, the boss would dismiss him and not reflect on what went wrong with his strategy. The most commonly seen and simplest way was usually to change the managers. Therefore, the poor manager became a scapegoat. He not only lost his job, but also had a stain on his coaching career.

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After the first round of the league tournament ended, Tony Twain once again made the headlines in the sports pages of various media outlets. His words in his post-match press conference that "someone doesn't want us to win" offended the English Football Association and the Referees' Association, and for which he received a fine of fifteen thousand pounds as well as a one-match ban from the Football Association.

<The Sun> mocked that Tony Twain was probably the manager with the greatest number of bans in modern football history. They unceremoniously pointed out that Twain was a "moron who speaks from his ass instead of using his head."

This time Twain did not fight back because he was "muffled" by the club. Evan Doughty barred Twain from shooting his mouth off and cause trouble for himself and the club again. Thanks to Twain's big mouth, Nottingham Forest had become the most difficult "thorn on the side" in the eyes of the English Football Association, the Referees' Association and the English Premier League committee. No matter the occasion, they would always receive some "special treatment" that no one else enjoyed.

As a result, Twain was very quiet. He sullenly looked on as the media taunted and sneered.

At this point, another incident happened which distracted the media's attention. No one laughed at him anymore, but this situation made him even more annoyed.

Manchester City had announced that they had already issued a blank cheque to Nottingham Forest for their leading striker, van Nistelrooy!

If it were successful, it could be the significant transfer in the world. Never before had a club been so contemptuous of the rules of the world like Manchester City. The other clubs would plan and calculate meticulously with the sale or purchase of players and try to maximize the benefits. There would be a lot of behind-the-scene stories every year at the negotiating table during the transfer window. The team managers, professional agents, players and managers together were scenes right out of a movie.

But Manchester City's emergence broke the traditional transfer rules. First, it provoked Manchester United, Real Madrid and the other big clubs. Then it tried to seduce the star players of other teams. Now they made an even more amazing move—they threw money which the other teams saw as a lifeline, around like it was dirt. That way, they acted as if they looked on high over all living things, and then used

a cold and conceited voice to inform the others, “How much is your player worth? Name your price, there is no one in the world that we can’t buy. Don’t think small and drag your feet. Give a number and write however much you want. If you write too low, I may say you are not sincere.”

Twain was furious.

He found Evan and Allan and said, “Did the Manchester City club really issue a blank cheque?”

Evan pulled a check out of a folder and handed it to Twain. He said, “They really give it.” His smile was a little odd, maybe he felt awkward. Allan sat on the side and was silent.

Twain saw that it was really blank on the check. Not a number was on it. It was just waiting for him to play the numbers game. “Are these idiots putting on a show? Are they sincerely coming to us to buy or to show off to us that they have the wealth of an entire nation?”

In fact, Manchester City’s owners did have the wealth of an entire nation—because they were basically the country, the United Arab Emirates.

Despite this fact, Twain would never allow them to show off on purpose, especially in front of him.

Damn, I have to count my pennies this summer while you’re living large. With a flick of your hand, here comes a blank check. Are you mocking me?

Hearing Twain’s complaint, the odd smile on Evan’s face deepened. Twain could be sure his smile was an awkward one while Allan continued to remain silent.

“What do you think?” Twain had not lost his head to anger yet. He knew the both of them needed to be consulted.

“Tony, we’ve got to listen to you with regards to any deals with the players.” Evan said.

Twain looked at Allan again.

Allan spread his hands and said, “Evan is right. The team is your area of command, Tony.”

“That is to say, I am full responsible for this matter, and you won’t get involved?” Feeling uneasy, Twain asked again.

Evan just laughed and did not reply. Allan raised both his hands and replied, “If you’re worried, we can sign an agreement in black and white...”

Twain interrupted his words and said, “I didn’t mean that, Allan.”

“I mean we really won’t interfere with your work. We all respect every decision you make. After all, you led the team to where it is today.”

“Thank you.” Twain gravely nodded his thanks and said to Allan, “Please help me call the media to Wilford. I’m going to have a press conference... All the media.”

Allan nodded and didn’t ask him what he was going to do at the press conference—any fool would know what he was going to do.

“You can’t let a seemingly thirsty person wait too long. We’ll give them an answer this afternoon.”
Twain snickered.

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There was one more thing Twain must do before the press conference. Out of respect for the player’s personal will, he must go and talk to van Nistelrooy to hear his thoughts on the matter.

Van Nistelrooy knew of the matter before Twain, who did not believe for a second that Manchester City did not contact him and his agent in private.

The Dutchman’s answer was rather straightforward, which touched Twain. He said, “I did not want to leave here, boss. I hope to retire here if possible.”

“But the Arab’s offer is very tempting, isn’t it?” Twain was not entirely convinced. He was afraid that these were just pretty words for show.

Van Nistelrooy laughed, “Actually they also gave me a blank check and said to my agent to fill out whatever amount I want.”

Twain cursed the Arabs for being ruthless in his mind. Imagine how many players could withstand such temptation of any amount of pay package...

F**k you Arab show-offs! So, what if you have oil? Excavate all you want. In a few decades the oil will be finished. I want to see what you can use to act so arrogantly at that time!

Tony Twain from a poor family abused roundly inside. He felt extreme and unbalanced.

“Then you...” Bracing himself, Twain was really worried about van Nistelrooy’s defection.

“I gave it back.” The Dutch striker shrugged.

Twain almost went straight up for a hug.

“I don’t play football to make a lot of money. I’ve made enough money. Right now, ... I just want to enjoy football. I like playing here.”

“You’re a good brother and really loyal!” Twain blurted this sentence in Mandarin. Not caring that van Nistelrooy did not understand, he patted the other man hard on the shoulder.

Van Nistelrooy did not know what the boss had said. He just looked at him laugh and let him pat him on the shoulder.

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Now that he knew van Nistelrooy’s thoughts on this, Twain had no qualms about what he was about to do—he was not worried about what would happen with Manchester City, but about this affecting his relationship with his player.

After the afternoon training, all the reporters did not go outside the training ground to stop the star players. Instead, they all rushed to the press conference hall of the Wilford training base.

While the leading character had not yet come, there were reporters who speculated as to the purpose behind Twain suddenly taking the initiative to gather everyone to hold a press conference.

There were actually two incidents involving him recently. One matter was his provocation of the Football Association and made them fly into a rage. The other was the “blank check gate” that only recently occurred.

Majority of the reporters chose that it had something to do with the “blank check” because they felt that Twain was not one who would step out for a press conference to do with a ban and a fifteen thousand pounds. Otherwise he would have done so once every few days.

When Twain and Allan Adams appeared at the press conference together, the room gradually quieted down.

Allan sat next to Twain, who stood in front of a pile of microphones. He made a “stop” gesture and said, “I’m not going to take any questions about the situation and will not take too much of everyone’s time.”

He then took a folded piece of paper out of his pocket and unfolded it to show the reporters below the stage.

“This is the blank check that the Manchester City Football Club gave us.” He said, pointing to the piece of paper.

The reporters with good eyesight could see that Twain did not lie to them.

Sure enough, it had something to do with Manchester City, who had been in the limelight lately.

Manchester City used its wealth and offended a number of clubs recently. There were also many people in the media industry who did not like them. Now Manchester City had finally come to Nottingham Forest. One team became arrogant because it suddenly became rich while the other was naturally arrogant... This group decided to watch the show.

“They asked us for van Nistelrooy this morning and gave a completely blank check for us to fill in the numbers. I would like to thank them for their generosity, and I decided to give them an answer in front of all the media as a mark of respect. My reporter friends are my witnesses.”

With that, he took a pen out of his pocket and swept the pile of microphones, cell phones, and recording pens on the table. He leaned down and started to fill in the numbers on the check.

After he lifted the pen and put it down, the whole room suddenly became quiet. The reporters who sat closer, craned their necks to see the numbers Twain had put down.

They only saw Twain’s wrists going in a circle, another circle and yet another circle...

After about thirty seconds, his hand still had not stopped and the room remained silent.

In fact, before coming, Allan did not know what kind of answer Twain would give Manchester City. He was as curious as the reporters below. So, he glanced from the side...

That was when Twain screwed on the pen cap and picked up the check—he was finished.

That evening, the photograph of Twain smiling with the check in his hand appeared on the various major television stations' sports news and football programs. Even the entertainment talk shows, which had nothing to do with football, excitedly discussed this affair—because this matter was really hilarious.

Most of England was on Twain's side in this rare instance.

The influx of foreign capital had caused a lot of panic among those who feared the erosion of English football. At this time, it was a coincidence that Tony Twain came out with "Tony Twain's style" of rejecting Manchester City's monetary offensive. Although he himself only wanted to protect his players, he could almost be equated as a "national hero" in the eyes of many outsiders...

"... To be honest, I think they (the Arabs) should know what kind of opponent they've encountered. It's not easy to poach a player from Tony Twain." In the Sky TV's football news, the news anchor smiled as he critiqued after he reported the news.

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The BBC television station conducted street interviews. A bald man clenched his fists and shouted excitedly, "Although I'm not a Nottingham Forest fan, this time I support Tony Twain and his team! Can't allow the Arabs to think that they can act without the slightest scruple because they have money! Keep fighting, Forest! Oh yeah!"

After the excited fan left, the reporter spoke to the microphone and said to the camera, "Obviously, he is not a Manchester City fan."

"Well, thank you, Vincent. Maybe he's a Manchester United fan." The host said after the footage cut back live to the studio.

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On a late-night talk show, the invited female star thrust up her generous bosom and said to the host with a laugh, "Ah, I think I'm a little obsessed with the lovely Tony. He's so manly! I don't mind having a one-night stand with him... I hear he doesn't have a girlfriend?"

The host pretended to make a face and said, "Aren't you afraid that he's gay?"

The female star's eyes sparkled, and she smiled happily, "I don't mind at all! And I think it's going to be more thrilling!"

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The BBC 5's correspondent and the reporter, Spicer from The Daily Telegraph was producing a book called <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is>. He said through the telephone on the live show to everyone who followed this incident closely, "This is not just a football event. I'd rather call it a social phenomenon! My <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is> is about to be finished! At that time, I believe you can learn some of the reasons. Frankly speaking he is such a person!"

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The Sky TV's website message board was even livelier. There was less constraint here than on the television media, so it seemed a little confusing. Those people who supported Tony Twain were in the majority, and the opposition party was almost all Manchester City fans.

"Let him die! Who does he think he is? This clown, Tony Twain is the bastard resulting from me screwing around with his mother. Wah haha haha—"

"Poor man, another idiot driven mad by Tony..."

"You damn moron, why did your father not flush you down the toilet when you were born?"

"Don't mind him. Leave him be."

"Tony Twain keep fighting! We are all your supporters!"

"Why should we support an upstart like Nottingham Forest? A hooligan has become your idol. I really feel sad for the British people!"

"You're not qualified to say that, you Manchester City upstart asshole!"

"You Manchester City idiot, who are you calling an upstart? Come to Stamford Bridge if you dare. I'll show you a thing or two!"

"We, Manchester United fans have announced that there is only one team in Manchester, and that is Manchester United! Oh yeah, oh yeah—Oh yeah!"

"Get out of the way, you red devils! Don't you know who the first owner in Manchester was! Blue is the main color of English football!"

"F**K! Are you completely ignoring the existence of Liverpool? I tell you; we've won the most championship titles in England! Blue is shit!"

"Anfield bastards, don't think that just because we Everton fans are away, you can be full of shit!"

"Manchester City are stupid c**ts, can't even be compared to Arsenal..."

"White Hart Lane bastards don't lump the Gunners together with idiots like Manchester City. We're better than them!"

"Damn it, we'll show you Gunners in the next North London derby!"

...

It was really chaotic and indeed the first mess in history.

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And the main character who caused this chaos was at home, with his legs crossed and holding a cup of tea, talking to Shania on the phone.

"Uncle Tony, you're making headlines again!"

"How so? Does the American side cares about the Premier League too? They all don't watch soccer, do they?"

"I checked online!"

"The Internet is so annoying. Can't even pretend to be a good guy..." Twain did not even watch his mouth and teased Shania who could not see him. He found that during this time, as long as it was a phone call with Shania, he could not act serious. He initially wanted to seriously ask her about her study and career, but all he could say became jokes. Perhaps it was because they had not seen each other for too long. He really miss her...

Sure enough, Shania giggled and said, "But I like to see you pretend to be a good guy, Uncle Tony."

"Why?" Twain did not understand. There was nothing to like about pretending to be a good guy.

"Because it's cute!"

A huge bead of sweat dripped from Twain's forehead. Was an uncle who was close to fort years old in biological age, still cute? He thought about it and felt a chill down his spine.

"Hey, Shania. Don't use the word 'cute' to describe an old man in the future. I'm covered in goosebumps."

Shania chuckled even more happily.

But he really felt good to be able to cheer up Shania who was alone in the United States. Not to mention that he would be a cute middle-aged uncle, even if he were to be a clown, Twain would do so too.

There was a strange feeling growing in Twain's heart. He liked to hear Shania silvery bell-like laughter. He felt that if he could make Shania happy every day, it would be a great achievement. He would never forgive whoever made Shania unhappy. And whoever get any ideas about this lovely fairy, he would also never ... he did not seem to have any right. She was not even his own daughter... But I can keep her safe. Those guys whom I don't think are good enough for her cannot approach Shania within five square miles!

After laughing happily, the two people then fell in a silence.

Twain could even clearly hear her gasps coming from the other end of the phone. Perhaps she had laughed too long. He could even imagine that Shania must be red in her face with a fine bead of sweat on her forehead. The gasps continued, and it became clearer, as if Shania herself had put her lips next to Twain's ear.

Twain felt a little itchy in his ear...

"Is your work difficult, Shania?" In order to get out of this awkward situation, he spoke first and asked.

"Of course, it's hard. Sometimes I feel like I'm too busy." Shania pursed her lips and said. "I feel like giving myself a year off!" She stretched her back and said loudly.

As she grew more famous and had made more new friends in Hollywood, her career gradually expanded. It was normal to be busy.

Twain smiled and thought that even though Shania was eighteen years old, she was still like a child psychologically. "If you want to take a year off, would Mr. Fasal cry?"

“Hee-hee. I can only tell you this. Mr. Fasal is getting stricter.” Shania stuck out her tongue.

Twain suddenly thought of something. “How about your parents? Did you stay in contact?” When he found that they were together, Shania rarely took the initiative to mention her family. Even if her concept of family was indifferent, she should not be like this. Not to mention he heard that Brazilians were not like the British, their sense of family was actually very strong.

“Yes, they came to L.A. some time ago to spend a few days with me. But they’re all busy. I’m been used to it since as long as I can remember. By the way, they asked about you.”

“Asked about me?”

“Yeah, they heard you went to China and Japan, and asked by the way, seeing that you are also busy ...”

Twain scratched his head and said, “If I can, I really want to put myself on leave for a year too...”

He finished his sentence only to find that he and Shania had said the same thing and heard Shani’s delighted laughter in amazement.

“If you take a year off, it would not be one person who would be crying, would it? Well, Uncle Tony?”

“Well, can’t always fulfill beautiful wishes. Ah, the reality is so cruel, and society is so harsh...”

After he chatted with Shania for a while more, he eventually hung up. Both of them were a little tired from working every day. They were tense from being public figures all day long and could only be themselves for so little time at night at home.

Lying in bed and staring at the ceiling, his eyes gradually adapted to the darkness in the bedroom. He was not thinking about how to deal with more reporters coming in tomorrow, or what would happen after his fight to death with Manchester City. He suddenly recalled Shania’s gasps over the phone.

In addition to the clear gasps in his mind, there was only the slightly open and moist red lips. The small and lovely tongue hidden behind the pearl white teeth gently poked its tip out, as if a budding lotus had just exposed its sharp tips.

Uncle Tony....

Twain suddenly sat up from the bed. He got off the bed, bent his waist and ran into the bathroom. He remembered that he had cared about talking to Shania over the phone just now and forgot to empty his bladder for his survival... Soon, the sound of peeing into the toilet could be heard.

Once he came out of the bathroom, he passed by Shania’s room, stood at the door and looked inside for a moment. The décor was exactly the same as when Shania was there. The family of Totoro soft toys sat on Shania’s bed and became temporary tenants.

Looking at these charmingly naïve and furry soft toys with their different expressions, Twain laughed as he leaned against the door frame.

The eighteen-year-old supermodel and Hollywood’s new star with countless fans around the world, Judy Shania Jordana was considered the star with a boundless future but she was still a little girl who could not sleep at night without holding anything.

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The next day, outside the gates of Wilford, Twain and Dunn came together. They could see the crowd of people swarming around there. They knew who those people were and why they were here.

“Honestly, I’m not surprised at all.” Twain raised his head and said off-handedly.

“Truthfully, I will be shocked if you’re surprised.” Dunn deadpanned and made a sarcastic remark next to him.

“Hanging out with the beautiful female reporter has made you more eloquent, Dunn...” Twain gave his partner a sideways glance.

An occasional glib repartee was good for the physical and mental health.

“Hi, good morning...Yo, Mr. 007, how early did you come here? There’s dew on your hair...” Twain skillfully greeted the reporters and did not forget to make a joke or two with the people he had a better relationship with.

“That’s perspiration, Tony...” Pierce Brosnan smiled awkwardly, and reached up to wipe the sweat on his forehead.

Twain signaled for Dunn to enter first. Then he stood at the gate and turned to ask, “What can I do for you?”

He did not want to bring this mess to the training ground. He wanted to settle it here, and not let a single reporter enter.

“Do you know the the Manchester City club’s latest response?” Someone asked aloud among the reporters.

“What?”

“Manchester City’s chief operating officer, Paul Aldridge has made a statement to hit back at your performance at yesterday’s press conference. He thinks you’re a circus clown, putting on a show.”

“He’s not the first person to say that about me. Doesn’t matter. They wanted to buy our player and we sincerely gave a price. If they can’t afford to pay, just come out and say they can’t afford to pay. We can also announce the end of the transfer deal. I don’t know how this personal attack came about.” Twain spread his hands with an innocent face. But the reporters knew that if he were really innocent, there would be no bad guys in the world.

If they were aware of such a Chinese saying— lead the life of a whore and expect a monument built for one’s chastity, and understood what it meant, they would have given it to Tony Twain. Because in their view, Twain was the kind of person who was like a whore that wanted a chastity monument...

“But, Mr. Twain. You don’t think this offer is a little like...”

“Do you think it’s not enough?” Twain asked which shocked the reporter to quickly wave his hands. Who would dare to think it was not enough with so many “9s”? They could not even count the figure!

“I mean to say...a little like daylight robbery.”

“I don’t think so.” The expression on Twain’s face looked even more innocent. “The Manchester City owner told us very sincerely to fill in the check as we like. He didn’t state the amount that we couldn’t fill in, nor did he set a limit for the lowest or highest. Hence I sincerely met the other party’s sincere request. I don’t think we’ve done anything wrong on both sides. So, I don’t understand what the chief operating officer is angry about... Don’t tell me the money is coming out of his own pocket? Oh, then he’s such a poor thing in that case...” Twain raised his eyebrows and sighed.

Some of the reporters laughed.

This time, most of the media stood on the side of Tony Twain. Many of the actions of the Manchester City club since the change of ownership had angered many in this circle, but they had not had the opportunity or excuse to express their dissatisfaction. If they deliberately picked fault with them, it might give the other party information that could be used against them. Now that Manchester City had provoked Nottingham Forest, there would be a good show.

“If the Manchester City club makes a public statement that they have never sent us a blank check and have never said those words ‘fill in the figure you want’, then everything was hyped up by me using the name of the new Manchester City boss. In that case, I can hold another press conference and publicly apologize to the Manchester City Football club as a whole. The sincerest apology and no objections from me!”

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Manchester City certainly could not lick back its sprayed spittle. That would be too disgusting...

The real reason was that the pervasive news media had already brought to live the description they wrote about their image as obscenely wealthy and squandering money around—furthermore, it was what they wanted to see most initially. They hoped to attract the world’s top players to play for them in this way.

As a result, now that they were checkmated by Twain, they had no way to refute.

Twain won in another clash between Nottingham Forest and Manchester City. He finally got his dignity back that he had lost on Richards.

Manchester City suffered a loss and had to suffer in silence. But did that mean they had no way of dealing with Tony Twain?

No, they had many ways.

Today’s Nottingham Forest might be a delicious cheesecake, 82 Lafite, scrumptious French banquet, scantily clad beautiful woman in the eyes of these big shots ... The more resistance they put up, the more it aroused the desire of the strong party to conquer.

Chapter 675: The Imposing Manner of The Strong

Van Nistelrooy was also harassed. As he was surrounded by many reporters running after him, he repeatedly voiced his stance. "I'm not leaving Nottingham Forest. I'm very happy with everything here, and I want to play here until I retire if possible."

The owner refused to sell and the player refused to come. What else was there to talk about?

The Manchester City club subsequently announced that they were no longer interested in van Nistelrooy.

Twain was able to take delight in fighting Manchester City after clarifying another matter — van der Vaart was fine.

In the first round of the league tournament, van der Vaart left the game with an injury in the opening ten minutes. Twain was very worried. After the game ended, the results of the hospital examination allowed him to breathe a sigh of relief. He would recover after a two-week rest since he did not injure any muscles or bones. Twain originally thought he needed at least four months to recover.

If that had not happened, Twain might not be in the mood to play with Manchester City. He would have rejected the offer.

The media and spectators in England would not have enjoyed such a good show the past two days.

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A lot of interesting things happened. The English fans found that as long as Tony Twain was around, they would never feel that time was slow. Everyone relished watching him shooting off his big mouth at the post-match press conference, and the head-on clash with Manchester City and the United Arab Emirates consortium behind it.

Just before the dust settled on those stories, the second round of the Premier League began.

In the second round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest continued their away trip and headed to Kingston upon Hull in Yorkshire, where they would meet a new rival, Hull City.

The 104-year-old team was competing in England's top tier football League for the first time. Before, they were more famous for their rugby. The team's home stadium, KCOM Stadium, was both a football pitch and an international rugby stadium.

Since Twain was banned by the English Football Association for one match, he was only allowed to watch the game from the stands, the command handed over to his two assistant managers, who would be in charge of the on-field adjustments. The Football Association was also aware that Tony Twain was not someone who would just sit quietly, so they sent security to flank Twain. They would sit beside him during the game to prevent him from using advanced communication tools to contact the coaches.

When Twain gave the team the specific tactics in the locker room, he was delighted to see the two black-clad men waiting at the door. "It's been a long time, you two."

The two people had overseen him during the time he was banned from the English Football League Championship.

They were familiar as well. The two smiled. "We often see you, Mr. Twain."

Although they were no strangers, they were not friends who would chat together, so Twain did not talk nonsense and just pointed to the grandstand to say, "let's go."

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In the stands, Twain was a lot more honest than their first encounter. He did not get any devious ideas and did not ask to change seats. He did not have any intention of contacting below. He was like an ordinary fan as he held a cup of beer and sat in the stands to watch the game. If the Forest team did well, he would clap and cheer like any other Forest fans. If Hull City had the upper hand, he would scold and boo as well.

As the two men watched his behavior, they did not know whether to cry or laugh.

Were there any managers who were like him?

Twain's thinking was very simple. Since he obviously could not direct the game in the stands, he would watch the game like a fan. The experience was invaluable to him.

Hull City was a newly promoted team and they were considered to be the top promoted favorite of the season. It took only five years for the team to move from the lowest level in the English professional league to the top. They ranked third in England. They could not be underestimated.

In the first round of the league tournament, Hull City won 2:1 against Fulham, and the entire city was jubilant. They were equally in high spirits for this game. If they did not handle them carefully, the UEFA Champions League winner and last season's Double Winner would suffer a defeat.

Hull City's manager was Phil Brown. Twain was a little unfamiliar with Hull City, but he was not unfamiliar with Brown. The man, who was once Allardyce's assistant manager, had spent seven years at Bolton Wanderers, from which his tactical preferences were evident.

The Bolton Wanderers achieved success in the Premier League by relying on strength to compete, which Brown was well-versed in. According to the team's new player George Boateng, the team began a lot of physical training before the season and would be pitting strength against the Premier League strong teams. And Boateng happened to be such a player. The team captain, Ashbee was even more loved by the fans for being aggressive on the pitch. In addition, the game's starting center-back, Turner was more than 1.90 meters tall, and Gardner, on loan, was equally strong.

Judging from the lineup, it was clear what tactics Hull City would use in this game: high balls and aerial shots in English traditional football and physical confrontational style of competition.

The natural enemy of a technical team was such a team. Remember the "Crazy Gang" Wimbledon that was brilliant for a while in the 1980s? The European champion, Liverpool had to bow before them at home.

Sadly for them, Nottingham Forest was not Liverpool, and they had never based their pride on their skills. In terms of strength, fighting spirit, and drive, Nottingham Forest would not lose to this newly promoted team.

Before the game, to counter the characteristics of the opponent, Twain's arranged tactics in the midfield to meet force with force, and then rely on incisive attacks from the sides to gain the key.

And, like most newly promoted teams, Hull City's focus in the summer transfer window had been on their offense rather than defense. Not because their defense was strong enough, but because their offense was worse. Consequently, most of the people brought in during the transfer window were attacking players. As for their defense, they still played the old set of coordination from the English Football League Championship.

Generally speaking, in the manager's opinion, offense could be adjusted at will, but the defense had to be steady. Unless they had to, they would rather trust old players who already understand than new players who might be capable.

Twain seized on that and gave up the defensive counterattack routine. Nottingham Forest launched a full-scale attack at the start of the away game, putting a lot of pressure on Hull City both on the sides and in the middle.

He did not believe that an English Football League Championship level of defense could withstand the attacking line of a Champions League level team.

The facts were as he thought. Hull City wanted to compete against the Forest team at home, using physical strength but lost four minutes later. Van Nistelrooy, who was in the spotlight because of the clash between Manchester City and Forest, was onside and successfully scored the opening goal. The KCOM Stadium was silent. The physically strong defenders were still a little tender when they came up against the experienced striker.

The goal that was scored so early in the game completely interrupted Phil Brown's deployment and upset the mood of Hull City players.

They beat Fulham in the first round and thought they could make a good start in the Premier League, so they arrogantly wanted to defeat Nottingham Forest at home — Manager Brown's reason was that the strong Nottingham Forest team would underestimate a newly promoted team.

But he did not know that Twain paid more attention to a newly promoted team. It was related to his own experience, and he never let go of a great opportunity to earn points and gain on the goal difference from a newly promoted team.

The poor Hull City rushed to organize a counterattack, but when they faced the two defensive lines led by George Wood, they could not gain an upper hand physically and they lacked skills and experience. Their circumstances immediately declined.

Eight minutes after the last goal, Nottingham Forest scored another goal. The goal was scored by Eastwood, whose sudden long shot at the top of the penalty area arc was perfectly aligned with his style. The football ball arced straight into the far corner of the goal. And it was 2:0!

The Forest team slowed down its pace a little after the two-goal lead. Hull City gradually strengthened and began to try to fight back.

The two sides were entangled on the pitch. Hull City had two excellent chances, but one was timely pounced on by van der Sar while Pepe lifted the siege for the other when he went head to head with the opposing striker.

Nottingham Forest also had a sure-shot chance. Ribéry's shot bounced off the post and Lennon, who followed up, tried to make up for it but it was kicked away by the opposing captain, Ashbee.

As van der Vaart could not play due to his injury, Twain put Beckham in the middle to partner with George Wood. The focus is on the sides with the middle as support. Because Beckham had some defensive ability, George Wood was instructed to plug in and actively participate in the offense to try to put more pressure on the opponent.

After scoring two goals in the first half, neither side scored again. The score was 2:0, with Nottingham Forest in the lead.

During halftime, Twain got up and smiled at the two men. "Did the FA say not to let me go into the locker room at halftime?"

The two men looked at each other, and one of them said alertly, "you can't go into the home team's locker room."

Twain laughed happily. "I'm not that stupid."

Then he turned his head around and walked down.

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At halftime, Twain instructed the team not to be satisfied with the two-goal lead. He found the Forest team a little too relaxed in the second part of the first half and Hull City's threatening shots against the goal happened during that period. If he were on the sidelines to direct the game, he would have roared to call them to attention using his loud voice.

"It's right to adjust your rhythm, but you can't relax all the way. If we face Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea, or Liverpool, I can't say if we will still have the two-goal advantage. In the second half, if there's a chance to score, don't let it go. Remember you'll be judged if you waste an opportunity!"

"What is the judgement?" someone on the team asked.

"It's punishment." Twain answered his question with a grim expression.

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The Forest team picked up its pace in the second half. Hull City, who had wanted to use the time to counterattack, was pressed within its own half of the pitch. They were so pathetic that they could not even make a shot.

In the 62nd and 67th minutes, van Nistelrooy completed his first hat-trick of the season. Nottingham Forest's top scorer scored two goals within five minutes to turn the score into 4:0.

Hull City, nicknamed the "Tigers," completely lost their fighting spirit.

Facing the Nottingham Forest team, whose strength surpassed theirs in more ways than one and treated the game more seriously, Phil Brown could only stand helplessly on the sidelines, unable to turn around a hopeless situation — he did not think that Tony Twain's hunger for victory was so ravenous that he would not even let go of a newly promoted team... That was incorrect. No one wanted to lose. But the

competitive attitude, which still relentlessly pursued goals despite the two-goal lead, gave Brown the chills on the sidelines. Nottingham Forest was now four goals ahead, but Brown saw that they had no intention of giving up and still relentlessly sought every chance to score a goal.

Brown felt as if a boulder was pressing down on him, making him breathless.

Was this the true face of Nottingham Forest, the miraculous team that swept through Europe in the last three seasons...

The obsessive pursuit of goals, victories, championship titles had created this invincible steely force.

He routinely glanced at the away team's technical area, wanting to get a closer look at the manager, who had a great deal of rumors around him. However, looking at the empty seat in the technical area, he froze momentarily before reacting — Tony Twain was banned again.

What an elusive opponent...

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In the 88th minute, everyone thought the game would end with this score, but Nottingham Forest scored again as Hull City struggled in the final moments to score a goal to save face.

It was Beckham with his iconic free kick. Hull City's contributor to its promotion and last season's English Football League Championship's top goalkeeper, Boaz Myhill, stood in place and did not move when the football spun into the goal.

Nottingham Forest swept Hull City by 5:0 to win two games in a row in the new season!

Nottingham Forest decisively won 5-0 in the away game.

After the last round of the league tournament ended, some columnists still criticized Nottingham Forest's performance and thought the start of their league tournament would be very difficult. Twain's team gave them a hard slap in the face with their actions in this round of the league tournament.

After the game, Phil Brown lamented that it was the gap in ability — “We did our best, but unfortunately Nottingham Forest did its best.”

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Two rounds later, Nottingham Forest was at the top of the league with two straight wins. They relied on their advantage in the goal difference to surpass Chelsea and Liverpool, which had also had two straight wins.

What interested Twain was Chelsea's performance after the arrival of its new manager, Scolari. It looked like despite Mourinho's departure, Chelsea would continue to be his best rival.

The day after they returned to Nottingham Forest, Twain received a fax. As the Double Winner last season, it was normal for the players on the team to receive interest from the other teams. He had received countless similar faxes this summer.

But it was different.

This fax was from the Manchester City Football Club.

They were not going to keep pestering van Nistelrooy.

This time, they changed their target.

That player was... Nicklas Bendtner.

Chapter 676: Bendtner's Ambition

The outside news media heard about Manchester City's desire to acquire Nottingham Forest's number two center forward, Nicklas Bendtner, almost exactly at the same time Twain saw the piece of news on his desk. It was clear that the Manchester City club deliberately revealed it to the outside world.

Just like how Tony Twain was close to <Nottingham Evening Post>, the Manchester City club must have been on close terms with one or two media, which could speak up on their behalf during key moments. Their reward would be to know "the insider story" earlier than any other media.

Twain was in a daze as he held the Manchester City club's offer.

There had been news of some clubs interested in Bendtner in previous seasons, but none had come true. On the one hand, Twain would not sell his team's future number one center forward; on the other, Bendtner's father, who was also his spokesman, had announced more than once that his son would not leave the Forest team.

In that case, would it still be the same result this time?

He decided to wait a day and see.

One day should be enough for Thomas Bendtner to respond?

Hence he stuffed the fax from Manchester City under a pile of folders.

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A day later, there was more and more news in the media about Manchester City's desire to bring in Bendtner, which was reprinted by the local media in Nottingham.

Bendtner's father, Thomas Bendtner, was still unresponsive.

That was when Twain sensed danger in the air.

The reporters flocked to the Wilford training base, wanting to hear what Bendtner himself thought of the "rumors."

But Bendtner remained silent and did not answer any questions from any reporter.

Bendtner was a slightly uncommunicative young man in the team, unlike Eastwood and Ribéry. Even so, his popularity was good. His silence was different from that of Anelka's. Anelka was a loner, while the Danish handsome guy was just a little introverted.

But not saying a word was a problem.

Twain felt he should call Bendtner's agent. He did not believe the Manchester City club would follow the rules, which were to approach the club first before they made contact with the player. The other side must have contacted the player's agent before they made an offer to the Forest team. They learned their lesson from their experience with van Nistelrooy. At that time, Manchester City failed because they did not make clear inquiries about van Nistelrooy's wishes.

Bendtner had two agents. One was his father, Thomas Bendtner, who was more like a spokesman. Bendtner conveyed any ideas he had through his father. He was not involved in the contract negotiations with the team and other work. But he was indeed the most important figure who could not be ignored, because his son depended on him to make decisions.

The other agent was Nicola Juric. He was a regular broker with a FIFA issued license. He carried out all the contact with the team.

Twain decided to call Juric first because the two of them dealt with each other more often than he did with Bendtner's father.

"Mr. Twain, I know you called me for." Juric spoke right to the point as he was a smart man. He did not waste time with Twain. He did not even wait for Twain to ask him. He revealed everything, "The Manchester City people came to me, hoping to know the possibility of Bendtner's transfer. I told them it was very difficult, because Mr. Twain certainly wouldn't let him go. But they said it didn't matter. They just wanted to know what Bendtner himself thought. As long as he wants to, then..."

"Very good." Twain nodded. The problem was simple. "What does Bendtner think?"

Juric smiled over the phone, "You can't ask me this, Mr. Twain."

Twain paused for a second before he reacted—if he wanted to know what Bendtner thought, he had to ask his father. Bendtner's thoughts were conveyed through his father's mouth to others.

Hanging up, Twain did not hurry to call Thomas. He wanted to straighten things out first.

It was clear that Manchester City lacked strikers. They were short since the start of last season to this season. Last season, Manchester City had so many strikers but not one of them score double-digit goals during the season! It could even be said to be an extraordinary shame and humiliation for a team's forwards. In other words, after the new boss came to power, they tried to plunder strikers worldwide and messed up other teams' transfer deals was not because they wanted to make enemies everywhere and definitely not to put on a show. It was because they were compelled by circumstances... As a result, Berbatov, Adebayor, Drogba and van Nistelrooy did not take up Manchester City's offers at all and did not even consider this upstart at all.

Since the world's top strikers were unwilling to "condescend", then it made sense for Manchester City to have no choice but to...

The problem is, this is the second time they are at my, Tony Twain's door again!

Nicklas Bendtner is my anointed future number one center forward. Manchester City, you have a big appetite...

After thinking things through, Twain then realized that he had been at loggerheads with Manchester City this summer.

First, they parted on bad terms due to Richards. Following which, because of van Nistelrooy, Twain aggravated the situation and caused a din, which put Manchester City in an awkward situation. Now the other side specifically came for Bendtner. What did that mean? Did they want to get back at me?

No way!

Twain picked up his cell phone to find the number for Bendtner's father, Thomas, and dialed it.

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The Forest players came to the training base in succession to get ready for the day's training.

Every summer, the "transfer rumors" would be discussed in the locker room. Outside, the reporters and fans racked their brains to find out the story behind every transfer rumor and the related inside story. But in here, these could be used as jokes in discussion.

Van Nistelrooy was the focus of much debate and butt of jokes some time ago. The boss's actions at the press conference also made everyone happy for a long time. Now it was Bendtner's turn.

"Hey, do you want to guess how the boss will reject Manchester City again?" Wes Morgan, who was naked, bounced around in the locker room while changing his clothes.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"Burn the check?" Bale said.

"I heard there was no blank check this time." It was Baines who answered him.

"Well..." Eastwood knitted his brows and said, "A direct rejection is not fun..."

Bendtner listened to people talking about things related to him, but he quietly changed clothes at the side. When Wes Morgan was still swinging his dick around in the locker room, he began to sit down and tie his shoelaces.

At last someone remembered that the person involved was by his side. Lennon's locker was on Bendtner's right, and the two were next to each other. He patted the back of Bendtner who bent over to tie his shoelaces and asked, "Nick, did they look for you?"

Bendtner did not look up and continued to tie his shoelaces as he said, "No."

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"Mr. Tony Twain, I don't want to lie to you. Actually, they did look for me." Thomas Bendtner answered Twain's question on the phone.

It was not unexpected at all. Twain's expression did not even change. He continued to ask, "I'm not going to ask you exactly what you discussed about. I just want to know what Bendtner's thoughts are on this."

To fight back against Manchester City, he naturally had to know what Bendtner himself thought. In this way, he would have his targeted countermeasure to deal with the situation like how he dealt with van Nistelrooy.

Twain thought he'd hear things like "He doesn't want to leave", like what his father had said in response to the previous rumors. He did not expect this time he would hear Thomas said clearly, "He wants to leave."

"That's good..." Twain's brain had not register for a while and just reflexively spoke before he realized something was amiss. He hurriedly corrected himself, "No, I mean ... What? Leave?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Twain. I don't want to lie to you, so I have to tell the truth. My son, Nicklas Bendtner, wants to leave Nottingham Forest."

Twain froze for a while and found that his brain was a little out of order. "What do you mean?"

"My son often complains that he cannot obtain an important position in the team, Mr. Twain. He wants to go to a team that can give him a main core position. As luck would have it, Manchester City have agreed to all his terms."

Twain felt cold all over. He never thought it would be like this. The future main center forward whom he always regarded highly, placed unlimited hopes on, spent several years of hard work on, actually felt he was not put in an important position in the team, and wanted to leave!

I'm hearing things, right?

Or I haven't woken up yet?

Or has Thomas the old man not woken up yet, and his mind was confused from a fever yesterday?

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The locker room was very lively since the boss had not appeared on the training ground anyway. There was still time before the training would start. Everyone did not mind staying here to talk about private topics. For example, they continued to guess what their boss would do to Manchester City.

Lennon was still chatting with Bendtner. This time, he half-jokingly asked, "You're not leaving, are you Nick? I heard that Manchester City is very rich and can give you a very high salary."

Bendtner shook his head and said, "I don't care how high the salary is."

Lennon smiled.

"I just want to play the main position." Having said that, he got up and went straight out of the noisy locker room.

Lennon watched his back disappear behind the door in puzzlement.

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"How can he not be put in an important position? He played twenty-seven games last season! Almost half the number of games. He's my second center forward. Doesn't that clarify the issue?" Twain was a

little agitated because he felt that Thomas's reason was bullshit and insufficient. He had a lot of data to overturn this "not been put in an important position" excuse. "He scored ten goals and had eight assists! With such excellent data, if he were to be at Arsenal, perhaps he might not get it at all!"

"Mr. Twain, that's the problem. You say he is the second center forward. My son, he wants to be the number one center forward. And I too think he has the ability."

It turned out that he was not willing to be van Nistelrooy's substitute. "Van Nistelrooy has more experience than he has. Moreover, according to my plan, he will officially replace the Dutchman as the number one center forward, come one more season!" That being the case, Twain was confident of making Bendtner stay.

"No. My son is too impatient to wait. Mr. Twain, do you still remember what you said to him when you first met Nicklas?"

That remark stopped Twain. How could he remember so clearly what happened four years ago?

Seeing that Twain did not answer, Thomas chuckled. This sound made Twain frown, and he suddenly felt incensed.

"You see, you don't remember, Mr. Twain. In order to have my son refused to go to Arsenal at that time and come to your team, you promised that he would be the main player and the core of the forward line. Am I wrong in saying that? Or maybe you were just casually saying it. I can understand. After all, in order to attract players to play for the team now, you managers always have to write blank checks and make promises that are impossible to fulfill. But my son always remembers these words. He came to the Forest team and trained hard to compete, working towards that goal..."

"Mr. Thomas Bendtner..."

"It's a shame that four years on, after Viduka had gone, came van Nistelrooy. You said next season belongs to Nicklas? To be honest, I'm doubtful. My son is a nice young man who always trusts others easily. But I'm not a twenty-year-old kid. I'm older than you, Mr. Twain. I know this is just an excuse for you to buy time. When the Dutchman can't play, you're going to find another center forward from the transfer market, right? With so many good center forwards now, I don't want my son to be a lifelong substitute. I never doubted my son's ability, but I doubt you can give him the chance to play to his full potential. Nicklas can be the best striker in the world, provided he doesn't play as a substitute for someone else at Forest. You want to keep him; I would never agree."

With the other man said so much in one breath, Twain's brain gradually calmed down. He asked, "Have you finished? Mr. Thomas Bendtner?"

"I have said all there are to say, Mr. Twain. I know you like people to be honest with you, so I'm being frank."

Twain took a deep breath, and then slowly spoke the words, "Thank you for your honesty. I think I need to consider everything you said."

"When you've thought about it, you're welcome to give me a call."

This time Twain did not throw the phone. He hung up and sat alone on the chair in a daze.

He knew that he sometimes deliberately suppressed Bendtner's desire, but that was due to his worry that he would become too proud. He was aware of what kind of person Bendtner was. This talented young man was proud and arrogant. Sometimes he had his eyes above his head. He did not want a genius with talent and a great future to end up average due to some psychological and character issues. So, he tried to create a less-than-smooth environment for Bendtner and never told him what he really thought. He wanted Bendtner to be able to experience it for himself.

The Chinese's reservation and the English's reservation were all embodied within the fake Caucasian body of Tony Twain.

He did not want to lay it all bare because he felt that would lose the meaning of experience and growth. Now it seemed that he was wrong.

Bendtner was not the kind of patient person who was willing to experience growth. His thinking was typically Western—since I have such a great foundation, environment and conditions, why do I have to go through some shitty growth? Why can't I be the main core right away? I have the ability, so I want it!

Twain felt like it was all wishful thinking on his part before...

I've spent so much efforts and hard work to focus on the development of this striker only to have him think that he has not been put to an important use.

It was a great irony for Twain, who liked to control everything with his own hands.

He leaned back on the back of his chair and looked out of the window at the sunny training ground, where Bendtner and his teammates appeared on the field one by one.

He really wanted to know what Bendtner was feeling at the moment.

You think you've been deceived?

I feel cheated instead!

Chapter 677: To Part on Bad Terms

Twain felt that he had been deceived, not that he had been deceived by others, but by his own wishful thinking. He had actually thought that all his players were obedient and well-behaved kids like the data in the FM game, which had no meaning other than a name.

It seemed that the impact of the transmigration had not completely disappeared...

Sometimes he really took this as a Football Manager game and play.

But Bendtner gave him a hard slap, which told him that this was the real world, so realistic that anyone in the team could break away from his control and pursue the future he wanted. Ribéry was a wake-up call, and Bendtner was soon to be a reality.

But Twain did not plan to let Bendtner go like that.

Furthermore, it was to sell to Manchester City.

The day after that phone call with Bendtner's father, Twain turned down Manchester City's offer of eighteen million pounds during an interview.

"Bendtner is the future of our team and we won't be foolish enough to give him to other clubs." His tone was tough as if there was no room for discussion.

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The car park in Wilford was getting crowded, with the various latest models of cars filling up the lots—the Nottingham Forest star players came for training in succession.

Bendtner sat in his black Volkswagen and was not in a hurry to get out of the car. Empty cars parked around him as their owners were already in the locker room.

With the car windows closed up, Bendtner called his father.

Although he had been in England for four years, his family was still in Denmark and he lived alone in Nottingham. He first lived in a hostel provided by the team and then moved out to rent a house. Unlike his other teammates, he had not bought a house in the city till now.

"Dad, he refused."

"I know. It's all over the media."

"How did you talk to him yesterday?"

Thomas heard some concern in his son's voice, and he smiled to comfort his son, "Don't worry. I put all my responsibility on myself, and it has nothing to do with you. We're going to prepare for the worst. Even if you don't end up leaving, he won't make things difficult for you."

Bendtner was slightly relieved to hear his father say so. He was only "slightly." These days, Bendtner was under immense psychological pressure as he trained every day. As soon as he saw the boss wearing sunglasses on the sidelines, he would feel a pair of eyes staring at himself.

As a determined "traitor" who wanted to escape the kingdom, while meticulously plotting the escape plan, he needed to be wary of the king. If the plan fell through and was exposed, a very harsh and cruel punishment would be waiting for him... This was no exaggeration. Bendtner and Anelka were not the same.

The Frenchman wanted to go, and Twain also wanted to drive him away. He only wanted to punish him before he left

On the other hand, Bendtner wanted to go, but Twain did not want him to go. Then the matter was not so simple as to discipline him before letting him go. This was a "revolt" to oppose the king's will.

How could there not be any psychological pressure in doing such a thing?

"Train with a peace of mind and don't think about anything else. I'll take care of everything." The father comforted his son, "If any reporter asks the question, just maintain silent and don't accept any interviews..."

"But Dad, how can I put pressure on him if I don't take a stand?"

“You don’t need to deal with this. I’ll put the pressure on him. I don’t want you to get involved. I’ll be the bad guy...”

Just then, Bendtner was startled by a knocking sound on the glass next to his ear, which startled him.

He turned his head around to find that it was Lennon who had just arrived. He leaned forward to the window and gestured to him, asking him why he did not go to the locker room.

“I’m sorry, Dad, my teammate came to look for me...”

“Ah... All right, you go on. Oh! Remember, if Twain comes to you, find an excuse to put it off...”

Bendtner quickly hung up the phone and got out of the car.

Lennon smiled at him, “Who you calling for so long? A girlfriend?”

Bendtner was worried about not knowing how to answer when Lennon gave him a reason. He smiled a little stiffly, “Yes.”

“Oh—how long have you known each other? Even we don’t know. Wow, you’re very secretive. Must be a beauty!”

“He he, I’ll call her out to meet everyone when there’s a chance the next time.”

Bendtner absentmindedly answered Lennon’s question on how beautiful his girlfriend was and left the parking lot side by side with him.

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During a break in the training, Twain did look for Bendtner, wanting to speak to him alone. Mindful of his father’s instructions, Bendtner declined the suggestion on the pretext that he had a date with his girlfriend. To prove that he must show up for the date, he even said it was his girlfriend’s birthday.

Twain cocked his head and looked at Bendtner for a while. His direct gaze scared him, and he almost came forth to confess. That was when Twain nodded and agreed. But before he left, he said, “I hope we both can have a good talk tomorrow.”

As soon as Twain turned around, Bendtner’s eyebrows drooped down—what reason he could find for tomorrow...

The training resumed. Twain stood on the side to watch when the cell phone in his pocket rang.

He knew there was only one person who would call him at this time because he had just rejected Manchester City’s offer earlier.

He pulled out his cell phone and stood by the training ground as he pressed the answer button.

“Hello, Mr. Thomas Bendtner.” He said in a cold voice.

“Hello, Mr. Tony Twain.” The voice over there carried a hint of smile.

“You must be annoyed that I turned down Manchester City’s offer, right?”

“No, how can I be? I understand that because their offer is too low. My son shouldn’t be worth only eighteen million pounds.”

“This is not a matter of price, Mr. Bendtner. Your son is not for sale by the club. He is the future of Nottingham Forest, and for the next ten years, he will be the team’s leading striker and the number one center forward!” Twain put weight to his tone in the hope that the old man would understand how important his son’s status was.

“As far as I know, a lot of clubs claim that certain players are not for sale, but they still change hands and sell them to the highest bidder.” Perhaps he sensed that Twain would be angry with this remark, so he hurriedly added, “I agree with your first remark, Mr. Twain. It’s really not about the price. It’s about the player’s will. As I said, it’s unsuitable for my son to continue to stay here because you simply can’t keep the promises you made to him... No, don’t talk about the future. I hope you respect the individual will of the player. Did not you just agree to let Piqué go back to Barcelona? Why can’t you respect my son’s idea the same way?”

“This is completely different!” Twain growled.

This was certainly different. He definitely did not spent as much efforts on Piqué like he did on Bendtner.

“I think it makes no difference. You have van Nistelrooy who can play as the center forward anyway.”

Twain felt that he had nothing to talk about with this stubborn old man who adamantly refused to believe him. He brusquely hung up the phone and stood there as he seethed.

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Manchester City raised their offer again, which saw them made a twenty-million bid to purchase Bendtner.

After some secret warfare, the Manchester United Football Club bought Berbatov for 30.75 million pounds. The transfer market had fewer and fewer good center forwards. If Manchester City did not hurry up, the transfer window would be closed soon. Then even if Bendtner really wanted to go, he must wait until January. Half a year’s time was not long and not short either. Who knew what would happen between now and then?

Meanwhile, Manchester City finally managed to sign the deal with the Brazilian star, Robinho who was at odds with the top brass at Real Madrid, costing them a fee of forty million pounds after much hard work. Schuster was extremely unhappy with this deal, but what could he do? He was not a manager at an English club. In the Spanish clubs, the club’s sporting director had more authority than the head coach. He did not dare to do anything but complain about a summer wasted, the winger, Ronaldo that he had planned did come, the original winger, Robinho was gone, and now the team only one winger, which had a negative impact on the team’s tactics.

At this point, the transfer drama was basically coming to an end, with the entire world following closely the news that Manchester City was chasing Bendtner because it could perhaps be the last bombshell before the summer transfer window closed.

Bendtner rose to fame along with Nottingham Forest’s three seasons in the Premier League and European football arena. He was no longer the young rising star of the future, but a star player calling

the shots. He was the main center forward in the Denmark team and also had a stable goal-scoring rate in the Forest team. Many teams' managers thought that Bendtner had a bright future. If Twain had not held onto him tightly, people would have stand in line to buy him long ago.

However, this time, Twain finally met an opponent who was good at hounding and had thick skin. Most importantly, this opponent was very, very rich.

They could not buy van Nistelrooy because the Dutchman did not want to leave the Forest team for Manchester City, so Twain and the club were able to reject confidently. After all, no matter how much money was offered, the player himself did not want to leave, which was out of their hands. Bendtner's situation was completely different. Now the player himself wanted to leave...

Twain patiently waited for Bendtner to finish celebrating his girlfriend's birthday, and then looked for him again. This time he was going to have to talk to the Danish kid in person no matter what.

"Can we have a chat after the training ends? It's about the recent transfer rumors."

"This..." Bendtner felt a little awkward.

"Your father won't let you talk to me, would he?"

Bendtner looked up in amazement at his boss.

"He did not tell me, but any fool could guess the connection." Twain said with a smile. "I think It's necessary for me to talk to you. I want to know what you think. You know, the day before yesterday I realized one thing: I thought I knew the person I see all the time very well but in fact, I do not know him at all."

Having said that, Twain tilted his head slightly and looked at Bendtner in front of him.

Bendtner was hesitant. Should he listen to his father, or the boss?

In the end, he chose the latter. He knew what his father was afraid in not letting him talk to his boss. Ribéry was taken to Mallorca by his agent to hide from the boss at that time. In the end, Ribéry's attitude changed immediately after the boss made a trip to Mallorca.

The boss was an expert at words and best at using words to stir up people's sentiments. He knew this very well. But he was also confident in his resolve. This time, no matter how well the boss spoke, he would not stay.

It was not that he was hard-hearted. It was because he knew that things had come to a head. If all that he had achieved went down the gutter and he would have chosen to stay in the end, he was not sure that the boss would not look for an opportunity to make life difficult for him. He appeared broad-minded, but in fact he was narrow-minded. He would always remember that he let him down.

Once the relationship between two people had the slightest crack, it was impossible to be perfect as before. It was inevitable that it would be awkward in the two people's interaction.

In this respect, he had no way out this time.

He nodded.

Twain smiled, "After the training ends at noon, I would like to invite you to lunch. What do you like?"

"The cafeteria will do." After Bendtner made his decision, his mood was a lot more relaxed. "I'm not particular about what I eat."

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During the noon break, most of the players chose to go home. Only a small number of people would stay in the training base's cafeteria for lunch.

Twain and Bendtner found a small corner and started their lunch with "things on their minds other than food."

The two people ate their meal in silence at first. Once the meal was almost done, Twain wiped his mouth with a napkin. He wanted to talk. Bendtner saw his look and stopped what he was doing.

"Your father told me that you plan to leave?"

Bendtner was already mentally prepared. He nodded without hesitation.

"Can you tell me why?" Twain said amiably. There was no hint of anger.

"I don't think I'm being put to important use here."

Accordingly, Twain began to give him a list of figures, proving that his number of appearances for the Forest team had gradually increased over the past few seasons. His rate of goals scored was also steady. He even cited his performance in a few important games to prove that he was really an important member of the team.

Bendtner just shook his head and said, "Honestly, boss... I don't like the position you give me. I'm a center forward and my job is to score. But more often than not, I have to pass the ball to my teammates on the pitch..."

Twain suddenly saw the light. Was this what he meant when he said he was not being put to important use?

However, this complicated the issue. In Twain's tactical system, the center forward would not simply be used to score goals. Most of the time, they needed to contribute to the team's overall offense. An assist was a very important indicator. Van Nistelrooy's ability had not actually diminished when he came to Nottingham Forest, but he had not won the Premier League's top striker again because most of the time he needed to sacrifice his place in the penalty area, pull to the middle of the backfield, even support his teammates at the sides and act as a bridgehead to protect the ball. As a result, he scored fewer goals than he did at Manchester United. But van Nistelrooy did not complain, nor had he ever publicly or privately revealed his displeasure with the arrangement. That was one of the reasons Twain specially liked van Nistelrooy.

Now Bendtner was completely at odds with Twain's tactical habits, which made him a little uncomfortable.

"Why do you think so? Nicklas, the center forward is also a member of the team. You help the team by doing so, which is also not bad for you."

“Boss, I don’t want to be a center forward with more assists than the number of goals scored.” Bendtner said resolutely as he already had a plan in his mind. “I’m only interested in scoring goals.”

Twain grinned, “I thought everyone was used to my tactics at Nottingham Forest. I did not think someone would oppose it here. If the team can’t win the game, is it useful for the striker to score more goals?”

“I don’t think the team can win if the striker can’t score.”

Twain listened to him say so and sighed, “I am now more determined in my idea that you should continue to develop and grow ... You had it backwards, Nicklas. Teams that don’t know how to defend can’t win games. Defense is the foundation of everything.”

Bendtner spread his hands and said, “This is where we differ, boss. I revere offense, and you’re more conservative.”

“Ha, I’m conservative?” There was a lot of media out that used this word to describe him, but Twain did not expect to hear this word from one of his players’ mouth. “Well, I’m fine with people saying I’m conservative as long as I can win the championship titles. Don’t you like championship titles?” Twain stared at the reckless kid in front of him and asked in return.

“I like. But I want to win the championship titles my own way.”

Bendtner looked directly at Twain and did not flinch.

“Very well, very well.” Twain pushed away the cutlery placed in front of him and stood to get up. “Then you use your way to win the championship titles!”

Having said that, he left without turning his head back.

He did not expect things to end up like this...

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Thomas Bendtner was pleased to hear his son’s retelling and said, “It looks like he’s agreed to let you go, son!”

As a result, Twain once again rejected Manchester City’s twenty million-pound transfer offer the next day. The reason was no different from before. He stated, “Bendtner is not for sale. He’s the future of the team. I will not be a fool and give him to others. I won’t do it for money!”

It was hard to guess what he was thinking. It was obvious that he parted on bad terms with Bendtner yesterday after their talk. Why did he immediately act like a private deal had been brokered with Bendtner?

Just after he turned down Manchester City for the second time, another man at the club finally could not sit still and came to Twain in person, hoping to talk to him frankly.

Chapter 678: A High Asking Price

Without having to guess or even think about it, the person who looked for Twain and wanted to talk to him must be Allan Adams.

His nose was even more sensitive than a hound when it came to money.

Twain also knew that sooner or later he would seek him out. He had ruined two of what he had considered as good deals this summer. One deal involved Ribéry, and the other was the just-concluded van Nistelrooy's "blank check-gate." The club's financial situation would be greatly improved if one of these two deals was clinched.

This time if Allan did not come looking for him, he would no longer be the club's marketing manager.

"I know you would come looking for me. Look." Twain pointed to the table with two cups of steaming coffee on it. "I've been preparing two cups these few days."

Allan felt helpless and had very few ways of dealing with a hooligan like Twain.

"Well, Tony. Since you know I would come look for you, you obviously know why. I'm not going to talk nonsense. Can you listen to my opinion?"

Twain gestured for him to go ahead and sat in his chair.

"Honestly I don't know much about what's going on within the team, so I don't know what you think of Bendtner. But I think selling him will be the best option now."

Twain nodded to indicate to him to continue.

"On the one hand, Bendtner completely does not want to stay in the team now. It would be unwise to force such a player to stay. It can also cause unrest in the locker room." At this point, Allan glanced at Twain and found that he had his head down, as if he was in deep thought. After all, this touched on Twain's domain and he was afraid that Twain would react badly. Now, he was able to breathe a sigh of relief from the looks of it. So, he continued, "On the other hand, I'm not going to hide from you, Tony. The club is in great need of money now. After you promised to increase Ribéry's pay, the rest of the team also had the same idea. We have to meet their demands. In addition, the actual cost of building a new stadium is more than we have budgeted. Some of the expenditure is completely out of control..."

In this regard, Allan must admit that his inexperience caused it. After all, he had not undertaken any engineering projects before, and did not know a lot of inside knacks. He only discovered that a lot of things had not been fully considered before until the new stadium started construction. Consequently, he could only use money to fill in...

"Thirdly ... the global economic environment is not very good."

Twain did not understand what Allan said. He was an idiot when it came to economics. The term "global economic environment" sounded alien to him.

"We need money to deal with some emergencies." After that, Allan spread his hands. He had already said everything he could say to Twain. After working with Twain for several years, he became familiar with this man's character. Twain's character was very tough and could sometimes be a little outrageous, but he was not made of stone. There were only two ways to get him to accept what he was unwilling to do: the first was to persuade him with kind words and discuss the stakes clearly. He was a smart man

and naturally knew which was the best choice; the second was to bypass Twain directly and keep him out of the loop which was simple and rough. He would only be informed once the matter was decided and began to be implemented, which was the so-called “the rice is cooked.”

The second approach would certainly permanently damage the relationship between the two people. Allan would not choose to do so unless it was his last resort. As for the first approach... the only risk was not knowing if Twain would be persuaded each time.

Such as this time.

After quietly listening to Allan’s speech, Twain was silent for a moment before he looked up at the other side. “That’s right, Allan. I have to apologize to you.”

“Huh?” Allan Adams was baffled.

“About the matter with van Nistelrooy. I did not have any discussion with you about what I was going to do. You must be angry, aren’t you?” Twain said to Allan seriously.

Allan hurriedly waved and said, “I knew what you wanted to do, but I really didn’t know how you were going to do. Besides, don’t think of me as weak. Although I am a businessman, I am also a man of temper. That kind of nearly insulting behavior from Manchester City was unacceptable to me. A businessman values equal relationship when doing business. Everyone is equal, no one is more precious than the other.”

Seeing Allan’s earnest explanation, Twain smiled first.

“Can you give me some time to think about the matter with Bendtner?”

Allan knew he could not ask Twain to make a decision now. He was already giving him face by being willing to consider it, rather than rebuffing him right away. So, he stood up and nodded, “Remember you don’t have much time, Tony.”

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Indeed, time was running out. It was August 27th now, less than four days before the transfer window closed.

Twain did not speak to Bendtner again and Bendtner’s father did not call Twain again. Manchester City did not make another new offer. Did they perhaps give up? Was this matter going to be quietly resolved just like that?

It was obviously impossible.

Twain was trying to calm his heart, and then sort things out. Despite parting on bad terms with Bendtner during that face to face talk, Twain was still reluctant to let the Dane go. It was mainly... he did not want to sell him to Manchester City. The thought of those Arabs’ faces made him feel sick.

As Twain stood alone on the sidelines of the training ground, he heard a sudden commotion coming from the training ground.

A fight?

Since the incident with Chimbonda and Bendtner, Twain had been very sensitive to this. He hurriedly came out of his reverie and stared over.

A group of people ran towards a point. Through the seams of the crowd, he saw the team's number one center forward, van Nistelrooy, kneading his thighs as he sat helplessly on the ground.

Was he hurt?

He ran over to see what happened.

The team members consciously cleared a path when they saw the boss came. He went straight to van Nistelrooy's side and asked Fleming, who was busy, "What's going on?"

"He pulled his thigh muscle." Fleming heard Twain's voice and glanced up at him. Perhaps he comprehended something else in the other man's frown, so he added, "It's not a big deal, but he certainly can't appear in this weekend's game."

Hearing him say so, van Nistelrooy smiled and comforted Twain, "I'm all right, boss."

Twain nodded and then withdrew. Dunn saw what happened on the side and rushed up to say, "The starting list needs to be adjusted. Bendtner..."

Twain shook his head and said, "We're playing 4-5-1 for the game the day after."

"And who's going to be the '1?'"

"Eastwood."

Dunn looked strangely at Twain.

Twain did not respond to his doubts and just turned to walk away.

As a result, Dunn looked back at Bendtner in the crowd. He stood on the side and drank water while his teammates chatted about van Nistelrooy's unexpected injury. Lennon seemed to be talking to him about something, but it was clear that Bendtner was distracted.

Did he hope to play in this game or not?

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In the third round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest definitely faced a tough rival—it was Chelsea, their long-time rival which they had been entangled with for these few seasons.

It was just that Chelsea's manager was not Mourinho or Grant, but "Big Phil" Scolari.

Although only two rounds had been started for the new season, this was also a focal match. The media started to hype the game, and they came up to ask Scolari on how Chelsea had not beaten Tony Twain's Forest team.

The Brazilian was very clever. He did not fall for it. He simply said it was another person's results which had nothing to do with him. Then he refused to answer such questions again.

Twain had been busy fighting with Manchester City during the period and did not have the energy to act in concert with the media and start a war of words with Scolari. Looking at how he was currently so busy, it was real worrying whether he was ready for the game against Chelsea...

The day before the game, Twain announced the squad list of the next day's match in Wilford. Nicklas Bendtner's name was not on it.

No one was shocked by this now. The players were not blind or deaf, much less fools. They all knew of the news that Bendtner and Twain had a falling out and were aware that this player was already determined to leave the team. Some people understood the reasons for his leaving, while the others scoffed at it.

Therefore, when Bendtner did not appear on the squad list, everyone knew the boss intentionally did this. It is punishment, isn't it? Yes, it must be a punishment and warning to a traitor.

Bendtner looked terrible standing among the team. When Twain gave the word "dismissed", he was the first to turn around and walk away.

He knew he must leave, but he could not accept being treated like this before his departure. There was no longer the slightest bit of yearning for this team in his heart. He had decided that if the team did not let him go, he would return to Denmark and boycott the training!

"Tony, can you explain to me a little, your purpose in doing what you did?" Dunn asked on the way home. He had noticed Bendtner's behavior just now and was somewhat worried.

"A certain someone pointed the finger at me and questioned my tactical thinking. I want to let him know who's the boss on the team." Twain's voice was frosty.

Dunn sighed. He knew that Twain was truly furious.

"But ... have you decided what you are going to do about the matter?" He was referring to the matter about Bendtner's transfer.

Twain shook his head this time and sounded somewhat lost from his tone, "I don't know..."

He really did not know. On the one hand, he was angry at Bendtner's betrayal. On the other hand, it was not easy to put aside four years of time and the efforts that he once poured into him. Should he admit defeat and let him go? Or should he force him to stay in the team and neither side would win?

While Twain felt helpless, the cell phone in his pocket rang.

He fished out his cell phone to take a look. Twain smiled and said, "Bendtner's father is calling. He must have known that his son is not on the squad list for tomorrow's game. I didn't think that Bendtner is still such a good boy. He tells his father everything at the first instance. Tsk tsk..."

He shook his head as he answered the call.

"Hello, Mr. Thomas Bendtner. I'm glad you still remembered to call me. I waited all day for your call yesterday to no avail. I thought you gave up."

Twain spoke politely and full of warmth. But Thomas Bendtner did not smile at all on the other end of the line. His biggest fear was that his son would become a target of Tony Twain's retaliation. Now it appeared as if his fears came true.

"I think it's time for us lay our cards on the table, Mr. Twain."

"What's that?" Twain pretended to be surprised. "Did we not already lay our cards long ago?"

"..."

"Your son insists on leaving but I won't let him go. Isn't that the case?"

Twain held up the phone to deal with Thomas Bendtner as he walked.

"I think I need to remind you, Mr. Twain. My son's contract with the Forest Club expires in July next year. Furthermore, we have already discussed and settled with my son's agent, Mr. Juric, that we will not negotiate any renewal with the Forest team. I'm suggesting this based on kind intentions. Let my son go now, and you'll still have money to earn. If you wait a year..."

Twain suddenly clutched the phone and then threw it out. The quality of the new phone was better than the previous one. It just bounced once on the ground and chipped a corner.

Next to him, Dunn watched in astonishment at the scene happening in front of him. He did not know what Bendtner's father said to Twain over the phone to actually make him so angry. He twisted his head to look over to find Twain looking furious.

"Son of a bitch, you dare threaten me!"

Dunn ran to the front to pick up the cell phone and discovered the chipped corner before he handed it to Twain. He said, "You have to change your bad habit of throwing the phone every time you get angry."

"I only have this thing on my hand to throw ... Give me the phone, yours... Don't worry, I won't throw it." Twain did not take his cell phone, but asked Dunn for his.

Dunn gave his phone to Twain, who dialed Allan Adams' cell phone number.

"Allan, give Manchester City a response and just say that don't think about buying Nicklas Bendtner for less than thirty million pounds!"

"Tony..." When he heard him say so, Dunn was a little worried and asked, "Isn't this price too high?"

Twain hung up and returned the phone to Dunn. He said to him at the same time, "Doesn't Manchester City like to be a rich sucker? I'll let them be one!"

He looked so fierce that it frightened Dunn even more... "What did Thomas Bendtner say to you?"

"He told me that Bendtner's contract is one year away and they do not plan to talk to the club about renewing his contract." Twain looked at Dunn and said, "I've forgotten about this matter before."

Dunn went, "..."

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On the morning of the match against Chelsea, the Nottingham media were still waging a war of words with the Manchester City Football Club. The asking price of thirty million pounds caused Mark Hughes to lash out at Tony Twain for being insatiable. Pierce Brosnan helped Twain to hit back in the Evening Post, saying that Nottingham Forest's future star and the number one goalscorer for the next decade, had a promising bright future, and was tagged as van Nistelrooy's successor. Moreover, it was only fair that the handsome Nicklas Bendtner was only selling for thirty million...

Allan Adams stuck to his guns and refused to budge from the asking price of thirty million pounds. He was not afraid of Manchester City. Because now all of England knew that Manchester City's problems with their strikers had reached a point where it must be resolved.

Manchester City had previously contacted Jô, a young Brazilian striker who had scored thirty goals in fifty-three games for CSKA Moscow. Although Jô would like to play in the Premier League, the transfer would be extremely complicated. Jô's ownership was not in the hands of CSKA Moscow, but in the hands of Media Sport Investment Limited (MSI), just like Mascherano and Tevez did at the time. MSI did not agree to release him this time due to unhappiness over Tevez's transfer to Manchester United that year. The English Football Association had also stated they wanted to block the transfer. In addition to the current owners not wanting to let go of the player, there was another factor that plagued Manchester City—he was not eligible for a work permit.

Jô's matter dragged on like this. MSI did not intend to relent even though the transfer window was about to close. With no other choice, Manchester City had to go all out for Bendtner.

It was against this background that Allan dared to drag his heels and demand an exorbitant amount from Manchester City.

Over here, Allan demanded a high asking price from the Manchester City club. Over there, Twain's team met with a hard battle.

There was no gain without a loss. On the verge of a major victory in the transfer market, Nottingham Forest could likely face the end of a minor record...

Chapter 679: End of an Affinity

Twain was indeed in a state of crisis.

The first half was ending and his team was behind 0 : 1 on home ground. That old man Scolari was different from his previous two predecessors, but perhaps it was due to owner Abramovich's personal aspiration which took effect that Scolari, after being in charge, emphasised more on ball control or the so-called "beautiful football". As the new main coach, appeasing the club president was mandatory.

But for Twain, all his knowledge on Chelsea was overthrown.

From the start of the competition, Chelsea on away was already extremely aggressive on offense and that aggression completely exceeded the expectations of the players of the Nottingham Forest.

No matter how many times Chelsea changes its head coach, their rivalry with Nottingham Forest will not dissipate if the players are the same. It had barely been 3 months since the end of the UEFA Champions League finals, not long enough for them to forget who they lost to in the championships.

The aggressive attack gave them a goal. And in just thirteen minutes, the away team Chelsea was leading. However, at this moment, Nottingham Forest did not make a single shot after each round of aggressive attack from their opponents.

“Exactly who owns this home ground?” John Motson asked skeptically.

That also was Twain’s question.

The first meeting with Chelsea with their recently changed coach actually made him felt quite unfamiliar. Scolari was just as arrogant as his predecessors yet he seemed humble before this match. Twain felt like he was holding back from devising evil intentions.

It was only the first half, but the psychological advantage they accumulated from previous encounters with Chelsea was slowly diminishing. Twain felt that he should reevaluate the opponent, because this Chelsea was no longer Mourinho’s Chelsea but “Big Phil’s”. The Chelsea from Grant’s time still carried Mourinho’s personality, but that had been disappearing bit by bit since Scolari was in charge.

For example, such positive sportsmanship, plays leadings to goals was nicer to watch as compared to Mourinho’s.

Abramovich wanted to watch beautiful soccer so he dismissed Mourinho and Grant who brought the team to the finals of the UEFA Champions league to hire the Brazillian Scolari. But, from what Grant knew of Scolari, just how long could this scene last?

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Twain was faced with a dilemma. When he was coaching Nottingham Forest, their odds of winning could reach 87% if they scored the first goal. This checks out perfectly with Nottingham Forest’s niche — make the first goal and then defend against the counter-attack. Scoring the goal greatly increased their lead, while not being able to score also meant they would not lose it. 1:0 was still an acceptable good result.

In this situation, their opponents would only have 2 options — either they become increasingly impatient or they do nothing and lose.

Currently, Twain was in the same scenario his opponents were in. Which path should he choose?

During the half-time break he gave his team a series of pep-talks, telling them they definitely could not lose to Chelsea on home ground and asking them to preserve in attacking the flanks. Other than that, he asked Eastwood to not constantly run out of the penalty area to receive the ball. There were five midfielders so the ball would definitely be passed to him, but if he was always too far from the goalmouth, how could he immediately challenge Chelsea’s goal?

Regarding this point, Eastwood also had his troubles. In the past, he was always partnered with strong second-strikers like Van Nistelrooy, Bendtner or Vidukar. The second-striker is responsible for drawing the opponent’s defensive firepower to himself, which meant Eastwood could attack freely near the penalty area. Naturally, this increased Eastwood’s threat level.

But now? He became the center forward, the main character and the main defending target of the opposing center back. Under the constant close pressure from strong center-backs like Terry, being able to ensure the ball reach him without having it stolen already expunged almost all of his energy, how could he even score afterwards? Besides, his stature was not one of a strong center forward. He would frequently lose his ball to his opponents' tackles.

How could Twain not know of his troubles? Obviously Twain knew, but he had no choice. Who told him to place the Danish kid outside the roster for the sake of punishing Bendtner?

Even without his rivalry with Chelsea, he would not allow the team to lose to Chelsea, because that was telling Bentner that Twain's team was unable to play without him.

"I know you have your difficulties, Freddy. We won't let you be the attacking point, you just need to hold the ball, leave the remaining work to..." he pointed at Ribery and van der Vaart. "Both of you readily attack, shoot the ball more."

Basically this was to allow Eastwood to create opportunities for his side attacking teammates.

The Romani nodded, but he did not know if he could fulfil the "center forward role." Honestly speaking, he had no confidence...

"Be patient, we will definitely find a hole in their defense line. I feel that Scolari will continue attacking in the second half, there will definitely be issues surfacing in their defensive line."

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During the second half, Chelsea was indeed continuing their attack, and there was a gap in their defensive line. But similarly, Nottingham Forest, impatiently trying to even out the score, also had issues in their defensive line.

During this competition, Twain was not successful with his dual defensive midfielder tactic. George Wood's active range of offense was large as always, but his style of running limited Tiago's abilities, and with Wood's habit of doing everything by himself, Tiago was unable to adapt. This was the first time they were playing together, so it was understandable that they had no chemistry.

Thus, this display of dual defensive midfielders was no better than a single defensive midfielder. Subsequently, Wood noticed his coached rapport with Tiago, but the bigger issue surfaced — some possessions would appear to be in the middle of the two players and both, in sync, will give up the ball for the other! Thinking that this ball was for the other player, they gave it up to the Chelsea's player instead.

Chelsea then helped themselves.

Drogba took advantage of that one misunderstanding between the two defensive midfielders, cut straight through the middle, easily broke through the thin defensive line, and then successfully made a shot. At the sixty-fifth minute of the whole competition, away team Chelsea was ahead by two goals!

The Chelsea players were celebrating on the field. Off the court, even Scolari was jumping wildly with both his hands up, akin to an energetic monkey. However, Twain was only showing a stern face.

Not long after losing the goal, he substituted Arshavin for Tiago, changing back to solo defensive midfielder, dual strikers in a 4-4-2 formation. After returning to the familiar formation, team Nottingham Forest regained their competitive tempo.

First, it was Eastwood passing the ball back to van der Vaart. The Dutch immediately took a long shot against Čech, who saved the ball with a dive. Following the corner kick, Pepe's header hit the arm of Ashley Cole, who was standing on the penalty line. Nottingham Forest's players raised their hands to signal the handball foul, but the head referee did not notice, and did not regard the protests of the players of the Nottingham Forest team.

Off the court, Twain was pointing his own eyes as a protest towards the fourth official, but it was futile. It was impossible for the head referee to call for a pause in the middle of a play to give Nottingham Forest a penalty. Even if the television screens repeatedly proved that Nottingham Forest was treated unfairly, referees would not follow the television screens to change their own judgement. This was prohibited by the rules of FIFA.

Without their tall center forward, Twain made the team do fewer high balls, play more ground possessions and do more through passes, hence maximising the speed superiorities of some players in the formation.

Scolari saw through Twain. At this moment, he signaled for the team to recover its formation — shrinking back to its defense and not giving Nottingham Forest any chances to use its through passes and speed.

Nottingham Forest did not regard its defense. It was almost a full-out attack, trying to even out the score. But up until the eighty-two minute, Nottingham Forest used a free kick to even the score after eighty-two minutes. The scorer was Gareth Bale.

After that, the counterattack of Nottingham Forest was even crazier. Scolari had no choice but to make some substitutions, changing his striker and defender, in hopes of securing this one goal advantage.

At this moment, he did not care for the aesthetics of the scene; getting the three points was of utmost importance. At this moment, Scolari was definitely not the type to listen to his boss and diligently play "beautiful soccer".

Twain then sent out Patrov to replace Ribery who was unable to run anymore. This substitution was of no choice... he initially wanted to switch out a defender to leave only three and continue to strengthen his offense. However, Ribery was simply too tired to run anymore — he fell directly to the ground with his left calf cramping. In the early seasons, this phenomenon has never occurred; it looked like the negative effects from that hectic summer was showing.

That substitution did little for the team's offense. Ultimately, Nottingham Forest lost its first home game this league, losing to Chelsea 1:2. Their undefeated record against Chelsea ever since they were promoted into the Premier League had become a thing of the past.

When it comes to records, Twain did not take them too seriously. Conversely, he felt that breaking it was a blessing, otherwise his players would have to bear a ridiculous amount of pressure every season when they face Chelsea.

However, losing a match was not a great thing. Losing their first game in the league ruined the home game opener; more importantly, they lost face in front of Bendtner. Losing this match was as good as telling Bendtner that the team was unable to win without him...

This was what infuriated Twain the most.

During the post-game conference, a reporter who wanted to be a troublemaker intentionally asked why Bendtner did not appear on the roster of this match, because to his knowledge the Danish center forward was neither injured nor in a bad state.

Twain angrily glanced at this female reporter, "He has hemorrhoids, could you have understood this?"

Having had her jibe backfire on her, she glared balefully at Twain and sat back down.

After leaving the city's soccer field, Twain gave Allan W. Adams a call, waiting to see if there was news regarding the transfers for Bendtner.

Actually, had Nottingham Forest won this match, Twain might have changed his plans to forcefully keep Bendtner, displaying a winner's attitude in front of him. However, now that he lost the competition, Bendtner had to leave. He could not tolerate having a player who mocked his personality and his soccer knowledge near him, when they have to seem nice to each other everyday.

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Bendtner did not appear to watch the match, it was as if he already was not a member of the Nottingham Forest.

He was packing his luggage in his condominium while waiting restlessly for the call. Like a girl plotting to elope, the fear could not mask his excitement and yearning for a beautiful future. The television was on, showing Nottingham Forest welcoming Chelsea for the match. He snuck a few looks, but was not in the mood to keep up with the match.

After Chelsea scored the second ball, Juric gave him a call. "They promised to take you away, Nicklas."

After hearing that from his manager, Bendtner sat on the sofa, finally in the mood to pay attention to the match. After all, he did wear the red jersey for four years.

Watching his own teammates on field attacking furiously while some ran like headless chickens, he really did not know how he should feel about this. It was rare to see Nottingham Forest being so helpless, as if there was no way to score a goal other than long shots. Ribery and Lennon were attacking forcefully, but there was little they could do in the face of Chelsea progressively pulling back their defensive line. They had no choice but to yield possession to them after breaking through..

If he were on the field, the midfielders could send the ball to either his head or his feet. Whether he scored or assisted his team mates, he would liven up the offence in Nottingham Forest.

The camera cut to the side of the field where Twain was orchestrating the match. He was signalling for the team to do more long shots, but he looked menacing, and it made him look like he was descending into madness.

The media once gave Twain the nickname “clown”, but it was different from Aimar. This “clown” had an obvious connotation of humiliation. But as Bendtner watched him on television today, he realised that this nickname was actually perfect for him. He really was a clown...

At the end of the match, Nottingham Forest scored a goal, but it did not change the result of the game. With a dark look on his face, Twain quickly left the court. Bendtner turned off the television and continued packing his things.

Now, it was none of his concern what happened to Nottingham Forest and Tony Twain.

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“Allan, what are the intentions of Man City?” Twain did not know the latest transfer progresses.

“There’s still no reply from them.”

” I think... Allan, do you think they think the price was too high?”

“No, Tony. Just like what your reporter friend said, thirty million is a fair price to pay for the next 10 years of Nottingham Forest’s main center forward. Don’t worry about the things here, leave everything to me. It’s a pity, losing the match.”

Twain pouted. Was Allan hinting at him to put more energy into the team’s training and matches instead of the transfer market and other clubs, managers, some star’s father’s intrigue?

“Both us and Chelsea are first-grade soccer teams, no matter who won or lost is normal. As long as the final championship is ours, that’s all that matters.”

Allan laughed, “Ha ha! Sure, we will wait for the final champions, Tony.”

After putting down the phone, Twain left the empty changing room and boarded the bus.

“Go back and rest, my buddies. This match gave everyone here a reminder — this is a new season, the Double Winners from last season means nothing.” In the cabin, Twain spread out his hands and said, “Forget about the Double Winners, now we have to restart from square one!”

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On the second day after the match, Man City and Nottingham Forest released the news at the same time.

Nottingham Forest’s young center forward Nikolas Bendtner will officially be transferred to Man City, tied by a four-year contract with a weekly salary of £120,000, involving a transfer fee of £30 million.

This soap drama finally came to an end. Some people gained, some people lost. People who gained lost some things at the same time, and people people who lost... did not gain anything.

Tony Twain declined to comment on this trade, staying silent throughout some media columns. Bystanders of the inner drama would not know how Twain was feeling after losing the successor to Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Should he be celebrating that a disobedient BAD_BOY has left, or should he be sad that four years of blood, sweat and tears are going down the drain?

Some guessed that this type of silence was proof of his sadness. After being betrayed by one of the players he valued the most, how could he not be sad?

Actually they were all wrong. Twain was currently worried about two important things that were making him frown constantly, how could he have the energy to be concerned about how the Danish kid was doing? So what if Bendtner left? Would the Earth stop rotating? Would Nottingham Forest would not win another championship? Would Tony Twain will stop drinking or smoking?

The midweek Super Cup, and the £30 million transfer fee that came with a priceless awkwardness — D*mn it, the transfer window will close very soon!

But to be honest, in the occasional lulls, he did think that the summer felt like a dream. Someone who was on his team listening to his teachings is now wearing a different club's jersey, and the next time they meet, they meet as opponents.

Piqué, Bendtner... and those who left early. Anelka, Ashley Young, Arteta. What would they think of their years in Nottingham Forest? How would they evaluate him as a head coach?

Most of them probably would not have nice things to say right...

Chapter 689: Aerial Overlord

Maybe Allan realised that Nottingham Forest only had 3 official strikers, and that was why he allowed Twain to use the remaining transfer budget to buy a center forward from the market.

But the problem was not money, but that he could not find a player to recruit.

This type of situation was too depressing. It was like a penniless beggar drooling while watching someone else feast. Suddenly, he stumbled upon a big sum of money and happily made his way to the feast, only to be disappointed when he saw that the restaurant had closed for the day.

It was already August 31, which meant there was less than a day before the transfer window closed. At this point in time, many transfers had already been completed, and even the incomplete ones would have already been in the contract signing phase. Even if Twain could find a suitable target, the player might already have been owned. Half a day was not enough time for finding a new target from other clubs.

In his deepest thoughts, Twain determined that Man City did this intentionally. They held off the transfer till the last minute for the past few days to deny Nottingham Forest the time to find a replacement. However, Twain had only been concerned with arguing with Man City over the past few days that he forgotten this scenario.

Great, he dug his own grave.

On one hand, Twain was unwilling to give up and continued to search for a suitable candidate in the transfer market. On the other hand, he had also prepared himself to be content with a negative

outcome. He decided to approach the youth team and the reserve team to see if there were any suitable forwards to use. Of course, this had to wait till the end of the Super Cup.

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When Tony Twain brought the Nottingham Forest team to Monaco to prepare for the UEFA Super Cup, the club members worked their hardest and put their all into the global region.

The Brazilian striker who was not bought by Man City was an option, but his complicated background and the pressing deadline made Nottingham Forest hesitate to take this player. Mario Gomez was the best scorer in the previous Bundesliga league and a powerful center forward, but his performance in the UEFA European Championships was so bad that the scouts in Nottingham Forest did not see much in him.

Nottingham Forest searched for so long that they even approached the Spanish Valencia FC, using all their assets to get the opposing striker David Villa. They did not even care if this person's personality was suited for the tactics in Nottingham Forest or if he was who Twain wanted.

Mario Balotelli, also known as "Super Mario", a genius player from Milan, might have been suitable for the team. However, once Mourinho heard that it was Nottingham Forest who asked for him, he rejected the offer without hesitation.

The newly risen Egyptian center forward Zaki met Twain's various requirements, but he had already been bought by Portsmouth. For a player who just transferred clubs in less than a month, it was impossible for Twain to make him transfer again.

At the most critical moment, the scouting team finally found the player that fulfilled all Twain's demands.

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Nikola Zigic, Serbian, 2 metres tall, and the second tallest center forwarding UEFA Champions League.

In the UEFA Champions League, there had been a strange phenomenon in the past years where the taller the center forwards, the weaker their header skills. A classic example was Zlatan Ibrahimović, whose footwork was exponentially better than his heading.

However, Zigic was different. He met Twain's expectations of a good center forward with great header skills. As a center forward, his header skills were as impressive as his build. Standing at 2.02 metres tall and weighing 100 kilograms, he was a real "Aerial Overlord" in the penalty area. During the match against Team Real Madrid, even the world-renowned Fabio Cannavaro did not know what to do against Zigic's height and weight; not even fouling could bring this big kid down.

Also, impressive header skills did not mean his footwork was clumsy. Zigic's shooting skills were equally good, indicating he truly was a well-rounded center forward.

What set him apart from Bendtner was that he had the potential to become a second passer who could create opportunities and selflessly set up plays for his team mates. The Siberian had better tactical discipline than Bendtner.

Most importantly, Zigic was not happy in Valencia.

In the previous season, Valencia spent a total of €107 million to bring him from Santander in Valencia, but he did not get to go on the field. Because he had missed a few matches in the early season due to injury, he had always been benched... More accurately, he was part of the audience.

Valencia's main strikers were "Gourd Doll" David Villa and Fernando Morientes, and behind them were Angulo and Arizmendi. Whether it was Sánchez Flores or Koeman, neither wanted to risk anything with this tall center forward. Valencia spent 107 million on a fifth striker, so it was no wonder they had a debt crisis last season. No matter how rich they were, they should not have splurged.

This summer, Real Madrid wanted to snatch Zigic, but he personally rejected this suggestion because he wanted to prove himself in Valencia.

Following the opening of La Liga's new season, Zigic found out the cruel truth — in the roster the new head coach Emery was planning to use, there was not a position for him as a center. David Villa decided to remain on the team at the last minute, which was as good as announcing that Zigic would not have the chance at fighting to be the starting center forward.

Nottingham Forest, which had a lack of center forwards, appeared at this moment. Initially, the people from Nottingham Forest came to buy David Villa, but were disdainfully rejected by Valencia. They expressed that David Villa was not for sale. They did not even let go of him to Real Madrid, let alone Nottingham Forest which was far in England. Desperate, Nottingham Forest then incidentally did a quick scan on the strikers in Valencia and surprisingly discovered an unhappy and unsatisfied one.

Valencia was not willing to sell David Villa but they were indeed short of funds, so they were very open to selling other players. Zigic also realised he had no future if he stayed in Valencia, but Nottingham Forest was a team that recently won two championships, whose roster was filled with many players of high standards, and they were gunning for the championship. This aligned perfectly with Zigic's wishes — he was hungry for reputation and results.

Both parties agreed without hesitation and signed the contract on the morning of September 1. Later that afternoon, Zigic flew to Nottingham and proceeded with his medical examination. At night, when Twain was at Monaco finishing his preparations and roster deployment for the match the next day, both Nottingham Forest and Valencia concurrently announced the transfer of Nikola Zugic into Nottingham Forest for a transfer fee of 10 million Euros. If not for the lack of time, Allen would have bargained for a lower price. Now that Valencia was lacking money, it was the perfect time to underpay them.

In the new season, Zigic would wear the number 9 jersey that Bentner passed down, becoming the new east striker in the contest.

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Twain was very content with the transfer for Zigic; he felt that the last of his emotional burden had been removed. He spent too much time and effort on matters unrelated to him, and being able to obtain an "Aerial Overlord" at the final moments more or less made up for those regrets. Now he could concentrate on defeating their UEFA Super Cup opponents — the Glasgow Rangers from Scotland.

In last season's finals, Glasgow Rangers defeated the veteran Bayern Munich in a close fight, winning the Europa Cup. Naturally, they would hope to be as lucky in the Super Cup. And Twain, without his strong center forward, had no choice but to deploy a defensive formation, relying on occasional surprise attacks to threaten a goal, but most of the time Nottingham Forest players were exhausted from running while defending.

Generally speaking, Nottingham Forest did not have a "UEFA Champions" stance. The Glasgow Rangers, with their high morale, seemed more like the winners of the UEFA Champions league.

But what happened in the end?

Nottingham Forest successfully defended till the penalty kick at the end. At this time, Glasgow Rangers, who were wildly attacking for one hundred and twenty minutes were both frustrated and exhausted — they never thought a Super Cup match would delay till the penalty kick. In contrast, the Nottingham Forest players, who were constantly being dominated in the main match were all super confident and calm, as if the penalty kick was something they had predicted from the start. The final psychological test of penalty kick had not even started but there was already a clear winner between the mentalities of both parties.

During the penalty, the first player on the field from the Glasgow Rangers was Kevin Thompson who, under large pressure, sent the ball into the stands, giving Nottingham Forest a great start. Following that, Nottingham Forest scored all 4 goals while Glasgow Rangers only scored two. They had already lost before even taking the fifth shot.

After Nottingham Forest followed up against Serie A giants AC Milan, they became the second team to successfully defend the European Super cup. Winning the second champion trophy in the new season brought some happiness to the team that recently sold their future superstar.

Though it was a messy situation, they still won. Once again, they proved to people a truth that they were unwilling to admit but they had to, which was "defending will forever be the basis of winning the championship."

And so the experts started to predict boldly — "This season, Nottingham Forest's brilliance will continue!"

These experts, after assessing three league seasons, concluded with a piece of advice: Do not be afraid to talk big about Nottingham Forest. This is because Twain will talk big every year, but always ends up the victor. Questioning him only will result in being lightly slapped by him at the end, so why not just talk big? If you somehow are right, you can claim to be far-sighted, and even if you are wrong, you can push the blame to Twain and his team for not being capable enough.

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Despite winning the Super Cup and purchasing the tall center forward Zigic, Twain did not have any signs of relaxing one bit. This reason was simple — someone got injured again. Van der Vaart and van Nistelrooy, who were still among those injured, gained a new buddy after the Super Cup match.

Pepe sprained his ankle during extra time, and at that time Twain had no reserves under his name, so he could only sit and wait. After the match and the check-ups, it was decided that Pepe needed to rest for 15 days. Now Twain could only celebrate that it was not a major injury, or else this start to the new league season was really unfavourable for the year.

After returning to Nottingham, Twain introduced Zigic before making time to speak to him individually, with the help of translation. He told Zigic about the type of team Nottingham Forest was, the style of football the main coach specialised in, the effects he hoped for the center forward to have on the plays, and the position he held in this team. At the same time, he showed some concern for Zigic's life in England, telling the latter to approach him if ever he felt uncomfortable. Twain was the perfect portrait of a benevolent, gentle and kind middle-aged man.

After the Super Cup, Nottingham Forest temporarily disbanded. Some players, as part of their national duty, had to return to play for their respective countries in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

Famous Italian gold medallist Fabio Capello had already taken over as England's new head coach, and because of this iron coach, George Wood was reselected for England's representative team. His steady display, faithful execution of tactics and calm personality corresponded to the wants of Capello.

The media predicted that, during this match where England would challenge Andorra on their home ground, Wood would be welcomed into the starting lineup. The young Nottingham Forest team leader still had to prove his value to the England team. Previously, he was deemed to be undervalued by the previous two head coaches.

Wood needed to work hard for his future in the England team but Twain was not slacking off either. Taking advantage of this, he took a trip to the reserve teams and the youth teams. He might have bought Zigic, but Nistelrooy was getting older, and no matter how good his condition was, there was no guarantee that he could maintain this in the next season... Realistically, it was difficult to even guarantee he could maintain his game for this season. Twain felt it was better to scout for his reserves.

Although the first team was on a break, the reserve teams still had to prepare for the Premier Reserve League match this weekend. Twain's arrival made the players on the reserve team extremely happy because they knew what the rare trips of the head coach meant. If they performed well, they had a chance to be promoted to the first team.

Turkish genius Sahin was following the first team to training, but joining the reserve team for competition. Twain hoped that, through this match, he could start coming in contact and familiarising with England's soccer style, and at the same time gradually improve his confidence and afflatus. He was also here to also watch how Sahin was performing.

Upon seeing Twain, the head coach of the reserve team, Colin Clarkwood, thought he was coming specifically to inspect Sahin. The moment they met, he prattled on about Sahin's performance. "Tony, this guy is indeed a genius. His performance in the reserve team competition was very outstanding. I think he already possesses the capability to fight in the first team. His passing was very creative, and his ball handling is extraordinary..."

Twain listened patiently to his introduction and nodded. "Let him stay under your guidance for a while, Colin."

“What? Isn’t Rafael injured?” asked Colin Clarkwood, seemingly very puzzled.

“There are so many people on the first team, I have to try to make sure they all go on the field.” Twain smiled helplessly.

Colin Clarkwood realised everything, and shook his head with a laugh. “No one wants to play as a substitute. Also, I heard the suggestions of the psychologists. Miss Taretha, the one who has been treating Sahin, felt that now is not a great time for him to return to the first team. I trust the professionals, so let’s just let him wait for now... Is he unhappy with anything?” What Twain cared about was that final question. Bendtner’s departure was a wake up call; he had to stop thinking that people were just obedient NPCs without any personal desires.

Colin Clarkwood shook his head. “That he does not have. In fact... I feel that he really enjoys these type of matches without pressure.”

Twain replied with an “oh” and stopped talking. He continued watching the internal friendly match of the reserve team on the training field. This friendly match would determine the roster for the reserve team competition tomorrow, so everyone was doing their best. They all wanted to show off their best selves in front of the head coach of the first team.

The few players who had the best prospects were all on loan, such as wing players like Adriano Moke. Players from the first team who had no national duty appeared in the reserve team as well; if they played well, they would participate in the preliminary match tomorrow. In reality, the reserve team was always a platform to calibrate the first team players’ states and to observe their standards. Twain rarely came and that was not because he was not concerned but because he had eyes here — Dunn. Dunn was always present for every reserve team match. Those guaranteed to be out of the roster of the first team in the league season would also come to prepare for the reserve team match to maintain their condition, and players who recently recovered would also rediscover their competitive tempo from the reserve team match. Another type would be a young man full of prospects like Colin, who would use the reserve team match to convince the head coach of the first team, and use the reserve team as a jumping block to rise to the first team and onto a greater stage.

However, these people were just passers-by in the reserve team. Those who stayed in the reserve team were mostly the less outstanding players who drew a low pay and were unable to compete in the first team, so being able to compete in the reserve team was sufficient for them. Every summer, the club would terminate their contract with such players or sell them off to lower grade teams at a low price, then pick another batch from the youth team to inspect at a closer distance. Those with potential would then stay or be loaned out to train and those without prospects would be fired after a few years, so on and so forth.

Twain quickly noticed the center back on the yellow team because he was simply too tall. Twain gauged him to be at least 1.9 meters tall, since he was taller than the goalkeeper. He felt that this person looked familiar, maybe it was because he was unusually tall. He turned his head to ask Colin Clarkwood. “Who is this number 5?”

“Aaron Mitchell, center back. However, his performance in this position is horrible.” Colin Clarkwood is a dedicated reserve team head coach, remembering the players that Twain could not recognise.

“How horrible is he?” Twain then recalled this name. He remembered that he noticed this big guy last summer when he went to the youth team to look for possible future stars.

“Lacks defensive knowledge.” Colin Clarkwood shakes his head. “Header has improved, body build is excellent. However, when he is defending he has no idea what he is doing. Watch.”

While speaking, Mitchell was juked by Hoyt, another striker in the reserve team, which led to a successful goal.

“Besides, his sliding tackle is lousy, and because of this, I had no choice but to prevent him from slide-tackling his opponent in the penalty area. In three matches he has already given his opponents 2 penalty kicks. He is always so easily juked which leads to him losing his center of gravity.”

The side without vests was celebrating the goal while the culprit who lost the ball was looking on the ground at the same spot being upset. Twain snuck a few more looks, then lowered his head. This kid was really tall, almost as tall as Zigic? Twain suddenly realised something.

“Perhaps he doesn’t suit this position, Colin. Try placing him onto the front line?” Twain told Colin.

The head coach of the reserve team was shocked by Twain’s ridiculous thought. “Forward? This...”

Seeing how he looked troubled, Twain smiled. “Fine, call him out, let me talk to him.”

Colin Clarkwood blew his whistle to stop the match, then signalled that silly big guy from the field to come over. His teammates looked shocked; they could not understand why Twain would fancy Mitchell when he had just made a mistake.

“Head coach, b-boss.” He greeted Colin Clarkwood first, stuttering a little when he faced a smiling Twain.

“Little guy, how tall are you?” Twain nodded as an acknowledgement, then asked.

“Uh...1.9 meters.”

Twain chuckled, “no wonder you look so tall, you are even taller than him...” Twain pointed at the other goalkeeper, Mitchell’s opponent who was wearing number 3. Dale Roberts, 1.91 meters tall.

“Honestly speaking, your performance is terrible.”

Hearing what Twain said, he fell completely silent instantly, lowering his head like a student facing his punishment.

“Now, I am giving you a chance. Go play striker.”

Hearing what Twain said, Mitchell became stunned. He raised his head in confusion to look towards the other who was shorter than him.

“Me, but I have never, never ever...”

“I am telling to play that role, so go do it, what is with all the nonsense!” Twain furrowed his eyebrows and Mitchell turned silent.

“Run along.” Colin Clarkson patted his shoulder and pushed him back into the field. Then, he pulled back the defensive midfielder to temporarily become the center back, changing the formation into a 4-3-3.

“Let them cross the ball more from the sides and pass high balls.”

Colin Clarkwood understood Twain’s intentions. “You want to see the kid’s header skills?”

“I want to see him score with a header.” Twain smiled while correcting his colleague’s mistake.

Until the end of the first half, Mitchell did not score once in his first time at the striker line. Initially, he was super nervous, not understanding why the head coach wanted him to be striker left him at a loss for words. However, when he discovered his teammates were always trying to cross high balls into the penalty area, he tried to do a header. He realised that, once he jumped, the opposing defenders could not do anything to him, so completely calmed down and focused on how to head the ball into the goal.

Although he did not score, he did hit the goal post twice, and there was one time where he forced the first team goalkeeper Dale Roberts to make a desperate dive — in order to save his left bottom corner header, Roberts almost hit the goal post.

Once his teammates discovered that Mitchell, who had nothing to offer but his height, had such a good function, they proactively passed high balls to him, immediately sounding the violent aerial alarm in front of the goal post of Roberts. Whether or not he could head the ball, such a huge figure such as Mitchell standing in front of the goal would put huge psychological pressure for the opposing defenders. His presence also aided in distracting the opposition for his teams, allowing the yellow team to even the score before the end of the first half. When Sahin appeared in front of the goal to score, he had no defenders near him at all — everyone was near Mitchell.

Witnessing such a scene, Twain beamed while applauding, on one hand approving Sahin’s goal, on the other hand telling the stunned Colin Clarkwood, “Looks like we both got his position wrong. He should have been a center forward. From now on, train him as a center forward.”

Hence, Aaron Mitchell, who started soccer when he was 10, who was a goalkeeper for a year and a center back for 7, officially changed his role to become an alternate center forward. Chelsea’s “Monster” center forward Drogba also switched from a center back to a center forward. Maybe Mitchell could not become the first Drogba but at least he could start working towards this goal.

Chapter 690: Forty and Confused

George Wood made the starting lineup in the England against FC Andorra game and performed remarkably. When he was brought off the field in the 80th minute, it was no longer a problem for England to win the game with a two-goal lead. So Capello felt assured to bring him off—with him on the pitch, England’s rear defensive line was indeed more solid. It was not just the defense that benefitted. England’s offense was more threatening because of him. After all, all the attacks started from the midfield. Capello had Wood alone in charge of the defense in this game and everyone else attacked. As for the “three midfielders”, Capello did not use England’s most accustomed 4-4-2 formation in this game, but instead they played 4-3-3. George Wood alone was pulled to the back to defend, with

Gerrard and Lampard both at the front, between the attacking midfielder and the shadow striker. This maximized their offensive abilities without distracting them with the defense.

However, the problem of the offensive core remained unresolved. Gerrard and Lampard were very capable attacking players and also took on the roles of playmakers in their respective clubs. But who would be at England's playmaker?

Although in the computer domain, dual-core CPUs were more powerful than a single-core, they could not be comprehended so easily on the football field. After all, people were not computers. One more core playmaker might lead to interference with each other, and eventually no one could play well. Like the current Brazil national team today, Dunga was having a headache over how Kaka and Ronaldinho could coexist on the pitch.

If Gerrard was the playmaker, then Lampard's play would be limited; If Lampard was the playmaker, then Gerrard could not play to his best level.

England's 2-0 win over Andorra was not directly related to Gerrard's or Lampard's excellent play. Both goals were scored from set pieces. George Wood's appearance only strengthened England's defense and had not made much of a direct contribution to the offense.

After this match, the England players would remain in the national team to prepare for the September 11th qualifiers. Capello still had time to adjust his lineup tactics.

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The First Team had no competition. Twain had been immersed in the reserve team during this period, overseeing the training and competition of the players who had no national team responsibilities for the Premier Reserve League.

Aaron Mitchell was training hard and adapting to the new position as a center forward. He progressed very slowly in the beginning. After all, he played as a full back for seven years and some habits were not that easy to change. The difference between a full back and a striker was also very large. Changing positions was not simply as easy as changing the name. A lot of knowledge was involved. Mitchell could only slowly explore and experience on his own.

Şahin's progress had also pleased Twain. With the help of the psychiatrists and coaches, he was trying not to shy away from the physical confrontations on the pitch. At first he was a little nervous and scared, but he did it in the end. Twain decided to let Şahin play in the EFL Cup for the Forest team next month. If Şahin could successfully return to his pre-injury level, the Turkish Football Federation should really send a pennant to Twain and Nottingham Forest.

At the end of the training session, Twain would sometimes invite Kerslake and Dunn to hang out and have a drink together at Burns' bar—Dunn certainly only drank non-alcoholic beverages. He would chat with Fat John, Skinny Bill and the gang, and then head home with Dunn.

Life was simple.

However, if he did not keep busy or not have drinks and be with friends, Twain would still feel a little lonely. The house was not considered small and there was no one else most of the time. Every night

before he went to bed or head to the bathroom to take a leak, he would have to pass by Shania's room. Sometimes he would suddenly stop to look inside.

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"Hey, Tony. Would you like to go have a drink tonight?" After the training, Kerslake hailed Twain warmly. Dunn looked at him too.

Twain unexpectedly shook his head and declined this time. "I've got something on. I can't go. You guys go ahead."

Kerslake looked at Dunn and was about to open his mouth when Dunn spoke first, "Since that's the case, I will go straight home." He had no interest in bars. He only used to go because Twain wanted to go, and they could have a chat together. Since Twain did not want to go today, there was no need for him to go to places he did not like very much.

Kerslake sighed helplessly, "All right. Since you're not going, what am I going to do there by myself?"

Twain chuckled, "You'd better go home and spend time with your wife, David! A family man shouldn't go to the bar all the time."

Kerslake gave a shrug and left. Twain looked at Dunn, "You should head back too."

Dunn nodded and turned to walk away without asking Twain about his plans.

What was Twain's plans? Actually, he was still going to have a drink, but in another environment. He did not want to go to Burns' bar today, where there were too many acquaintances. Someone would always come talk to him with a drink. He would not be idle for a minute.

Why did he suddenly decide to drink in a different bar? Because he suddenly remembered that tomorrow was his birthday, Tony Twain's birthday.

He had been in England for almost five years, and he had never celebrated a birthday. The first year was because he did not remember the birthday of the body's owner. His memory breaks for that year was rather serious and he could not remember many things. Now he remembered some and still could not recall the other stuff. However, those were very long-term memories and did not affect him much if he did not recall. In the latter three years, he knew Tony Twain's birthday was on September 9th, but he did not bother. On the one hand, it was someone else's birthday. On the other hand, he was always very busy. When he did remember the birthday, the timing often would have already passed. Over time, he was too lazy to think about such meaning things like birthdays.

Not everyone took birthdays seriously. Twain remembered that he previously was not concerned with such matters. His parents would take care of it when he was still living at home. While he was alone in other cities for his studies and work, he never celebrated his birthday—he had few friends and it was too silly to buy a cake and blow candles on his own. He just have to remember the date and year of his own birth date. There was no need to do so many fancy things.

He guessed that Dunn and he were the kind of people who did not care about birthdays, because he did not see Dunn celebrate his birthday once since he came to Nottingham. By the way, Dunn's birthday was on August 8th, which was already over. It coincided with the Olympic Games opening. Twain had even

joked at the time that his birthday party was even directed by the director Zhang Yimou. Dunn did not respond to this, which made Twain felt that he had told a corny joke again.

But this year, Twain, who did not care about his birthday, suddenly thought of his birthday.

Because he suddenly remembered that come tomorrow, this body of his would be forty years old...

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Forty years old!

It was a scary age.

Twain was still thinking about the problem when he sat and drank alone in a bar in downtown Nottingham city, which he had never been to.

He had never cared about his age before. It could even be said that he had always felt that after he had transmigrated here, his age should start from the age of twenty-six years old. In that case, he was only thirty-one years old this year. There were still a lot of young people who had not married at this age in China.

The reality was cruel. He could feel his body slowly aging now, which was a natural pattern and could not be stopped. He also could not turn a blind eye to it. Although in the football world, the media and others still addressed him as “a young manager” and said he was “young and promising”, football was a special world. Here, a 30-year-old player was termed as “a veteran.”

Forty years old was really old.

As the Chinese saying went: At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts.

A thirty-year-old person should have settled down and established his career. He was now forty years old and still alone—from now on he must see himself as a person who had truly been lived for forty years.

He felt he should seriously think about “a family.”

The messy bachelor’s room needed to be cleaned up. He could not always get a quick meal at Burns’ bar after work. Masturbation and call girls could not accompany a person for life ... Most importantly, he was not a celibate, a homosexual, frigid, never been hurt by a woman when he was young, psychopath, a hardcore member of the “anti-society and romance squad”, felt animosity toward society, women and family. Then he had nowhere to settle this lonesome heart of his. In the still of the night, he would also feel unbearable.

Recently while they were having drinks, Kerslake would always looked at his watch when it was time. Then he would jabbered on and complained about how his wife would nag if he went home late. While he talked about how “he can’t drink to his heart’s content because there will be trouble with a woman at home”, he would obediently bid farewell to Twain and rushed home to accompany his wife.

Twain asked Dunn before. Did Kerslake want to stay and have a few more drinks, or did he really want to go back to spend time with his wife?

Dunn thought about it and shook his head to say he did not know.

He reckoned that he was unable to understand the feeling without a family.

At the thought of a family, Twain felt even more troubled. He downed mouthfuls of golden-colored alcohol into his mouth.

Because he realized that his social circle was pathetically small. Apart from football, it was more football. He used to think there was nothing wrong with it. It was the life he wanted. Now when he wanted to find a woman in his social circle whom he could have an affinity and to spend his life with, he could not find her—99.9% percent of people in his life were men.

In fact, Dunn was like him, but Dunn was still young and had just turned twenty-seven years old. His future was long. He had plenty of time to plan his life and meet the person he liked. For the first time, Twain felt his time was tight. Ten years' time would fly by and he would be fifty years old then, half a century old... Previously he had no concept of this age. Now that he thought about it, he would feel the chill down his spine.

How could there be a woman who would like a forty-year-old middle-aged man with an eccentric character and unlikable temperament?

It was a lively bar here, not because there was a lot of people chatting loudly, but because of the loud music and young men and women having a crazy time together. It was not a traditional pub but a younger and more stylish version, similar to a club.

Twain came here randomly. He did not like this kind of noisy music, which did not sound as moving as the songs in the City Ground stadium's grandstand to his ears. But he could bring himself to a state whereby he could be completely deaf to the music and noise. He just sat alone in the corner, downing one drink after another. He was bothered by some things and when he was troubled, he would drink until he was drunk, and the trouble would naturally be gone.

In his state, he still managed to attract someone's attention in another corner.

"May I sit here?" A female voice rang out beside Twain's ear.

Twain looked at the other person. It was a woman with brown hair and fair skin, holding a wine glass and smiling as she sat in front of him. He could not make out her features clearly, because he was intoxicated and blurry-eyed.

He was no stranger to such an opening line, which he often encountered on some occasions. The other parties would be prettily and sexily dressed women. They would sit down with a smile as one invited them to a drink, and then one could do whatever he wanted...

Twain was not in the mood now. He did not come to this unfamiliar bar to take care of his physical needs. But when he saw the other party's brown hair, he hesitated and changed his mind.

"Aren't you already seated here, miss?"

The woman smiled.

“You’re so beautiful, miss.” It was a false compliment, and an instinctive reflex of sorts. Twain would say this when he met a woman who made the first move. Now he simply could not make out the other person’s appearance as he had too much to drink and also because of the dim lighting. What caught his eye was a sea of dazzling white—the other person wore little clothes.

“Is anything the matter, beautiful lady?”

“I’m curious about you. Is that ok?” The woman laughed.

“It counts as a reason too.” Twain nodded, then squinted his eyes as he stared at the other person and asked, “But do you know who I am?”

The woman looked around. Men and women were still partying to the explosive music.

“What does your identity have to do with the two of us on a night like this?”

The two people looked at each other and smiled. Ah, there was mutual understanding...

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The sound of a car engine stalling came from the street outside the house. After a while, the sound of an open lock rang in the dark house and the front door was opened. The light from the streetlights outside shone in, and two long figures appeared at the door.

“This is my place. It’s a little messy... hope you don’t mind, ha.” Twain slurred as he pointed inside the door to the woman he was hugging. “You know, this is true of a single middle-aged man...”

Twain threw off the leather shoes on his feet and began to feel around in the dark to turn on the lights.

When he had just turned on the lights, another familiar voice suddenly rang out behind him.

“You have such a colorful nightlife, Uncle Tony.”

Twain turned his head around in amazement, and found his Shania standing on the stairs, coldly overlooking him, as well as the beautifully and fashionably dressed woman he met at the bar in his arms...

This was a strange scene. Twain thought he had drunk too much and was seeing and hearing things. He looked at Shania and turned to look at the woman from the bar next to him who was confused about what had suddenly happened.

He felt that his brain which had been anaesthetized by alcohol was a little slow.

“Oh... what’s ... going on...?” After a while, he blurted out this sentence.

“It looks like you’re doing well by yourself. I’m relieved by this. Goodbye, Uncle Tony. Also, it’s just after midnight, happy birthday.” Shania took a backpack from the room and walked down. She waved her hand at the two people with a cool expression and went straight out of the door. Soon the sound of a car starting was heard, and then a white Mercedes Jeep drove past Twain’s door.

“She, she is...” The woman pointed to Shania who walked away, somewhat surprised and puzzled.

The cold wind outside the door blew in, and there was a layer of sweat on Twain's forehead—He had sobered up.

Shania specially came back from overseas. It was just that...how did it happen like this?

This time, the woman looked at Twain with an even more surprised and puzzled expression. Twain realized that he was still hugging the other person till now. He hurriedly let go and said, "I'm sorry, so sorry... I don't know what happened. But I can't tonight..." As he spoke, he pulled out a few bills in his wallet and handed them to her.

The woman saw Twain's action and her face turned cold. She looked at Twain and spoke in a completely different tone from the one she used to chat at the bar, "I think you're mistaken. I'm not a prostitute, Mr. Tony Twain."

Having said that, the woman turned around and left Twain's house. Like Shania, she drove off.

At this time, Dunn, who heard the movements next door, came over. When he entered the house, he found that it was empty except for Twain standing alone at the door, in a daze as if he were a pillar.

"What happened? Where's Shania?"

Twain turned to look at him, "You knew? Did you see her?"

"As soon as I came back, I saw the lights up at your place. I came over to take a look out of curiosity. I did not expect Shania to come back. I had wanted to call you and ask you to come home. But she said she wanted to surprise you, and did not let me call... She specially came back for your birthday and said she wanted to give you a birthday present... By the way, where's she?" As he spoke, Dunn looked around to find Shania.

"Stop looking. She left." Twain sat on the couch with his hands covering his face as he rubbed vigorously. He tried to sober himself up.

"What happened?" Dunn also felt that the mood was wrong at this time.

"I don't know." Twain spread his hands and said, "Simply put, I went out for a drink and brought back a woman. Then I saw Shania. Following which, Shania left, and the woman left soon after when I tried to give her money."

Dunn looked oddly at Twain and asked, "How much did you have to drink, Tony?"

"I don't know. I didn't count."

Dunn sighed and sat down next to Twain, muttering, "This is why I hate drinking..."

The two men sat silently on the couch. The door was still opened and the wind outside was blowing in, making them feel a little cold.